



# Folklore

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# **Folklore**

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Edited by Mare Kõiva & Andres Kuperjanov  
Guest editors: Art Leete & Aimar Ventsel

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## INTRODUCTION: WORLD ROUTES IN THE ARCTIC<sup>1</sup>

*Art Leete, Aimar Ventsel*

The Arctic is associated in popular perception with a vast frozen snow covered empty place. Everybody who has been in the Arctic, whether in the Eurasian or North American part, knows that this stereotype is correct. Indeed, the Arctic is a place with lots of space that determines the lifestyle of the people in this area. All human activities – whether livelihood or mastering of the territory – are and always have been connected with substantial movement. Hunting, fishing, trading, the establishment of settlements and keeping them alive, all this needs the movement of goods and human resources. Economists have calculated that due to the need for transportation of goods and people over huge distances, in combination with the climate, to maintain human activities in the Arctic is more expensive than in other regions of the world (Hill & Gaddy 2003).

For indigenous people movement has been a necessary part of their lifestyle, they have followed animals, fish and vegetation in order to stock themselves up with meat, furs, firewood and so forth, or to follow trade routes to barter and sell their produce for goods they were unable to find in their own environment. In the case of states, movement into and within the Arctic was and is related to two main reasons: territorial control and resources. For all Arctic states (Russia, USA, Canada, Scandinavian states), the Arctic space was a territory that needed to be controlled and for a long time there has been only one strategy to reach this goal – by establishing settlements, trading posts, military outposts or other permanent or temporary spot on the map with the required human population. Apart from political reasons, appropriating Arctic territories had also an economic aspect. The Arctic is a resource frontier, rich in natural and mineral resources that are difficult to exploit due to the vast distances and hostile climate. This used to be so centuries ago and the situation has not changed much in modern times, as the discussion around exploiting Arctic Ocean oil fields has demonstrated (Cowling 2011). Settlements and

infrastructure were established over centuries and marked the progress of the mastering of the northern territories. Looking at this process historically, different forms and purposes for movement into and within the Arctic merged very soon. Due to the fact that settlements generally became a centre for social, political and economic life for both the indigenous and incoming population this created infrastructure – whether roads, ships or air traffic – was and is used by all groups of the population, the import of goods has always been in direct dependence on the export of timber, furs, oil, gas, gold and other extracted resources.

The northern icy hemisphere has never been a static place abruptly changing by the emerging colonial powers. As a matter of fact, migration and movement has always existed in Siberia, Scandinavia and the North-American Arctic. Indigenous people moved around, pushed other groups aside, Cossacks, trappers or other early white settlers came and caused different territorial regroupings. It is quite evident that moving is integrated into the northern peoples' culture in a variety of ways. People carry things over long distances. We can find a lot of devices like various sledges, boats or horse and reindeer saddles in their forest and tundra camps that are used for transporting objects if moving on foot using dogs or reindeer sledges.

For a long time, scholarly descriptions have emphasised the nomadic or “wandering” element as the essential one in the life of the northern peoples. Distinguished moving skills have always been a part of the northern peoples' image. During Antiquity and the Middle Ages, extraordinary physical appearance and skills were assigned to demonic strangers who inhabited the northern and eastern edges of the ecumene. For example, a number of Ancient Greek authors described the Sciapods, people with one large foot that enabled them to hop around at enormous speeds (Cohen 1998). These demonic creations were also described by medieval authors who took over the majority of symbols (including the distinctive moving ability and habits of the Sciapods) from Antiquity (Cohen 1998; Ott 1998). A modern intellectual style of portraying the Arctic people's movement was established by the 19th century. The moving component dominated the literary image of northern peoples' until recent times. This “wandering” issue was still imposed as almost mythical or, at least, romantic. The initial ideas about the northern peoples already included an image of extraordinary movement. An image of the northerners as a wandering people was established by early intellectual traditions and observations. This attitude has also been codified in early legislation that was meant to regulate different peoples' rights in the Russian Empire – the ‘Statute for Administration of Siberian Indigenes’ from 1822, and essentially similar ideas about the Arctic peoples were repeated in the laws of the early Soviet period.

In the course of the centuries and millennia, moving became firmly established in the academic and popular approach constituting the northern peoples' position in the world.

Somehow a similar attitude can be detected in the early Soviet period. Scholars took this image of the "wandering" inhabitant of the north as axiomatic. At the same time, by now it was treated as a relic of the past which was obstructing progress.

Large-scale exploiting of Northern skirts does not contradict the interests of the indigenous population, if we put all the questions in the right way, taking into account all the peculiarities of indigenous economic life.

It would be absolutely unacceptable to isolate the aborigine from the whole way of life of the country. But it will happen if we allow him to use territories of breathtaking scales in the north, where he will be wandering around within his exotic primitive trap, just as hundreds of years ago. (Dobrova-Yadrintseva 1930)

Siberia in the Western popular image is associated with prison camps and the GULAG while the North American Arctic rather with Jack London's stories of gold diggers. It is less known that Siberia is the most important economic region of modern Russia, in the same way as the North American or Scandinavian Arctic, becoming a resource frontier. However, the exploitation of natural resources was not very active until the industrialization in the 1960s. Although the North American or Scandinavian Arctic was not used – as was the Russian Arctic – as a place for punishment and conviction, in the pre-second world war period it had little economic importance either. Later industrialisation, the GULAG or military settlements brought new and different people into the Arctic territories.

The establishment of new settlements and a network of infrastructure has changed not only the lifestyle of the indigenous people but created a unique polar society where different social and ethnic groups live together, tied to each other through mutual interests. The interdependence of these groups is very intensive and has caused an exchange of ideas, concepts and know-how. Unfortunately, the impact of such contact has not always being positive, especially on most of the indigenous societies in the Arctic. The forced sedentarisation and modernisation has often created unwished for consequences for the indigenous people where their lifestyle and social norms had to be adapted to the new environment or restructured radically. All over the Arctic this process meant conflicts between modern and indigenous traditional societies, in many cases ending in the disruption of indigenous cultures (Rasing 1994; Slezkine 1994; Forsyth 1992). Movement and access to means of transport plays an

important part in these changes. In modern times most indigenous communities face a situation where indigenous women move away to study or work and marry out of their communities. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant a cut in subsidies that directly influenced many settlements in the Russian North. The lack of movement, i.e. decrease of mobility in remote Siberian villages has caused the isolation of indigenous villages, social problems and alcoholism. People who benefitted from cheap subsidised travelling and life in the communities where social security structures were financed by the state, today often face a lack of perspectives and poor living conditions. There are too many negative examples to list them all.

Alongside the physical movement of people, ideas and other intangible objects moved into the North as well. When people and groups reject or adapt to new ideas, it usually directly or indirectly affects their life and is mirrored in their everyday activities. The reorganisation of local life in the Arctic brought new concepts, rearranged family and gender relations, changing traditional life paths. Trading relations have changed local economies since the middle ages where subsistence hunting shifted to commercial hunting for furs (Fisher 1943; Khazanov 1994). Huge changes in movement and territoriality were caused by the states when they began to collect taxes and sedentarise indigenous people. As studies show, the Christian mission has rearranged family and other social relations (Vallikivi 2001; Leete 2004). As a fact, the missions in the Arctic demonstrate in an exemplary way the complexity and social meaning of the religion. In modern times, media like TV, radio, magazines or the Internet has had a huge impact not only in the adoption of new fashions or music but also shaping gender relations (Ventsel 2010; Habeck & Ventsel 2009).

As we see, life in the Arctic has never been static but full of changes even if the popular notions tend to ignore this. The movement of people, goods and ideas has been crucial for the circumpolar societies and has always been a basis for their existence. The lack of movement usually means isolation and degradation of these societies. Due to factors like climate and distance, human relations in the Arctic are very intense but complex. The concentration of human activities in centres far from each other shows the interrelation of different groups and ideas more clearly than within 'normal' living conditions. Among others, the movement or lack of it demonstrates its impact upon peoples' lives and their practices.

In today's world there exists more and more movement. These movements create new identities and new social relations – missionaries, Chinese migrants, more and more anthropologists move around in Siberia. Siberia seems to be a place where everybody wants to go. How is the movement in Siberia different and where is it similar to movement in other parts of world? The

Arctic Workshop at the University of Tartu was created to discuss these and similar issues. The first three workshops plan to focus on the issues of movement and its social, cultural, political or economic impact and therefore bear the subtitle “World Routes”. In every workshop, we plan to add papers that focus on regions outside of Siberia to initiate discussion between researchers working in different regions of the North and show similarities or differences in movement all over the area.

## NOTES

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## **MOVEMENT IN AN INSULAR COMMUNITY: THE FAEROE ISLANDS' CASE**

*Toomas Lapp (1979–2010)<sup>1</sup>*

The ocean can be a linking way or an isolating factor. For the Faeroe Islands, movement is at the origins of their population, but its history has revealed itself surprisingly sedentary. After the Vikings stopped there and populated the islands, where lived already the famous “Irish monks” – who were also supposed to have migrated in order to get to those desert islands, the Faeroese population has remained stable and stationary. Why? Which are the mechanisms that have dissuaded the population to pursue its once mobile way of life? How the sea is perceived in the archipelago – has it allowed and encouraged the contacts between the islands or, on the contrary, prevented the movement of the Faeroese within their internal space? How commerce and contacts with other powers affected the Faeroese communities? To all these questions this paper hopes to give an answer based on the analysis of the Faeroese experience throughout the centuries.

The Faeroe Islands are an archipelago of eighteen rock islands in the Northern Atlantic, in the middle of a triangle formed by Norway, Iceland and Scotland. From the administrative point of view, it is an autonomous region within the Kingdom of Denmark, and is inhabited by about 50.000 persons whose language is Faeroese, a Scandinavian language close to Icelandic. They live nowadays mainly from fishing and discuss more or less actively of becoming independent from Denmark, as the Islands' territorial waters are thought to contain rich oil fields.

As they are situated in the midst of the Ocean, the possibility or the impossibility of crossing the water has been one of the main elements in the islands' life. On the one hand, seafaring has been the way of connecting the Faeroe Islands with the external world, mostly with Norway, Denmark and Scotland, and on the other hand sea is the connector between the islands themselves. At the same time, because of natural and political factors, often the water connection has been more a means of dividing than of uniting: the more than one

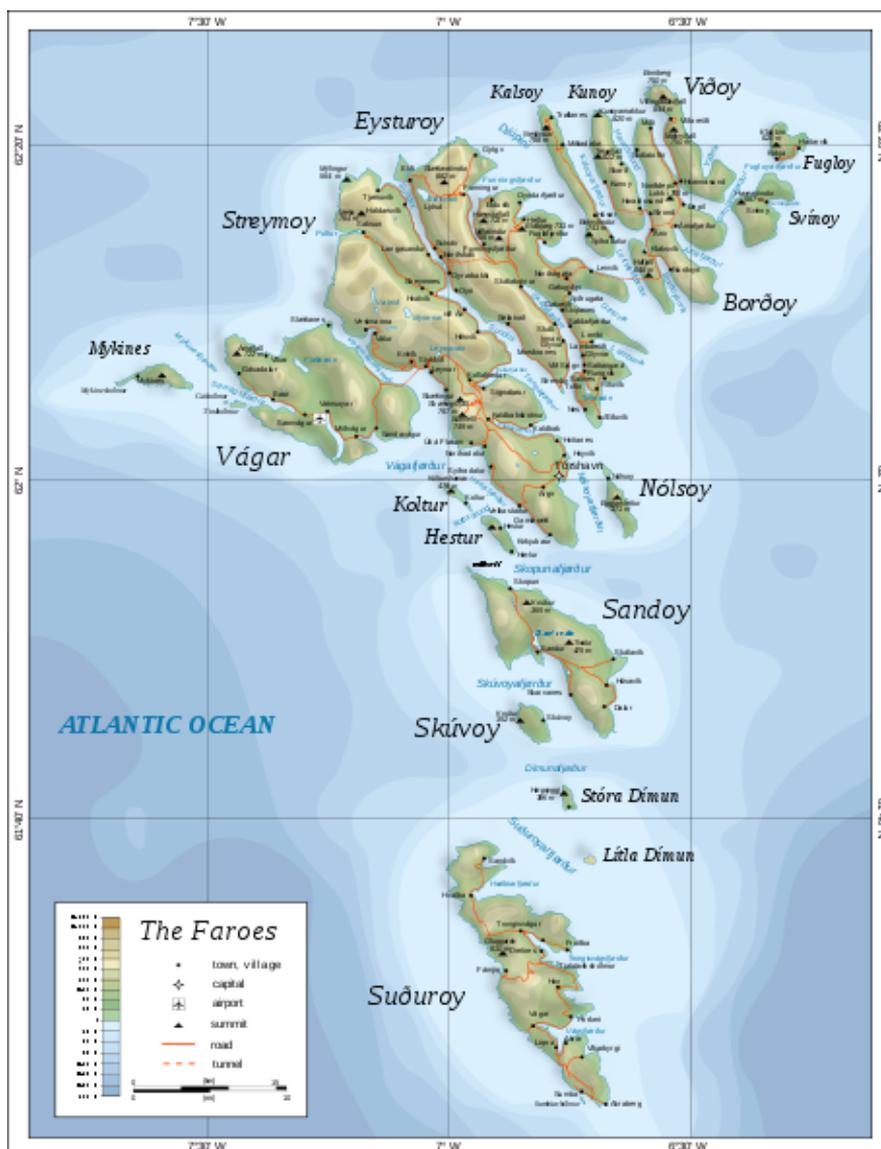


thousand years in which the islands have been inhabited may be characterised more as static than dynamic. I shall examine firstly the physical movement in history between the islands themselves and then movement between the Faeroe Islands and the rest of the world.

### **INTERNAL MOVEMENT**

Movement between the islands has been determined mainly by the natural conditions. Firstly, the Faeroe Islands are rock islands, with very few places to land. This has been a precondition for human habitat, which has chosen the places where landing was easier to establish villages. On the other hand, the scarce quantity of driftwood available has also influenced the amount of communication throughout time between the islands themselves: the Faeroese had actually no boats, which would be fit for sea fishing and could only afford to remain close to their shores and to elaborate community techniques allowing

them to get from the sea as much food as necessary to feed the people. So whale hunting was not held in high sea, but the whales were directed to places close to the shore, where they could easily be slaughtered by a whole community of Faeroese. Even when the communities had small boats allowing them to pass from one island to the other, the weather conditions made movement between the islands a complicated venture: the islands are very windy and the sea is often dangerous, especially for small crafts.



## In history

The movement between the islands, as the rest of the islands' life, was regulated by the so-called "Sheep letter" (Old Norse '*sauðabréfit*' of 24 June, 1298). The annual meeting of the *ting* was the occasion during the Middle Ages in which Faeroese gathered, coming from different islands: until 1298, the *ting*, was both a legislative and judicial organ and after, it preserved only the judicial authority. People still continued to meet in Tórshavn every year. At the same time, it was the occasion to buy and sell goods. One of the consequences of this system is that women became fundamentally sedentary.

Thus, until the 20th century, movement between the islands was very limited. It determined a very keen island identity and dialectal differences. Movement was limited to certain layers of society, mainly to priests and pastors, who were compelled to move from one island to another.

The Catholic church, in the Middle Ages, had seven priests in the Faeroe islands, with assistants to help them, and at the end of the Catholic times (before 1000–1535) the seven priests served the fifty four churches existing on the islands. The churches were located far from one another: actually even within one island, moving from one church to another might be a demanding undertaking. For example let us take the northern part of the main island, Streymoy. One priest had to move between Saksun and Tjørnuvík churches, that are not far from one another in distance, but as there are no roads, the priest had to climb up and down rocks to move between his parishes. So mass could not be held every Sunday or even every holiday. The situation did not change later, in the Reformation period, the only difference being that while the priests in the Catholic time were Faroese, the Lutheran pastors were mostly Danes, coming from Denmark, and compelled to adapt to conditions very different from those they were accustomed to.

Considering the difficulty of transportation between the islands, a special service, called *skyds / skjuts*, was installed during the 19th century: each island had an appointed responsible for boat transportation, who was due to help organising the movement of priests, officials and private movements or tidings from one island to another. The *skyds* was a kind of forerunner of the postal service (from 1870), ensuring contacts between the islands. The postal service at the beginning ran but seven trips a year to each island.

## **New kinds of movement**

After 1856, the building or buying ships (see below) allowed the Faeroese to increase movement between islands. While the Faeroese were becoming a navigating people, the drain towards the capital, Tórshavn, increased.

In order to avoid urbanisation, in the 1980s, the Faeroe Islands invested, with the help given by Denmark's state budget, in building huge infrastructures. Roads are good, and several islands are now connected with one another with tunnels – for example the tunnel connecting Eysturoy (Leirvík) to the Northern islands (island of Borðoy, Klaksvík, the second town in the Faeroes), called Norðoyatunnilin, was opened in 2006 and with its 6300 m is the longer in the Islands. Even small villages are connected to good roads and tunnels open them up, as for example the two villages in the island of Kunoy, Kunoy and Haraldssund, whose population amounts to some dozen persons.

In addition 12 helicopter landing fields were constructed. Helicopter tickets have even nowadays very cheap prices, in order to encourage mobility between the islands. In order to avoid foreign visitors taking exaggerated advantage of the low fares meant for the local population, a non-resident is not allowed to buy return tickets.

While most of the islands are quite close to one another, and are connected either through tunnels or bridges (with some connections by boat), the Southern islands, Sandoy and Suðuroy are more distant than the others, being accessible only by boat or by helicopter. The ferry Smyril M/S connects Tvøroyri and Tórshavn, it is a large boat for around one thousand passengers and more than 200 cars. It circulates two or three times a day and it is important for Suðuroy's community that it is their boat and that it spends the night in the island.

So, movement between the islands has become much easier in the Faeroe Islands in the last decades. The aim of such regional policy was indeed to give the Faeroese easy access to the towns, hoping they would go on living in small places and remote islands. At the beginning, the results were not very convincing: urbanisation went on and villages were deserted. The most attractive places were firstly the capital but also the second town Klaksvík as well as Runavík. The regional policy launched in the 1970s starts only now to give some results: if the improved infrastructure was used in the 1970s and 1980s to quit the remote regions, now we can point out the reverse tendency. Many people work at home with their computer over the internet and prefer to do it in the countryside, far from the noise of Tórshavn, while knowing that when-

ever they feel the need, they may access very easily the capital. Still, several islands remain very scarcely inhabited, mainly by elders, while houses formerly used during all the year have become mostly summer residences.

## EXTERNAL MOVEMENT

Movement towards the Faeroe Islands was decisive in the first stages of their history: the first occupation of the islands as well as the second occupation, of longer duration, came from outside.

### The occupation of the islands

The occupation of the Islands by mankind started in about 600–650 AD: they are discovered by Irish hermit monks, in search of isolation and solitude. West (1972: 5) is convinced that the Irish monks arrived in the Islands while following the direction given by birds' migration, considering that it should lead to land, where the birds would be able to rest. In his text written in 825 *Liber de mensura orbis terræ* ('The Earth's Measuring Book'), the Irish scholar Dicuil describes the islands North and North-East from Britain:

*Sunt aliæ insulæ multæ in septentrionali Britannix Oceano, quæ septentrionalibus Britannix insulis duorum dierum ac noctium recta navigatione, plenis velis, assiduo feliciter adiri queunt. Aliquis presbyter religiosas mihi retulit quod, in duobus æstivis diebus, et una intercedente nocte, navigans in duorum navicula transtrorum, in unam illarum introivit.* (Walckenaer 1807: 30)<sup>2</sup>

In his description, Dicuil mentions that the monks lived in the Islands about one hundred years but were compelled to quit because of the Viking plunderers. The Vikings arrived at the Faeroe Islands in the 8th century. After sailing from Norway, the Vikings had stopped on the British Islands, married local women and gone with them to the Faeroes (Jorgensen *et al.* 2004). When they arrived at the Faeroe islands, the Vikings found there not only monks, but also a fair amount of black wild lambs, and gave the Islands the name *Føroyar*, which means in Faeroese 'Lamb islands'.

If the first inhabitants, the Irish monks, did not influence in any way the later social relations, the lambs they had brought became the bases of the society's economy until the mid 19th century, when wool was the main export

article. Wool is still called nowadays the gold of the Faeroe Islands (in Faeroese *Seyða ull er Føroya gull*).

The Faeroese society developed on the bases of the Viking population, which had brought the social system from Norway, the Vikings installed in the Islands a pastoral society. Although no trees grew on the rocks, the absence of tree wood was not problematic at the beginning, as drift wood was used for building houses, tools and boats as well as for heating the dwellings. The remains of a Viking dwelling discovered in 1942 through archaeological excavations prove that the Vikings were in touch both with Norway and the British islands, from where they imported crops, soda-lime, wood and luxury goods – as glass and hazelnuts (Dahl 1970).

At the end of the 10th century, Olav Trygvason, King of Norway, decided to spread Christianity not only in Continental Norway but also in all the places occupied by the Norwegians, i.e. the Vikings in the West, in order to consolidate his Kingdom (Mortensen 2003: 9).<sup>3</sup> At the turning of the millennium, the adoption of Christianity also concludes the period of the Faroese' independence, and in 1035 the King of Norway started to collect taxes from the islands.

### **Immobility for 600 years**

The Faroese become more and more sedentary, because they had not enough wood to build crafts that would have allowed them to cross the Ocean: the Vikings former bold navigation skills sink into oblivion. During more than 600 years, the Faeroese do not move. This immobility is also due to regulation that does not encourage physical movement nor dynamism in society.

### ***Trade***

The Faroese own immobility still does not mean that the islands were completely isolated from the rest of the world. They have never been self sufficient as far as wood and food are concerned, and they have always needed connections with the outside world (Thorsteinsson 1991: 21). In spring 1271 Norway's King Magnús Lagabøte sent the Faroese a letter, in which he praises their docility and promise to send every year two trade ships from Norway (Young 1979: 139).

In 1535 the Faeroe's trade monopoly was established that was to determine the islands' life and fate for the three centuries. In essentials it meant that the King gave only to one trader (or he traded for some time himself) the right to

trade with the Faeroe islands, and the Faeroese were forbidden, under death penalty, to trade with any other partner.

Still, in spite of the prohibition, smuggling was widespread especially with British and Dutch ships, and almost all layers of society practised it. As Danish priests as well as the members of the legislative body, the *Løgting*, failed to respect the ban, usually smuggling affairs were indulgently treated in court (West 1972: 40; Wylie 1987: 29).

The rules for trade monopoly were strictly fixed by the King, but often the traders themselves did not respect them. For example they were due to transport across the Ocean for a symbolic fare all the Faeroese who wanted to present the King any letter of demand or complaint; still, the sending of complaints to Copenhagen was complicated if not impossible, for the content of the letters concerned usually the traders, who were thus not interested to have them transported to Copenhagen. The Faeroese had no ship at all to sail far from their shores.

The monopoly trade had a direct influence on the Faeroe Islands' social structure. The prices were fixed and they were changed, during the whole duration of the monopole trade, only a couple of times. The prices were the reason why it was advantageous for the Faeroese to deal mainly with wool and not with fishing: the society was organised as a mono-functional economy and therefore it was almost motionless. Moreover, rules regulated most strictly marriage and thus reproduction, striving to keep the islands population stable: marriage was forbidden unless the couple could prove possession of a certain amount of land.

The Faeroese were accustomed to stationary society from the Middle Ages on and they were scared of changes and therefore pretty conservative. The following example may illustrate their approach: although fishing was not economically essential for the Islands, still the Faeroese caught fish close to their shores for their own feeding. At the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, British fishermen started to fish close to the Faeroe Islands. In 1617, the Faeroese sent the Danish King Christian IV a letter of complaint, in which they protested against the British catching in their fishing points hering that they would use as baits for bigger fish in their nets. The Faeroese did not use nets and thus they were at their disadvantage, and eventually were deprived of sufficient food and were in trouble for paying the king their due taxes (Zachariassen 1961: 133). Wylie (1987: 30) interprets the letter's content not as an attempt to make the king help the Faroese renew their fishing techniques in order to yield better catch, but to have him drive the British away so that the Faeroese could go on fishing as they had done for centuries.

Another example of the Faeroese conservative spirit goes back to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, when the civil servants repeatedly recommended to lift the trade monopoly and thus to free the Faeroese trade. At the same time, the Faeroese peasants sent several letters to Copenhagen, demanding the monopoly trade to be maintained, for they were afraid of the possible chaos during the transition period. Officially, the monopoly was lifted only in 1856.

### ***The foreigners***

Until 1821, each spring, the first ship brought not only the traders, but also the *foogt*, the representative of the King, who spent all the summer in the Faeroe Islands and went back to Bergen in autumn with the last ship. In winter, the *foogt* was replaced by a Faeroese, the "*winterfoogt*". The *foogt's* task was to collect taxes and to participate to court processes as prosecutor (Wylie 1987: 11). The other foreign civil servants on the island were the head of the garrison, who was in charge of helping the monopoly warehouses and in general the town of Tórshavn as well as the appointed merchant. Danes or Norwegians never populated massively the islands and only some few times they were landowners (Debes 1995: 23). Thus, the Faeroese had extremely limited contacts with people from different cultures.

After the peace of Kiel in 1814, in which Denmark had to yield Norway to Sweden, Denmark still kept all its former colonies in North Atlantic – Greenland, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands. Denmark started to administrate directly these regions as its own regions and thus a governor, the *amtmand*, was sent in 1821 to the Faeroe Islands: he was the highest representative of the Danish state power. Unlike the former high civil servant positions<sup>4</sup>, the governor's position was temporary and many ambitious Danish civil servants saw in the Faeroe Islands a good springboard towards a promising career. They used it to be noticed and thus attempted to be as useful as possible to the islands<sup>5</sup>. In connection with movement, we must mention Christian Pløyen, who was governor in 1837–1848: he was so keen on the Faeroe islands' development that he applied for money from the Danish state, in order to discover Shetland and Orkney, whose natural conditions are similar to the Faeroe islands', in order to find skills that would optimise the Faeroe islands agriculture and fishing (Pløyen 1999). After this visit, he helped, with financial support from Denmark, several gifted Faeroese to travel to Shetland and Orkney to learn new fishing techniques. Moreover, it was Pløyen's initiative to establish a regular postal service between the Faeroe Islands and Denmark as well as Great Britain

so that the islands were no more an archipelago isolated from Europe, which was not concerned from Europe's events: now information moved from the world to the Faeroe Islands in a couple of weeks.

### ***Religion***

During the Middle Ages, besides the merchants and the *foogt*, the Faeroese were in touch with the external world through the Catholic bishop. The diocese of the Faeroe Islands was established in around 1100: at the beginning it belonged to the archbishop of Bremen, later to Lund and later to the archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim) (Bruun 1942: 674). Among the thirty four bishops in the history of the Faeroe Islands, there were only a few Faeroese; the others were Norwegians, Danes or Germans. The local priests were almost without exceptions Faeroese; they had been trained as priests by the bishops on the spot. The diocese of the Faeroe Islands lasted more than 400 years, but we have very few data about it because of scarce sources. We know from indirect sources that the headquarters of the diocese were often plundered by pirates – another way in which the Faeroe Islands were connected to the outer world...

After the Reformation (1535–1540), the Faeroese pastors were more and more frequently replaced by Danish pastors; the Catholic school that trained ecclesiastics was closed and the Latin school that opened later in Tórshavn was expensive and did not train pastors, it only gave students the possibility of starting theology studies in Copenhagen. In general, until the second half of the 19th century, sending children to school was beyond the means of the Faeroese families.

### ***Ryberg's trade***

In the Faeroe Islands' otherwise very quiet history, there is one short twenty-three years period in which the whole society was shattered quite properly. It was when the Danish trader Niels Ryberg decided in 1766 to found on the Faeroe Islands a transit warehouse in order to stock goods from the Indian Ocean and Caribbean before smuggling them to Great Britain. At the same time, Ryberg was not allowed to sell goods to the Faeroese, because it was a threat to the Royal trade monopoly (Rasch 1964: 170). Trading was especially successful during the American Independence war, when Tórshavn harbour welcomed fifty crafts, instead of the two or three that sailed to the Islands before yearly (Jacobsen 2006: 99). Not only foreign sailors, but also foreign carpenters, coppers arrived in Tórshavn, and they started to adapt the town to

their needs: they established a tobacco factory, a club and a riding field. Ryberg finished the activity of transit storing in 1788, when Great Britain practically gave up import taxes and smuggling was not profitable any more. Although Ryberg's intermezzo did not influence the development of the Islands on the long term, it was the first window for the Faeroese to the world: Ryberg employed Faeroese boys in his warehouses and ships. One of the boys who worked on Ryberg's ships was Nólsoyar Páll, whom I shall present hereafter.

## **TOWARDS NEW MOVEMENT**

### **Nólsoyar Páll, the uncommon Faeroese**

After Ryberg's warehouses were closed, life went on in the Faeroe Islands as it has gone on for centuries before – the population herded lambs and contacts with external world, when they happened, were scarce. But we must mention a remarkable personality called Nólsoyar Páll (or Páll from the island of Nólsoy), who was presented at the end of the 19th century, in the context of the Faeroese national awakening, as a national hero. He was born in 1766, and worked as a boy on Ryberg's trade ships, later on other ships, crossing many seas. Páll is supposed to have served both in the French and British fleets, and later as a captain on American trade ships. In 1800 he returned to the Faeroe Islands and started to keep a farm. But being a curious and progressive spirit, he did not keep to agriculture but invented means to improve fishing activities: he elaborated a new kind of hull, well adapted to the Faeroe Islands windy waters and their strong currents and changed the form of the boats' sails – his innovations were adopted almost everywhere in the islands. He is also remembered because he looked with some friends for a shipwrecked sailing boat and built from it a boat fit to navigate, the *Royndin Friða* – the first long run boat built in the Faeroe Islands and belonging to a Faeroese. With his boat, he transported different kinds of goods between the Faeroe Islands and Norway, Denmark and Great Britain, and for this, he was assigned by the civil servants to court for violating the monopoly trade rules and dealing with smuggling. Páll perished in a storm on the way between Great Britain and the Faeroe Islands in 1809.

Nólsoyar Páll, with his moving nature, was in striking contrast with the static society of the Faeroe Islands, while by trying to find ways to sidestep the rules of monopoly trade and by sailing with his own ship he was a forerunner of the change that would come to the Faeroes a hundred and fifty years later.

## **The end of monopoly trade**

The static aspect of Faeroese society had been mostly a consequence of the restrictions imposed by the monopoly trade. This absolute rule is more and more discussed in the 19th century.

The monopoly trade had been bringing losses for quite a long time and the king's advisers in Copenhagen had been repeatedly recommending liberalising trade with the Faeroe Islands. The King had agreed – in spite of the confused reactions coming from the islands. The Faeroe peasants had on the one hand asked the King to maintain the monopoly, but on the other hand Nólsoyar Páll had demanded liberalisation of trade. The main obstacle to monopoly trade revocation was only that the Danish government had more urgent issues – for example Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century or, some years later, the Schleswig-Holstein question. The monopoly rules were definitively lifted in 1856.

For many Faeroese, the abolition of monopoly trade is a major milestone in the history of the Islands – it represents the official end of the Middle Ages in the Islands and some people consider it even as the first year of a new era – for now the Faeroese could trade with one another as well as with foreign merchants (Olafsson 2000: 123). Their society, which was until that time relatively static and closed, started immediately to develop and to grow. Between 1860 and 1901, the number of the Faeroese doubled. Movement increased, mainly from the Faeroe islands towards the world.

The development of export possibilities led to a change in the islands production's pattern. Soon wool and wool products export was replaced by fish: at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century, Great Britain replaced its sailing ships by modern steamers and the Faeroese were able to buy quite cheap sailing boats. Fishing became industrial and concentrated on far fishing, an activity that was completely unknown until that time to the Faeroese. This development meant that the men were absent for months from home and this factor influenced strongly agriculture, which had dominated until then the Faeroese economy, and the Faeroese culture as a whole.

Another direction of movement from the islands towards other Northern countries is connected to education. As the Faeroese richness started to grow rapidly, it became possible for more and more Faeroese to study in universities abroad. In general Faeroese went to University in Copenhagen, but some went to Iceland or Norway<sup>6</sup>. Compared to the situation in the Nordic countries at the time, the Faeroese' quick enrichment and the absence of unemployment represent a remarkable exception, for during the same period, millions of people quitted Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland towards the Unites States

of America in quest of economic wealth or spiritual salvation. Officially no one from the Faeroe Islands emigrated at that time: thus the movement pattern does not follow the Scandinavian model at all.

Movement developed not only from the islands, but also towards them. The frequent movement of fishermen between the Faeroe and the British Islands allowed in 1860 the arrival of the first non-Catholic and non-Lutheran missionary William Sloan, representing the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative evangelical denomination. He did not immediately succeed in the Islands: at the beginning he scared people so that he was several times left to sleep outdoors (Berghamar 1992). But after working obstinately for decades, Sloan achieved confidence from many people and today the Plymouth Brethren are the biggest non-Lutheran religious movement in the Faeroe Islands.

### **Opening towards the world**

At the beginning of the 20th century the Faeroese started to add engines to their sailing boats and to sail further and further. The new movement towards the world yet did not bring a radical opening of the sailors world: they remained in the North Atlantic and the contacts with other population remained limited. They sailed towards Iceland, but from the 1920s on they moved to Western Greenlandic shores, looking for better catch. Although geographically they sailed very far from home, their trips did not afford any cultural enlightening contact. Greenland was a closed colony belonging to Denmark and the Danes made sure that Greenlanders did not meet any foreigner, included Danish citizens. Therefore the Faeroese were not allowed ashore even to drink fresh water. They found a temporary compromise in 1927, when they were allowed to build their own port on a desert island, Færingehavn, in order to get drinking water and to store fish catches. In 1937, Denmark allowed also non-Faeroese fishermen in Færingehavn – and thus the Faeroese met people from several other countries there, although the contacts with Greenland's natives remained inexistent.

Both World War I and World War II meant isolation from Denmark for the Faeroe islands, but they intensified contacts with Great Britain, and implied movement in both directions. When, during WWI, famine started to harass the Faeroe Islands, the Faeroese ensured income of food through the British. But vice-versa, during WWII – which is seen in the Faeroese history as a period of economic development, the Faeroese offered the United Kingdom substantial assistance by daring transport fish from the Icelandic ports to Great Britain, which suffered from lack of food, while the Icelanders considered sea-

far too dangerous and were not ready to risk German attacks on their boats. The modest and old-fashioned Faeroese boats were actually more fit for sea travel in those troubled days, because they escaped detection by radars.

Even more important, the main movement direction was not from the Faeroes towards Great Britain, but the reverse: the British moved towards the Faeroe Islands. Actually, in order to avoid so important a military strategic location to be taken by the Germans, Great Britain, on April 8th 1940, occupied the Faeroe Islands in an operation called “Valentine”. Two hundred sailors were soon replaced by foot soldiers. At the highest point of the occupation, there were in the Faeroes until 8000 British soldiers, who went almost all away in 1945, when the control over the Islands was returned to Denmark (Dalsgaard 1989: 13). Although the Faeroe Islands protested against the occupation, several authors have called it a formal occupation (cf. Dalsgaard 1989; Åkesson Filholm 2009; Strøyberg 2004). While the Faeroese wished to remain neutral in the war, they were well aware that they would be sooner or later occupied by one of the belligerents and thus they were quite happy that the British arrived before the Germans. The occupation is called by the Faeroese people “the Friendly Occupation”. Around one hundred and seventy British soldiers married Faeroese women and remained in the Islands. The fact that the Faeroese were not very seriously against the occupation is proved by the celebration held in 1990 of its 50th anniversary, where many British ex-service-men were invited. Moreover, this period is a forerunner of later self-rule: symbolically, the Faeroese flag was first officially used under the British rule (Lapp 2009: 110).

### **The bank crisis in the 1990s**

In the last decade of the 20th century, physical movements have also been doubled by more virtual movements, proving the opening of a traditionally closed society: the changes in behavioural patterns were well revealed with the 1990s bank crisis. The crash was mostly due to the accumulation of foreign debt, due to the welfare aspirations of the Faeroese society. Capital had been flowing to the Faeroes and allowed developed infrastructure and personal consumption, but all under Danish warrant. Eventually the situation exploded, and the collapse of the fish industry revealed the weaknesses of the Faeroese economic system and its dependence from the outside world (Baerenholdt & Aarsaether 1999). The year 1992 is remembered as a “anno horribilis”: the islands financial bankruptcy led to the emigration of one quarter of the population towards Denmark, while Denmark, in spite of internal tensions and a

debate about the cost of supporting the islands for the Danish taxpayer, payed and helped the Faeroes to rebuild its economy.

In the last decades of the 20th century, movement seems to be generalised in the Faeroese every day reality: in spite of the creation of a Faeroese University<sup>7</sup> in 1965, more and more Faeroese youth move abroad to be trained, and many remain abroad for some time to work in their profession. Still, there is also the reverse movement – Faeroese going back to their native islands after some year of work experience abroad – mainly in Denmark, where they have all the advantages of being citizens. The emigration for study or for working abroad represents still a considerable amount of the Faeroese population.

The Faeroese and Denmark (01.01.2006)

Men	Women	Total
10.499	12.050	22.549

## CONCLUSION

While one would have expected the traditional economic system of an archipelago to be very much dependent on the sea and on movement across it, the case of the Faeroe islands seem to lead us in another direction: the sea, for the major part of its history, was only marginally a connecting way, but mainly maintained the islands and their inhabitants in a most isolated condition, condemning them to sedentary life. The natural conditions of the rock islands, in which trees do not grow, did not give the local population access to the sea, and nailed them on the islands, where they survived thanks to the lambs, the sea birds eggs (on some islands) and the fish caught near the shore. During the Middle Ages (that finished for the Faeroes in the mid-19th-century), the rules established by Norway and later by Denmark enhanced this closeness, and thus, political factors confirmed the trends due to natural elements.

The traditional opposition to change and thus to movement was challenged by external conditions: the opening of trade on the one hand, in 1856, and the opportunity of acquiring ships enhanced a new role for the sea as connector and stimulated movement and change in the Faeroese society. At the beginning of the 21st century, progress has closed the gap and Faeroese society is now in touch with the world's general development.

The Faeroese case is thus interesting and peculiar in Europe's history, which is as a whole characterised by the intensity of contacts between different cultures and societies: while the waters around the Faroe Islands have both united

and separated the islands from each other and rest of the world, for most part of the Faroese history, however, they are to be seen as the isolating factor.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This article is based on the material Toomas Lapp had written for his presentation in the seminar Worldroutes I, Tartu, May 30 2010. The article was not concluded when Toomas Lapp tragically perished on July 12th. His message has been reconstructed, translated and completed by Eva Toulouze, who was his doctoral supervisor and had discussed at length his positions for this presentation. By publishing his last scientific contribution, we homage our colleague, whose path was so brutally interrupted.
- <sup>2</sup> Translation: “In the Ocean north to Britain there are other islands, where one gets by sailing from the Northern British Islands two days and two nights with favorable winds. A reliable priest told me that he sailed with a two-bench boat two summer days and the night in-between and visited one of them“.
- <sup>3</sup> While in Iceland, where the occupation has many similarities with the Faeroe’s one, evangelisation went smoothly – because of the Icelanders’ pragmatic approach, according to which adopting Christianity was necessary in order to keep good trade relations with the Christian world –, the Faeroese at the beginning were opposed to the new faith. The Faeroe Islands’ evangelisation is reported in the ancient *Færeyinga saga*, ‘The Faeroese saga’. Some time later they were compelled to give in and to submit to Norway’s King’s pressure.
- <sup>4</sup> The *foogt* was a lifelong position. The foreigners in the islands, included the pastors, integrated into the Faeroese society, and became usually Faeroese, without exercising any influence on this society that would change it.
- <sup>5</sup> For example Christian Ludvig Tillisch, who was governor in 1825–1830, founded schools in several villages, the Tórshavn handicraft school for girls, established the first library and the first hospital.
- <sup>6</sup> It is towards Iceland that V. U. Hammershaimb, the creator of Faeroese written language, directed young Faeroese, hoping that studying in Icelandic would arise interest for the Faeroese language and in general for the Faeroese national question.
- <sup>7</sup> Not all subjects are taught at the Faeroese University, which has three faculties.

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# YURI VELLA ON THE MOVE: DRIVING AN UAZIK IN WESTERN SIBERIA

*Liivo Niglas*

**Abstract:** In this paper, I want to demonstrate how modern technology can be employed in the sustainability strategy of an indigenous person who is trying to hold on to a traditional mode of existence. In the case of Yuri Vella, who is the main research subject of this study, modern technology is not only used for carrying out everyday domestic and economic activities. For him it is also a tool to withstand corporate pressure on traditional sources of livelihood. Yuri Vella has incorporated a wide range of modern technological devices into his forest universe. I will argue that one of the most crucial technological items he is relying on in his daily struggle for economic, cultural and political survival is a car. Paradoxically, the extraction of oil that is needed to sustain his “automobility”, is a principal factor that is threatening his indigenous way of life in this oil-rich region of Western Siberia.

**Key words:** anthropological film, automobility, nomadism, reindeer herding, technological change, visual anthropology

## INTRODUCTION

Yuri Vella lives in the basin of the Agan River. It is situated in the Mid-Ob region of the Western Siberian Plain, which is poorly drained and consists of some of the world’s largest swamps and floodplains. A unique combination of harsh climatic conditions, an abundance of natural resources, an extremely vulnerable environment, a modest infrastructure and a multi-ethnic population characterize this region. The local indigenous people, the Khanty and the Forest Nenets, adapted to this severe natural habitat by developing a way of life that was based on hunting, fishing and reindeer herding. Since the 1960s, when oil was discovered in the region, these traditional subsistence activities came under pressure because the oil-industry competes for the same resource – the land – that the natives living in the forest need for their survival. The state authorities have always sided with the oil producers in this conflict because the Russian national budget relies heavily on oil revenue.

Yuri Vella is one of those natives who are holding on to their land. So far he has been successful in his struggle to maintain a traditional way of life despite

the economic, political and psychological constraints that come with being in constant conflict with the powerful oil-industry. It surely requires a lot of courage and determination, but in Yuri Vella's case it can be also explained by his unique way of thinking about and reacting to the challenges of everyday reality. Unlike many other indigenous people in Northern Siberia, Yuri Vella has over the years been able to integrate into his mental world aspects of different realities and value systems that are often in conflict with each other.<sup>1</sup>

As a member of a small ethnic group of 2000 people, the Forest Nenets, Yuri Vella inherited a worldview based on nomadic reindeer herding and traditional folk stories. On the other hand, he grew up and studied in a typical national village, which was formed as a result of the official settlement policy with the aim of turning the "backward natives" into proper Soviet citizens. Since his early youth, he has been writing poems and stories in order to quench his thirst to express his understanding of the world, and in his thirties he studied by correspondence at the Poetry Department of the Moscow Institute of Literature while working as a hunter. After the collapse of the Soviet economy, he bought some reindeers and moved with his family to live in the forest. He had to become politically active and to learn to fight for his indigenous and property rights in order to survive as a reindeer herder in one of the most important oil-producing regions of Russia. From these different life experiences Yuri Vella has constructed himself a worldview that helps him to face the harsh reality of an indigenous person in Western Siberia (Niglas & Toulouze 2004).

Mental strength is crucial for survival in a severe physical and social environment but it has to be supported by adequate technology, if it is to be sustainable. Yuri Vella has created in his forest home a technological environment, which offers him and his family a traditional way of life with modern comforts. One of the most important technological tools in his material world is a car.

Yuri Vella obtained his first car<sup>2</sup> about 10 years ago, since then he has had three cars. It has always been the same model – UAZ 452<sup>3</sup> This four-wheel drive minibus (there is also a pickup-truck model) is a simple, rather uncomfortable car that is strong and capable of driving on almost any terrain. The UAZ 452 has been manufactured without major changes since 1966 and was for a long time mostly reserved for the police, army and paramedic use. The minibus and other UAZ cars, most notably the UAZ 469, which was very similar in design to the original Jeep, have gained legendary status in Russia. People inhabiting regions with modest infrastructure and difficult road conditions use these vehicles still to this day due to their off-road ability, reliability and simplicity. The popular name for these cars is *uazik* and they are a good

alternative to the more expensive Western made 4x4's. Apart from the lower cost, the popularity of *uazik* cars lies in their much simpler design compared to sophisticated, "computerized" Western off-road vehicles.

For Yuri Vella, the *uazik* is the best choice for a car as it is easy to use and maintain in the field conditions of Western Siberia. And, as I will show in this paper, the *uazik* is a suitable car for carrying out various tasks in Yuri Vella's everyday life: it helps him to take care of his reindeer; it makes it possible to maintain vital links with his native village and with bigger towns in the region, and it serves also as an effective tool for defending his indigenous rights.

Many indigenous people use cars in Western Siberia, but in this paper I have chosen to focus on a single individual rather than on an ethnic group or entire region. I feel that it allows to get deeper into the phenomenon's complexity without having to generalise on a significant amount of individual diversity. My emphasis is on "personal culture" rather than on "collective culture" (as in Valsiner 2007) because Yuri Vella is a man, whose idiosyncratic semiotic-system of symbols, practices and personal objects differs substantially from the communally shared meanings, social norms and everyday life practices of the indigenous people of the region. There is also a methodological reason why I prefer to narrow my research focus to a single person.

For me, fieldwork is mainly a visual experience. Therefore, I usually use a video camera as a means to pursue ethnographic enquiry, and an anthropological documentary film as a way to present research results. Filmmaking, much like classical ethnographic fieldwork, is always specific, rooted in a certain time and place, and focused on particular individuals. But unlike written ethnography, the recorded images cannot produce explicit statements about collective culture. Any generalizations, which can be found in a film,<sup>4</sup> are there implicitly, evoked by the images of specific individuals in a specific environment, and by the way of presenting those images in a film narrative. Similarly to a film, this paper contains very few general statements. The empirical data presented here about one individual's personal use of a car could be used as raw material for a generalization on the collective car culture of the indigenous people of Western Siberia. But I hope the paper also offers something else.

When visiting Yuri Vella, my primary goal has always been filmmaking rather than doing classical ethnographic research. Therefore, this paper should be read as the work of an anthropological filmmaker who is trying to conceptualize an interesting cultural phenomenon encountered while recording the life of a particular person. Thus, the findings presented here are not the result of a pre-planned and in-depth ethnographic enquiry; they are more like a side-product of other work – ideas gained during shooting and editing footage about a very specific indigenous man.

I have been trying to record and understand Yuri Vella's world with the help of a video camera since 2000, when I first set out to film his life in the forests of Western Siberia. Since then I have been to his place four times, spending there altogether three months and recording about 60 hours of footage. The first two fieldtrips resulted in a 58 min anthropological film *Yuri Vella's World* (2003) and the footage captured during the last two trips<sup>5</sup> will soon be edited into a new feature-length documentary about this remarkable man. Therefore, I am compelled to consider (at least to a certain extent) the requirements of a narrative film in my choices during video shooting, both in choosing the episodes to be filmed and in actual camera work. But as an anthropologist I try to film in the way that offers viewers not only an audiovisual representation of the observed reality but also some anthropological knowledge of this reality. By filming Yuri Vella, I have attempted to bring within reach the social experience of one particular individual. Besides the intellectual side of this experience, I was also interested in something else. Much of it can be put under the heading of "sensory knowledge" – that is "how people perceive their material environment and interact with it, both its natural and cultural forms, including their interaction with others as physical beings" (MacDougall 2005: 268).

In order to gain a deeper anthropological knowledge of what it means for Yuri Vella to drive a car in Western Siberia, it would be fruitful to use video material as a sort of catalyst that could provide the mechanism of understanding his sensory experience of driving the car. Unfortunately it is not possible to include actual video material in a written text. Therefore, for this presentation the video footage serves mainly as a set of fieldwork notes, which helps me to reflect on the economic, social and political aspects of Yuri Vella's personal usage of a car. The emotional, sensory and reflective dimension of the recorded material will be dealt with only to certain extent.

## **YURI VELLA AND MOBILITY**

It has always been very intense to film Yuri Vella. It requires a great deal of stamina from a filmmaker to keep up with him, because he is constantly on the move, both physically and mentally.

When talking to Yuri one quickly notices that his mind is seldom in the present; that he mostly talks about the future. Almost everything he does, be it taking care of his reindeers, making a new sledge or dealing with his grand children, is directed towards a distant tomorrow, his thoughts are traveling always into a future 50 or 70 years from now (Niglas & Toulouze 2004).

But he moves a great deal in the physical world as well. He travels often away from his tribal territory (in Russian: *rodovoie ugodie*) in order to give a talk in a local school or to participate in a TV talk show or to work on a new book with an illustrator in one of the regional cities (Surgut, Nizhnevartovsk, Khanty-Mansiysk). Quite often he has to take a plane to Moscow or to other regions in Russia for a meeting or lecture. Sometimes he travels to Europe or to North America to represent Native Siberians in human and indigenous rights events. And in order to lead the life of a reindeer herder he has to move around in his proper territory a lot: it takes lots of comings and goings to look after ones reindeer, to travel between different camps and to get to a good hunting ground or fishing place.

Yuri Vella's open, slightly restless, nature is manifested through his eagerness to adopt new things into his world. He is always ready to try out a new machine, a new technology. It is very comfortable to stay at his forest camps, compared to many other indigenous households in the area. The houses at his camps are built according to the traditional Khanty model – one-room log buildings with an iron stove in the corner – but the presence of the contemporary world is manifested in technological details. Yuri has an electric generator that allows him and his family to use modern technology to make life easier in the forest conditions. There is an electric stove in the winter house that enables his wife to bake bread without working outside in the cold. There is usually a TV set in the house, regardless of which seasonal camp he and his family are staying in: Yuri has a large collection of videotapes, which consist of both fiction and documentary films that he likes to watch before going to sleep, as well as the footage he has filmed himself with a video camera to document indigenous reality in the changing physical and social environment. For more than a decade Yuri has had a computer that he uses to write poems, design his books and watch DVDs. He keeps in contact with the outside world through a mobile phone that he was relying on a long time before “the mobile phone revolution” kicked off in Western Siberia (Stammler 2009: 61)<sup>6</sup>. In spring 2009, a permanent Internet connection was established in his winter camp through a satellite dish with the help of UNESCO. Yuri also owns a set of modern tools, which help him to conduct his day-to-day tasks in the camp: a chainsaw, a portable sawmill and various electric tools.

As reindeer herding, fishing and hunting requires a lot of moving around, Yuri tries to use modern technology for transport whenever possible. He has a motorboat for collecting fish from traps or taking his wife and daughter(s) for berry picking in summer. In order to have the access to a larger fishing area, he and his grandsons dug numerous channels that connect eleven lakes into a man-made system of waterways.



*Yuri Vella's summer camp.  
A still from author's video footage.*



*Yuri Vella, reindeer and uazik.  
A still from author's video footage.*

When the water is frozen and the ground is covered by snow, Yuri drives a snowmobile to take care of his herd and to check the fish traps. Yuri was one of the first natives who started to use a *buran*<sup>7</sup> – a classic Soviet snowmobile – in the area. According to Yuri, he was a member of the first experimental mechanized hunting brigade in Russia. The Institute of Hunting and Fur Farming, which was based in Kirov, formed the brigade in 1979. The aim of the brigade was to do research on hunting for fur animals, moose and wild reindeer. The brigade was provided with a snowmobile for collective use and it had a researcher from the institute as a member. Soon Yuri had saved enough money and he bought himself a personal snowmobile. There is no doubt that the snowmobile had a great influence on the mobility and subsistence activities of Yuri Vella and other indigenous people in Northern Russia. But it was not on the same scale as in Fenno-Scandia where the adopting of new technology brought along the rapid economic and social change in Sami society in the 1960s, which has been described as “the snowmobile revolution” (Pelto 1987; Helander-Renvalg 2007).<sup>8</sup>

The snowmobile continues to play an essential part in Yuri’s everyday activities in the winter season. But I would argue that probably the most important feature of Yuri’s mobility is his *uazik*. Unlike the snowmobile, it can be used throughout the year, and more importantly, it binds Yuri’s forest home strongly with the outside world – physically, economically and politically.

Therefore, I was not surprised when viewing the video material I had shot over the years on Yuri, to find out that a substantial part of it was filmed either about or in the car. What did surprise me while watching the footage was the extent of the information communicated to the camera during the driving. Most of the data presented in this article has been recorded on the move. The camera captured not only what Yuri said while driving the car; it also registered how he said it and what was visible through the windshield or the side window of the car at that moment.

## **FILMING IN THE CAR**

It could be argued that this emphasis on driving tells more about my preferences as a filmmaker than describes the reality of Yuri Vella’s everyday life. It is true that filming in a moving vehicle is very common in fiction as well as in documentary film, especially when it comes to recording a dialog between film characters or an interview between protagonist and film director. The intimacy that occurs when being isolated in a moving car provides a suitable environment for actors or real life characters to be engaged in a natural and fo-

cused conversation. Because it is what we do while driving – we talk to our fellow passengers; it is an essential part of “car culture”. Filming in a moving vehicle allows also the showing of the geographical dimension of the action and to introduce the physical environment – land or cityscape that is passing by outside the windshield or the side window – as a separate character whom the actor or protagonist is reacting to while driving.

No wonder that episodes shot in a car can be found in almost every film, which tries to portray modern society. A car has become so deeply embedded in today’s world that it is almost impossible to represent any cultural reality without it. Even the most remote corners of the human habitat are being overtaken by ever spreading “automobility”, a concept that British sociologists and geographers have defined as “one of the principal socio-technical institutions through which modernity is organized” (Böhm *et al.* 2006: 3).

The car and all the material, social and cultural phenomenon that are interconnected with it, plays such a dominant role in our life that it is only natural to find its strong impact in audio-visual representations of diverse human societies; be it, for example, a comic Internet clip about a Warlpiri “bush mechanic” in the Western Desert of Australia who does “magic” on a dead car battery (*Bush Magician...*) or an art-house film on love, pain, divorce, and womanhood in Iranian society told entirely through conversations between a Tehrani woman and the passengers she picks up in her car (Kiarostami 2002).

The car is not just an instrument of modern technology that shapes our economic, political and social engagement with the world. There are also emotional and sensory dimensions attached to it. Or as Mimi Sheller has stated: “Car consumption is never simply about rational economic choices, but is as much about aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving” (2004: 2). Sheller who is advocating “an emotional sociology of automobility” in order to find ways to turn today’s car culture into a transportation system which is socially and environmentally more responsible, writes that this aim could only be achieved if we take “seriously how people feel *about* and *in* cars, and how the feel *of* different car cultures elicits specific dispositions and ways of life” (Sheller 2004: 4, original emphasis).

Interest in sensory and emotional aspects of culture is increasingly central to the social sciences and humanities because it has been acknowledged that sensoriality is fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people’s lives (Pink 2009: 7). Visual anthropology embraced the senses already a long time ago, if not in theory, then in practice (MacDougall 1998; Pink 2006; Grimshaw 2001)<sup>9</sup> and the use of visual methods and media in the anthropology of the senses is now common practice. For example, Sarah Pink finds that “the use of a video camera encourages a research participant to

engage physically with their material and sensory environments to *show* the ethnographer their experiences *corporeally*.” (Pink 2009: 105, original emphasis). She also acknowledges that the video camera introduces something of the reflexivity (*ibid*: 105), referring to David MacDougall’s conception of “corporeal images”. According to MacDougall “We see with our bodies, and any image we make carries the imprint of our bodies; that is to say, of our being as well as the meanings we intend to convey [...] Corporeal images are not just images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world” (MacDougall 2005: 3).

Filming Yuri Vella in the car can be considered as a research method that helps to explore the specific environment he is acting and living in. The camera captures the way Yuri is physically engaging with the car while driving, it tells what kind of sensory “place” the car is and how he is using it. It also shows how he is experiencing and reacting to the environment that lies outside of the car. For example, some places along the road might provoke Yuri to verbalize certain memories and feelings, or show their reflection on his face. In other words, the camera provides the opportunity to understand and also to represent Yuri’s embodied experience of driving the car in a particular environment.

The video footage reveals what it physically means to drive a car on Western Siberian roads. It shows the corporeal experience of the driver. It does so through the image produced by a filmmaker who has shared the same physical and mental experience. During the recording, the experience is filtered and manipulated by the filmmaker according to what kind of sensory environment he feels to be in and how he has felt in a similar environment before. Similarly, the audience’s understanding of the protagonist’s sensory experience is achieved by mirroring its own bodily memories from the past on the shown image. In both cases, the process of understanding is less intellectual than it is emotional and corporeal. The aim is to reach the kind of anthropological knowledge “in which meaning is not merely the outcome of reflection upon experience but necessarily *includes* the experience [...] the experience is the knowledge” (MacDougall 1998: 79, original emphasis).

## **AUTOMOBILITY IN RUSSIA**

According to John Urry automobility can be conceptualized as “a self-organizing autopoietic, non-linear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs” (Urry 2004: 27).

Many of the characteristics of the Russian system of automobility have been inherited from its Soviet past; the most notorious features being bad roads and reckless driving.<sup>10</sup> In the Soviet Union, cars for decades were reserved only for the political elite, the rest of the population traveled by overcrowded public transportation. The car became an affordable consumer item for Soviet citizens from the 1970s on, when the rise in living standards, drawn especially on the huge oil and gas reserves found in Western Siberia, coincided with the emergence of mass production of automobiles.<sup>11</sup> But even then only a privileged few had the chance to buy. Like other goods in the shortage that characterized the Soviet consumer society, new cars could be obtained mainly through the exchange of favors, or through the semi-illegal economy. The best chance was to purchase a second-hand car, but its real market price was often higher than one had to pay officially for a new one. (Siegelbaum 2009; Zezina 2009; Gatejel 2009)

Getting the car was just one of the difficulties a Soviet automobilist had to go through. The lack of service stations and other infrastructural facilities, and insufficient investment in spare parts production, made it inevitable for car owners to find unofficial, often criminal, ways to take care of their cars. Siegelbaum has called it “a Faustian bargain”. He uses this term to emphasize

the inevitability of automobile owners’ reliance on heterodox and illegal practices that included hiring of labor, appropriating state property for private (again, “personal”) use and profit, and diverting time away from the performance of one’s job and other social responsibilities to the care and feeding of one’s car (Siegelbaum 2009: 24).<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1990s the Soviet system collapsed and a car market opened for the wide range of Western cars and eventually the system of modern maintenance facilities like service centers and gas stations was developed. But even today, especially outside of the main urban centers, the functioning of the Russian automobility relies heavily on the features developed during the Soviet time. The car scene in Western Siberia, for example, is still dominated by domestic cars, many of them designed or even produced in the Soviet Union. Although the Russian market is full of western cars, most of them used right-hand drive vehicles exported from Japan, people preferred, until very recently, to own Russian-made cars due to the low price, simple design and access to spare parts<sup>13</sup>. There are more properly functioning gas stations and repair workshops than during the Soviet time, but people living in the deep periphery of the country have usually neither the means nor money to use them.

In addition to the car models and infrastructure, other aspects of Soviet automobility have survived in today’s Russia as well. Answering to Siegelbaum’s

question about which practices of Soviet driving culture have been retained in post-Soviet people (Siegelbaum 2009: 29), I can state from my personal experience that, at least in Siberia: the little *GAI*<sup>14</sup> stations and the arrogant *GAI-shchniki* are still on the main roads leading out of the cities; the general disdain for wearing seat belts has not disappeared, even though the buckle-up campaigns are frequent and the fines are high; the ubiquity of bribes to settle fines has persisted despite all the traffic police reforms; people still remove windshield wipers from parked cars to prevent theft; the cross-traffic turns are made on major intersections also today; the car owners still find ways to obtain fuel illegally, though it has become much harder; even the predominance of women among gas station attendants has not changed since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

## **DRIVING A CAR IN WESTERN SIBERIA**

If there was no oil in the region, there would probably be no road infrastructure away from major historical centers. I realized how difficult it was to travel in the region prior to the oil development when we drove in Yuri's *uazik* across the bridge over the Ob River on our way to Surgut. As it often happens when traveling with Yuri, passing by a specific location loaded with his personal remembrance or with someone else's recollections, the bridge triggered the flow of a spontaneous but well composed narrative. This time it was about the death of his father.

It happened in the 1950s. His father was sent to Surgut by the administration of the *kolkhoz* in his native village Varyogan to fetch the big sum of money that was needed for running the *kolkhoz*. Back then, as there were no roads, the main mode of transportation in summer for indigenous people was a dug-out boat. Yuri's father reached Surgut only to find out that there is no money and that he had to continue to Khanty-Mansiysk, a regional administrative center a couple of hundred kilometers down the Ob River. On the way back when he was staying overnight in Surgut his dugout was stolen and he was compelled to continue on foot. He traveled from camp to a camp, crossing bigger rivers by swimming while holding onto tree trunks. He consumed alcohol in one of the camps and next morning when he woke up in the forest he realized that he had lost the money. According to Yuri his father had an attack of panic and feared that he will be shot for losing the state money, which was quite a common penalty for this kind of misbehavior in the 1950s, and although the incident was eventually covered up by the *kolkhoz* administration, he lost his mental balance and soon after committed suicide.

In the mid 1950s oil was first discovered in the basin of the middle Ob River. As a result great changes took place in the region: railroads and motor roads were constructed through the forest and swamps; the new booming oil cities appeared where before there were either small sleepy towns like Nizhnevartovsk and Surgut or reindeer herders' campsites as in the case of Kogalym and Raduzhnyi. The region has been the center of Russian oil production ever since, it is the home base for the two biggest oil companies in the country – Lukoil and TNK-BP; and legendary Samotlor oil field, the largest in Russia and the sixth largest in the world, is situated here.

Although the road system that the state and oil companies have built since then is quite extensive, the quality and the maintenance of the roads are very poor.<sup>15</sup>

The aim is to extract oil with as little expense as possible. Therefore only the main roads are paved, those, which go to oil wells and are out of sight, are nothing more than strips of sand. Driving a car or even a big truck on this kind of road is very slow and difficult. The drivers try to find firmer ground off the road in the forest. The result is that there are often as many as seven or eight parallel roads going in the same direction. There are proper bridges only on bigger rivers. Constructing roads across small rivers and creeks quite often means just putting a metal tube on the riverbed and covering it by sand.

The oil industry's desire to save money and its indifference towards nature are also visible on the roadsides: while the main highways that connect regional centers are kept quite clean by Russian standards, the auxiliary roads going to oil wells are usually very polluted. Roadside litter there consists of garbage, oil pollution, leftover materials from road construction, and quite often parts or even entire bodies of heavy machinery like trucks and bulldozers. The omnipresence of the oil industry is felt also in the form of visual pollution: besides pine forest, swamps, lakes and rivers the typical roadside landscape in the region includes sand quarries, forest clearances, oil pipes running on the ground and through the lakes along the road, pump jacks working at oil wells, burning gas flares<sup>16</sup>, etc.

The oil industry has occupied public space also by erecting imposing concrete and metal structures bearing oil companies symbols along the main roads and by having their logos written on huge oil tanks that are towering in various oil production sites. It is not that different from the American urban road-scape, which is "surrounded by a plethora of corporate logos, of McDonalds, the Ramada Inn and Mobil Gas" (Edensor 2004: 108–109).

All these features of the local road system – the quality of roads, the characteristics of roadside litter, the presence of the oil industry's infrastructure, the visibility of corporate symbols as well as particular flora and fauna – can be

perceived as being part of a specific regional motorscape. According to Tim Edensor, who has studied motorscapes on a national level, the motorscapes are primarily constituted out of those “mundane spaces which are unreexively apprehended, serialized and recurrent” (Edensor 2004: 108). Familiar features, even if they are perceived as negative, constitute a sense of being in place in most motorized landscapes of Western Siberia, since the omnipresence of the oil industry and its influence on vernacular features and everyday fixtures embedded in local contexts recur throughout the region.

The piece of land where Yuri Vella is living and herding his reindeer is approximately 20 km long and 20 km wide. He moved there after the collapse of the Soviet economic order in 1990 from Varyogan, the village where he had lived most of his life. He took advantage of the chaotic situation in the legal system and reclaimed the area that used to belong to his parental grandmother as his “tribal land”. It was also the place where his father had herded kolkhoz’s reindeer and Yuri himself had worked as a state hunter in the end of 1970s and in 1980s. Yuri bought 10 reindeers and built a couple of camps with log cabins at the seasonal herding grounds in order to lead the life of a Nenets reindeer herder. The territory was not pristine however – it had been a site of oil exploration, but was abandoned during the downgrade of the Soviet economy. Yuri inherited the land, which had old exploration wells, some pollution and a few roads.

After a short interregnum the oil industry was booming again and by now Yuri Vella’s home territory is surrounded by Lukoil’s oil wells and other oil production facilities. This, besides causing a negative impact on quality of life such as pollution, noise and threat from poachers, provides Yuri and his family with relatively easy access to the local road system. The nearest oil well is just on the other side of the wooden fence that Yuri has erected to mark his territory and to prevent his reindeer to venture into the oil workers’ “soup” (Niglas 2003). The road that is used for servicing the oil well is one of those typical cheaply built sand roads, which in spots is difficult for an *uazik* to drive on due to the deep sand and poor drainage. But there is varying regular traffic circulation on the road, which makes it necessary for Lukoil to maintain it at a certain level throughout the year. It means that Yuri and his family have the possibility to leave their forest home at almost any moment, provided that the weather conditions are not too extreme for the car.

How much Yuri Vella and other indigenous car owners depend on the oil companies’ road systems was revealed when Lukoil workers tried to dismantle a bridge connecting Yuri’s territory with the Varyogan village in the autumn of 2000. Yuri, who was taking his grandchildren in the *uazik* to the village school, drove towards the Hapleuta River and saw that a wheeled digger

was tearing down the bridge. He realised that the destruction of the bridge would cut off the road to the settlements that the indigenous people went to get medical help, buy food, visit relatives, take children to school and deal with state institutions. In order to prevent the destruction of the bridge, he cut the digger's tires with an axe. The bridge was saved for the moment. Lukoil sued Yuri Vella for damaging the company's property and won the case (Niglas 2005: 120–122). But the bridge was eventually taken down. Yuri Vella, together with other indigenous families, built a new bridge away from the main road.

The new bridge is a real testimony to creative indigenous engineering. It is a kind of suspension bridge: strong boards are resting on two iron cables that are stretched across the river. The cables were found among the junk that had been left behind in the forest by oil workers. Yuri told me that it is actually the second bridge that they built in that spot – the first one did not survive the testing and was washed away by the river. So, there was always excitement in the air when Yuri drove his *uazik* over the bridge. He always insisted that we, the passengers, cross the bridge on foot. As the bridge is a few kilometres away from the main road and only a narrow *uazik* track goes there, the non-indigenous people do not know about it. Yuri showed me once, on our way to the camp, what was left of the bridge destroyed by Lukoil. When we got to the bridge we saw a car and people sitting on the other shore of the river. Yuri explained to me that they are waiting for their colleague from Novoagansk, the small town next to Varyogan, in order to take him to work in a Lukoil oil field. But first, someone had to give this man a ride from Novoagansk to the river and then he had to climb on what was left of the bridge to the other shore. It felt like *deja vu* from the heyday of Soviet absurdity.

Lukoil did not achieve its goal to discipline “un-cooperative natives”, like Yuri Vella (Niglas 2005), but its strategy to restrict traffic near its oil-fields, which was the official explanation for disassembling the bridge, was, at least partly, successful. Because of the new bridge, local indigenous people can again use this vital road, but they cannot drive on it during winter. When the old bridge was still there, the road was kept clear of deep snow by trucks that took people and goods from the big settlements like Raduzhnyi or Novoagansk to the oil fields and beyond. Now, when there is a lot of snow and Yuri Vella wants to get to Varyogan, which is about 130 km from his camp by the old road, he has to make a huge detour and drive about 650 km using roads that are maintained all year around.

In general, Yuri Vella's forest home has a relatively good connection with the outside world via the oil companies' and state road system. But on the other hand there are psychological constraints that make the use of this infrastructure problematic. For example, Yuri Vella is reluctant to drive to the local

centers because he perceives them as hostile spaces; partly because he is not that confident about driving in a busy city, but mainly because these are the environments, which are demonstratively controlled by the political and/or oil authorities. Typically for Russian automobility, roads leading to bigger towns, for example to Surgut, Nizhnevartovsk or Kogalym, have little *GAI* stations on major intersections and at entrances to the cities. These traffic police stations are manned with *GAI-shchniki* whose main purpose is to stop cars for inspection of driving licenses and other documents, which is usually carried out with a suspicious look in their eyes and by asking questions about the purpose of the trip. In the oil rich region of Western Siberia, there are also checkpoints on smaller roads operated by the oil companies' security forces. For a native person it is a dubious situation to go through the inspection points: on the one hand the natives are usually looked down on by those who have power in Siberia, especially by a low-ranking policeman or a security guard; on the other hand, the issue of indigenous rights and the land has made local authorities and oil companies very careful in their relationship with natives living in the forest. As Yuri Vella has been in a conflict with both local powers for years, he is always afraid of being harassed when driving through the inspection points. And, before driving through a checkpoint, he always puts on a cotton *malitsa* – a traditional summer cloth for native men, to emphasize his status as an indigenous reindeer herder.

## **MAINTAINING UAZIK IN THE FOREST**

Most of the Westerners are increasingly seeing cars as “sealed objects where users are discouraged, even penalised, for interfering with them [...] by the complexity of the objects, the cost of specialist tools, and the risk of having a warranty voided” (Clarsen 2002). But people living in the remote areas of Russia, for example in Western Siberia, still prefer to repair their cars themselves, often sidestepping the cash economy and using the methods of “bush mechanics”<sup>17</sup> to get their vehicles fixed.

Yuri Vella rarely takes his *uazik* to an authorized mechanic. This means driving to some bigger town and spending a considerable sum of money. He tries to stock up on the necessary spare parts whenever he happens to be in a local city in order to avoid extra trips for maintaining his car.

Very often he repairs the car himself. He has constructed a simple car lift made out of scrap metal plates found in the forest to allow better access to the car from underneath in his summer camp. But whenever possible he prefers to delegate more serious or time consuming repairs to a relative or a friend. In

more difficult cases Yuri asks his son-in-law, who has the necessary tools, skills and expertise, to fix the car.

Kolchu and Anton, the two teenage grandsons living with Yuri Vella in the forest since they were small, are helping to take care of the car too. Their duty is to prepare the car for driving, and if necessary change a flat tire, refill the fuel tank, or change light bulbs.

The closest place to get professional help is a truck depot of the local Lukoil unit, about one hour drive from the forest camps. Yuri Vella goes there when he needs to do something on the car that requires using special equipment, welding or fixing a broken car battery, for example. I have been to the truck depot with Yuri once, in summer 2009. It was fascinating to see him negotiating with the head of the depot to get his things done. They engaged in a kind of humorous conversation, which mainly consisted of jokes at the each other's expense that sometimes bordered on verbal abuse. As the men represent two different, even opposite, value systems, they have to communicate in a situation in which conflict and rivalry is very likely but must be avoided, much like in a classical joking relationship<sup>18</sup>. It is possible that their conversation had this character partly because I was there with a camera. But even if they did "perform for the audience", they did so by applying their standard modes of behavior in a given situation; the camera's presence just brought it out more clearly.<sup>19</sup> The men parted without giving each other any clear promises, but their partnership was once again reinforced: Yuri had shown his need for help in a specific case, while the head of the depot emphasized the more informal nature of their relationship by sending a jar of melted fat to Yuri's wife as a present.

On our way back home I asked Yuri, on camera, how he feels about using the oil workers help. He said that he and the local oil workers try to co-exist without disturbing each other too much. But sometimes they ask favours from each other. Yuri explained that the Nenets term for this kind of partner is the word *t'iLu*, which means a person who takes care of you, who sees that you have everything you need.<sup>20</sup> Yuri's *t'iLu* is the head of the truck deposit. If it was not him, someone else would have to fulfil this function. Explaining the system of their partnership he gave me an example. I transcribed it fully from the video footage in order to demonstrate his way of reasoning, which combines the phenomenon of a *t'iLu* with his personal life, the wrongdoings of Lukoil and state law into a well-structured narrative. Unfortunately I cannot convey in this text his voice and facial expressions while he was telling me, neither can I make you feel with your body the bad quality of the road we were driving on, nor show the sandy wasteland and rusty oil pipes that were passing by our side window. Yuri said:

Sometimes I get from him fuel, diesel for the electric generator, a little gasoline for the car, sometimes kerosene for a lamp, small things like that. Is he buying it for me? No, he takes it from his company, he steals it like we say in Russian; if to put it bluntly – he steals it from his company for me, gives it to me. That’s why he is needed, in principle. Because, firstly, the closest gas station is far away. Secondly, we do not always have money to refill the car. Thirdly, I understand well that Lukoil occupied our lands: if Lukoil had not come here, we would maybe have been able to sustain ourselves here. If Lukoil was not here (showing out the front of the car with his hand), I would not graze my reindeer somewhere there (showing to the right), but somewhere here (showing to the left), closer to Varyogan. I would have more land to herd the reindeers, I would have maybe a bigger herd, by two-three times... For example, I am still not selling reindeer. The herd is still small. But if the oil field was not here, I would maybe already be selling reindeer meat. But Lukoil, so to speak, is slowing me down, is slowing down our efforts to live better. It means... it is completely logical, that Lukoil should compensate these losses, and in the law it is written that Lukoil should compensate. We concluded a contract. When Lukoil needed my signature, Lukoil concluded a contract with our family, promised us this and that, including fuel for our family. One year passed. When I started to tell Lukoil that here you are spilling (oil); here you are not doing the right thing; here you have no need to drive, but you drive... Lukoil got tired of hearing it and Lukoil decided to teach me, decided to teach our family a lesson – and stopped paying according to the economic agreement. I know perfectly that I am right, Lukoil had to pay it. Further, the economic contract terminates in the case we both – we both concluded it, right... According to the civil law, either we both agreed to determine it or the court... when one side wants to determine it but the other does not, then this one side has to go to court and the court has to determine the contract. There was not that kind of determination by the court, it means that Lukoil up to now owes my family fuel and money and etc. Therefore, I think that the fact that the representative of Lukoil steals for me fuel, means that I take what belongs to me, I take what Lukoil owes me.

Yuri told that as a return favour for getting his car repaired or acquiring some fuel, he provides his partner now and then with reindeer meat and sometimes lets him drive onto his tribal land to catch fish or hunt grouse. It seems that the automobile owners’ reliance on heterodox and illegal practice is still going strong in today’s Russia. Hopefully Yuri Vella and other indigenous car automobilists do not have to pay too high price for their own “Faustian bargain”.

## **UAZIK AND REINDEER**

In Western Siberia the most important traditional mode of transportation has been reindeer. While some indigenous peoples in Siberia ride their reindeer (Evenki, Evens, Dolgans), the Nenets and the Khantys use reindeers as draft animals to pull wooden sledges (in Russian: *narta*). In the arctic zone of Western Siberia, where the poor nutritional quality of tundra vegetation compels people to graze their herds on a vast territory, the reindeer is used for transportation throughout the year (Niglas 1997). In the forest zone, reindeer herding is local, and reindeer-driven sledges have been used only in winter, along with skis. In summer, the main means of transportation has traditionally been a dugout canoe.

Today, traditional modes of transportation have been replaced by modern technology in many places. There are great regional differences in using cars, snowmobiles and motorboats in Western Siberia. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the area of the Middle Ob River where Yuri Vella lives has relatively good infrastructure for fuel driven transport due to the long presence of the oil industry: the road system is quite extensive; spare parts and service centers are accessible in bigger towns and oil production sites; and there exists both legal and “un-official” ways of obtaining fuel.

This is in contrast, for example, with another region where the Forest Nenets live as a distinct and compact group – the Num-To area, which is much less developed. The village of Num-To has been described as one of the poorest places in Siberia (Salminen 1997: 95–96). There is no permanent road that connects it with other settlements and it can be reached only by helicopter, that flies once a week from the city of Beloyarsk. But the oil and gas producers are already working in the area and probably the use of reindeer for transport will decrease soon due to better infrastructure and the loss of herding land. When I was visiting Num-To in winter 2004 many indigenous people were driving reindeer sledge, and those who had snow mobiles had to make a big effort to find fuel, at times travelling long distances to obtain oil and gasoline from an oil production site.

Yuri Vella has always wanted to live with reindeer. Since he grew up in a village, his contact with reindeer in childhood was limited. He recalls how he envied his schoolmates who were brought on reindeer sledges to the village’s boarding school from their forest homes (Niglas 2003) or when during the school holidays their fathers came to pick them up from school with an extra reindeer sledge for the children to drive home. He also remembers vividly those moments when he could accompany his relative Aatan on a reindeer sledge to take hay for kolkhoz’ cows and horses, and that on the way back Aatan allowed him to hold the reins (Vella 2008: 137–138).

Yuri has never really used reindeer for transport. Before he began breeding reindeer, he became accustomed to the snowmobile while working as a professional hunter. Although Yuri is very keen on making sledges and other necessary items for driving reindeer, he harnesses reindeers in front of a sledge very seldom, usually to entertain himself or his grandchildren. As he explained in summer 2009 while making a driving pole<sup>21</sup> with an axe:

Last year I drove reindeer 3–4 times. But you see – if you need to go to get fish (from a fish trap), you first have to round the reindeer up; then catch it, then harness it to the sledge; and then drive ... on the speed of an animal; but an animal can go about 20 km/h. It is slow. But here... you drink the tea, go out of the house, do one move (making a gesture as pulling the starter rope to start the engine), the snowmobile starts and off you drive. And you drive 40 km/h, 50 km/h – it is two times faster. You check the fish trap and return quickly home. And you can drive far in one day. This is the advantage of *buran* over reindeer. On the other hand it is more interesting to drive reindeer: if there is nothing to do, one can drive reindeer; reindeers go slowly, during that you can contemplate, think and philosophize.

Before Yuri had a car, he used the snowmobile for long distance travel, for example to get from his forest camp to the village of Varyogan in winter. It took about 7–8 hours to cover a distance of 100 km. Sometimes he drove his snow mobile to a “friendly” oil production site and hitched a ride from there. Driving long distances on a snowmobile, especially on a Soviet designed *buran*, is physically very demanding. Not only is it difficult because of the weather conditions (cold, wind, snow), it is also very hard on a driver’s arms, legs and back. It is no wonder that Yuri tries to drive his *uazik* all year round. Sometimes it can be difficult, too. For example when it is below 40° C outside and the oil in the transmission joints of the car has congealed, and Yuri has to spend hours heating up the gearbox with a kerosene blowlamp; or in the case when he has to avoid bigger snowdrifts on the open road by navigating his way through the forest. Driving on bad roads with a Soviet designed and Russian built car that can break down any moment, turns any long trip into an adventure. It is not wise to travel alone, and usually it is Yuri’s wife Lena who accompanies him on car trips with prepared food and thermoses filled with hot tea.

In the above-mentioned statement Yuri links the activity of driving reindeer with certain mental processes, like thinking, contemplating and philosophizing. In this regard, the driving of a reindeer sledge seems to be very similar to driving a car. Both activities facilitate a certain state of mind that is suitable for contemplating. One form of it is singing. Yuri sings very often

when he is driving his *uazik*. Yuri has said that: “singing while driving, either loud or in thought, helps – the hands are on the steering wheel but brains are singing”.

The songs he sings are as diverse as his life experiences. It can be a popular Russian song he learned while doing his military service in the Soviet army or the song he heard from a Nenets shaman. Watching Yuri singing in the car brought back memories from my fieldwork among the Nenets reindeer herders of the Yamal tundra. Driving on a reindeer sledge when migrating to a new camp or visiting relatives seemed to provide the Nenets with the necessary environment for singing – unlike a crowded campsite or a tent shared by many people, driving alone or with small children on a sledge creates the private space that facilitates the singing of one’s own or someone else’s personal song.

There are other points of similarity that can be drawn between a car and a traditional way of life. On our way back to the camp after driving to Kogalym or to the local Lukoil truck dept, Yuri often remarked that a Nenets does not like to return home by the same way he left – it is more interesting to choose a different route for going back. Typically for him, he was referring to a traditional folk concept in order to explain and justify his engagement in the modern world. It was almost like he was stressing that after a short detour in the reign of money and oil we return to the land of tradition and reindeer, “forgetting” that he is not holding reindeer reins but the steering wheel of his car in his hands.

The connection between driving a car and driving a reindeer in Yuri’s thinking is very clear when he talks about *hahu*. According to Yuri, the *hahu* is the skill of finding one’s way through the forest. It is seeing one’s surroundings from different angles, simultaneously rather than as a flat, two-dimensional picture. Only the Nenets have *hahu*: when a Nenets drives on a *narta*, he always finds his way between the trees, he never takes out his axe to clear the way or to cut down a tree; but a Khanty has to work hard with an axe in order to drive his *narta* through the forest. That is what the Khantys are saying about the Nenets and the Nenets about Khnatys, because the two people have lived together for a long time and they know each other well, says Yuri. Yuri was telling me all this while slaloming the *uazik* between the trees in order to bypass a spot of deep sand on the road.

When I commented that it seems that a Nenets drives a car like he drives a *narta*, Yuri smiled in agreement and went on by saying that the way a Nenets is driving his *narta* is determined by the reindeer, because his conscious is subordinated to the life of a reindeer. Yuri added that he will show me later a reindeer bull, whose antlers are as wide as a *uazik*, and despite that it always

finds its way through the forest. He laughed and concluded the topic by stating that it is because: “a Nenets is like a reindeer, or maybe reindeer is like a Nenets”.

### **HERDING REINDEER WITH UAZIK**

When Yuri Vella moved to live in the forest, he had to learn how to look after his reindeers. Even now, after 20 years of experience, he often repeats that he is still just “a young reindeer herder” with moderate skills. He doesn’t say it because he is modest or because he does not want to compare himself to those who have lived with reindeer for all of their life. He really thinks that way. This is evident from the way he acts whenever he is dealing with his reindeer, for example, when he has to take the herd to a new pasture or catch a reindeer in a corral: he becomes very cautious, even nervous, and is usually not pleased when I try to film him. It seems that he is not completely sure that he is taking care of his herd in the right way, that the more experienced herder may do it differently. It could also be partly the reason why Yuri Vella is always so anxious to know where exactly his reindeers are located and how they are doing.

Yuri Vella has about 100 reindeer, which is not that small a number in comparison to some other families in the neighborhood. The Forest Nenets and the Khantys who live in the region have traditionally had small herds; the reindeer were mainly used as draft animals while most of their livelihood came from hunting and fishing (Verbov 1936). Unlike in the open tundra of Yamal Peninsula, where herders monitor big herds (up to a few thousand heads) constantly working in 24 hours shifts (Niglas 1997), the reindeers in the area of Middle Ob River are grazing unguarded in the forest. In order to prevent the animals from becoming wild, it is necessary that the herder has regular contact with his herd.

Yuri Vella likes to visit his herd as often as possible. He knows that if the reindeers are left alone for too long, they will be afraid of people and it would be very difficult to control them.<sup>22</sup> Another reason why he makes an effort to go to see his herd is to make sure that all the animals are there and, if necessary, direct them to another pasture. As various oil producing sites are surrounding Yuri Vella’s territory, it is important to prevent the reindeers from venturing to an oil-well or to a main road, where they would be an easy target for oil-peoples’ dogs and guns. Yuri has lost quite a few reindeers for unknown reasons and he is seriously concerned about poachers on his land.

In winter, he goes almost every morning to the forest to find the herd and to bring it back to his winter camp for the day. For that he has to predict the

location of the animals by considering their natural instincts and feeding habits as well as the characteristics of the environment and the weather conditions. If he does it accurately and the herd is not too far from the camp, then it can take less than an hour; but if he has his calculations wrong he might spend hours searching for reindeer tracks. Once the animals are in the camp, Yuri and his wife feed them dried bread or fish soup while talking fondly to them in the corral. Yuri lets the reindeers free at dusk. He tries to direct the herd towards the desired pasture by opening one of the many gates of the corral.

The calving period in spring can be also very intensive for a herder: it is wise to monitor newborn calves in order to minimize lost lives in the cases when a calf cannot keep up with its mother or when the weather gets too cold.

Looking after ones herd is easier in summer, because the reindeer is herded “by smoke”: animals come to the people by themselves in order to get protection from mosquitoes, horseflies and gnats in a so-called reindeer house (in Russian: *olennyi dom*). It is a big log structure with a roof and a fireplace in the middle. Burning either fresh moss on an open fire or firewood in a closed container produces the smoke, which keeps the insects away from the herd.

And even in autumn when reindeer are occupied with reproducing, it is wise to keep an eye on the herd. It is very important that as many cows as possible have the opportunity to get a bull. The herder has to ensure that each group of cows have a bull among them, and that nobody disturbs the animals during the rut, because the cows are accepting bulls for a very short time (some only during 3 hours during the entire rut) and there will not be another opportunity.

Regardless of the season, Yuri Vella tries to visit his reindeers as often as possible even if they are far away from the camp. In winter, depending on the weather and the snow conditions he either walks, skies or drives a snowmobile, often combining all three, in order to find his herd. He continues to use the snowmobile until there is almost no snow, trying to drive mainly on frozen lakes and wet moss. From late spring till winter he has to walk a lot, sometimes combining it with rowing the dugout canoe, if he wants to see how his animals are doing in the forest. But whenever possible, he prefers to drive his *uazik*.

Yuri Vella is not a young man anymore<sup>23</sup> and over the years he has had his share of travelling on foot through the swamps and pine groves in his tribal land, first as a hunter working for a kolkhoz and later as a private reindeer herder. It is not just the walking he is tired of, it is also the carrying of a gun, axe, a teapot, some food and other necessary items needed when hiking in the forest. Driving a car makes travelling much easier and faster. An *Uazik* might not be a comfortable car by western standards, but it is a very convenient one

when it comes to camping in the forest, carrying a dugout canoe, or taking a couple of reindeers from one place to another. As I will demonstrate below, the car is also suitable for tracking reindeers.

When I was visiting Yuri in summer 2009, I often accompanied him when he went to look for reindeers that had not been to the reindeer house for some days. Yuri went to fix the fire in the reindeer house a few times a day and often took with him some dried bread for the reindeers that were resting in the smoke. Therefore, he knew well which ones were missing and for how long. If some reindeer had been away from the camp for too long, Yuri got worried and went to search for them. Usually we went by car. We never knew how far we would have to go and, as it is very hard to see animal tracks on vegetation, it was better to stay on the sandy road where the reindeer tracks are clearly visible. Yuri also told me that reindeer actually prefer to walk along the roads. Sooner or later we saw tracks and Yuri examined them in order to determine which direction the animals went. Quite often he did not even get out of the car, he just drove slowly, backing up his *uazik* whenever he needed to have a closer look at the tracks. When we found the missing reindeers resting on the road or eating lichen not far from it, Yuri put his head out of the side window of the car and told them to go home. Sometimes we drove like this – reindeers slowly running in front of the car, with Yuri, his head out of the window, yelling at them to move on – for a few kilometers in order to make them return to the rest of the herd.

## **NOMADISING WITH *UAZIK***

In the forest area of Western Siberia, the reindeer pastoralism is traditionally practiced in the form of semi-nomadism. Tim Ingold has referred to this type of migration pattern as fixed-point nomadism – the movements of people are tied to the center with regular use of peripheral locations (Ingold 1987: 187). The herd is moving between seasonal pastures that are not very far from each other. People try to be close to their animals and move between different camps according to the season. The distance between the camps is in general quite small, from five to twenty kilometers. There is usually one main and two or three peripheral camps. Winter camp is usually the main one and consists of a few log buildings – one or two cabins for living, some storage huts and a sauna. A summer campsite has in general fewer buildings than the winter one, but as people live there for a few months in a row, it has to offer them enough space and comfort. In spring and in autumn, people camp near the seasonal pasture only for short periods and then they stay mainly in small huts or in tents. If

necessary, for example, when a seasonal pasture is overgrazed or there is not enough firewood in the vicinity any more, a camp can be moved to a new location, either by constructing new houses or bringing dismantled buildings from the old campsite.

Yuri Vella has built many camps over the years. His winter camp lies in the thick pine forest, which shields it from cold wind. The summer camp is situated on a windy area between lakes in order to keep mosquitoes and horseflies away from reindeer and people. He also uses a temporary camp to be close to the herd during the calving period in spring. Before it was always a *chum*, a conic tent that the Nenets and Khantys have traditionally used as a dwelling place. Recently it has been “the house with stripes” – the bizarre, UFO-looking building that stands high up on “skis” and is painted in camouflage (hence, the stripes). In principle, a tank-like “all terrain vehicle” (in Russian: *vezdehod*) could pull it to a needed spot.<sup>24</sup>

Traditionally people moved from one camp to another by reindeer. Castorated bulls, in poorer families also cows, were used as draft animals to take sledges loaded with people and household items to the next seasonal camp. When Yuri Vella and his family are changing camp, they usually drive a car. There is a good, for the most part, wide and straight road between his summer and winter camp: a state company that explored for oil during the Soviet time had to construct the road in order to bring in an oil derrick. Although the physical act of travelling to the new camp has become much faster and easier because of the car, the psychological and emotional side of moving camp has not lost its importance. In May 2001, I filmed how Yuri and his family moved from the winter camp to the summer camp. Yuri’s eldest daughter with her husband and three children were also living in the forest then; they lived in a separate house and used another *uazik* for travelling to the new camp. There is a sequence in *Yuri Vella’s World* that shows both families packing their stuff on *uaziks*, driving to the summer camp and unpacking there. In the film the edited sequence lasts about four minutes. Viewing the unedited footage with the original time displayed, I realized that it took more than 4 hours to load the cars and only less than twenty minutes to drive it to the next camp. Besides time, both the film and the footage reveal the overall atmosphere of the event: the cheerfulness of the children that are trying to help the adults to load the cars and play at the same time; the stressed adults, telling the children not to be in the way; the restless dog barking in over-excitement; the suspicious cat sneaking around the car. The excitement is in the air and nobody is indifferent. Yuri sums it up by saying to the camera: “So, how is your mood? The Nenets say that travelling to the new place, to the new camp, is always a party?” Almost ten years later, in 2009, while loading the *uazik* for a

trip to the autumn camp, Yuri repeats the same thing, this time adding that his grandmother wore three or four layers of festive dresses on top of each other for this important event. This statement is contradicted a few shots earlier in the same sequence, when Yuri's wife comes out of the house to get ready for autumn camp and mumbles to herself: "I am fed up with this constant moving." This certainly demonstrates that while Yuri likes to link his deeds with the traditional worldview, his wife acts more in the real moment. But it also emphasizes the fact that the reasons for moving camps have changed since the times of Yuri's grandmother. Constructing and visiting different seasonal camps is not anymore just a way to be close to ones' reindeer. It has become a necessary strategy to manifest the herder's rights to certain pieces of land. The visible presence of indigenous people, achieved by building a hunting cabin or being there in person, reminds the outsiders that they are trespassers on someone's property, that the area is not a "white spot" on an oil company's map, that it is not a place to be exploited for corporate or personal needs.

## **ON THE LAND OF LOVE**

Yuri Vella built a new seasonal camp in the autumn of 2009. He had planned it for quite some time. A part of his herd had been going to the area next to the Vatyogan River for the last three years. Reindeers like to come there in late summer and autumn, because it has a wide pine grove with plenty of mushrooms and it is further away from the noisy oil wells. The place has become a main rutting area for one of the reindeer groups, which had separated from the main herd. Yuri explained that when the herd is getting bigger, he has to keep more bulls in the herd to make sure that all the cows have a chance to get impregnated. But the bulls compete with each other and more powerful ones share the herd between them. Usually there are two or three separate groups of reindeer during the rut.

Yuri Vella was very concerned about his reindeers in the Vatyogan area. This area is part of the territory that was assigned to Yuri as his tribal land at the meeting between the representatives of Lukoil, the administration of Surgut county and local indigenous family heads in the beginning of 1996. But the decision was never officially approved and the only document that shows his connection to the place is a paper, which states that it used to be his hunting territory when he was a state hunter. In autumn of 1996, less than a year after the meeting, the area on the Vatyogan River was given by a governor's resolution to the hunting society of Lukoil. Yuri found out about it only recently by

chance (an official showed him the document, although he did not have the right to do it). The legal status of the land is even more complicated than that: in the middle of 1996, the area was declared as a land reserve (licensed land unit of South-Vyatoisky), where hunting, berry picking and driving is prohibited. The license agreement, which bears the signature of the governor and representatives of Lukoil, also admits that Yuri Vella has a tribal territory there<sup>25</sup>. Understanding that the area he needs for reindeer herding and considers as his tribal land has been actually given to Lukoil's hunting society, compelled Yuri to take action. Firstly, he became a law student in order to clarify his legal position in the case, and secondly, he decided to build a camp on the disputed land. As Yuri phrased it: "We have to start fighting again with Lukoil; the new conflict begins. And the governor sends again someone to deal with it... (laughing)".

Yuri dismantled an old hunting cabin in the summer camp and brought it by *uazik* to the Vatyogan area. He had chosen for his autumn camp a site on a narrow pine grove between a river meadow and a swamp. It is the spot where about 80 years ago his maternal relative Yussi Kampki set his hunting traps. Yuri had dreamed to live in this place for a long time, because there is a spring with clean water next it. But the place has another strategic value as well: the road built years ago for oil exploration goes through the campsite. Yuri says that the road helps him to look after his herd – the reindeers like to walk along the road and their tracks are visible on the sand of the road, therefore it is easy to find them by car. Having a camp in the middle of the road serves one more purpose for Yuri. It makes his presence in the disputed area more visible, and it also forces people who want to hunt or fish in the area on the other side of the camp to knowingly commit an act of trespassing by opening the gates in the fence that surrounds the camp. It was a clear message for Lukoil workers: "Look, the indigenous family is living here and you have no reason to be here." For me it looked like a declaration of war. Yuri was aware of its possible consequences. About ten years ago someone burned down the cabin he was using when working as a hunter. It was located just three kilometers from the present camp. Yuri thinks that Lukoil people, who wanted to have the place for themselves in order to fish in an old riverbed that was near the cabin, burned it down. When we visited the site we found that it had become a camping place with a table and chairs and lots of empty beer cans littering the ground.

When I started to film Yuri Vella in summer 2009 I did not intend to go back there for the autumn. But towards the end of my stay Yuri insisted that I should come back and film the reindeer during the rut. He pointed out that, as he will build a new camp in the Vatyogan area, there would most likely be

encounters with oil workers and it could be good material for the film. It was clear to me, that besides thinking about the film, he was hoping to use the camera's presence in his fight with Lukoil. When I returned in autumn, I told Yuri that I can stay with him only for a couple of weeks this time. Yuri replied that he hopes we find some oil workers before I have to go back. And we did.

## **THE DAY OF ACTION**

We moved from the summer camp to the autumn camp the very next day I arrived in the forest in September. I decided to record the changing of the camp with my camera. By the end of the day I was physically and mentally exhausted, and had filmed four hours of exciting footage. What follows is a description of a long day filled with fast driving, bold bluffing and clever use of modern technology. The tactics Yuri Vella used that day to achieve his political ends are similar to those employed by indigenous groups in other parts of the world, like, for example, the Kayapo Indians' appropriation of video cameras for conflict with the Venezuelan state (Turner 1992), or the Zapatista movement's use of Internet technology to mobilize their struggle for autonomy in Mexico (Kowal 2002). Yuri Vella's "guerilla" tactics – the use of video camera and access to the Internet combined with the element of surprise and extraordinary mobility, seem to be very effective in the fight for his indigenous rights.

We noticed truck tracks already at the barrier gate built by Lukoil that was supposed to protect the Vatyogan area from the outsiders. On our way to the camp we came across a group of reindeers resting by the road and used the opportunity to feed them some dried bread. Suddenly Kolchu noticed a truck speeding in the distance. Yuri, after some hesitation, ordered us to take our seats in the *uazik* and we started to chase the truck. When we were catching up with the truck, Yuri said: "Liivo, main thing is [to film] the number plate and the face of the driver, the driver or whoever there is... I need this shot." When I asked what he needs it for, he replied that there will soon be a session of the regional Public Chamber on ecology<sup>26</sup> and he will raise the question of Lukoil vehicles violating the license agreement by which it is outlawed to hunt, fish, pick berries in the area. He also told Kolchu to get out his camera and film the truck. Finally the truck stopped and a young man wearing a black-and-red jacket with a Lukoil logo came out of the cabin. Yuri and Kolchu jumped out of the car. I hesitated to leave the *uazik*. Although my papers (visa, registration) were in order, filming on the company's premises could have caused problems both for Yuri and for me: in the Russian North, the people in general, and those with power in particular, are highly suspicious of foreigners

with cameras. But then Yuri asked me to get out and film the number plate of the truck and the driver's face. When Yuri opened the door of the truck, the driver turned his face away. The man in the Lukoil jacket kept saying. "What is going on? What is the problem?" Yuri told him in an agitated voice about the license agreement; about Kolchu's cow who disappeared here last autumn without any trace; about his hunting cabin that had been burned down. Yuri kept repeating phrases like "tribal land", "license agreement", "reindeer", "camera", "general director of Lukoil" and "governor" while the man tried to impress Yuri with his official position and influence in the company. He was obviously disturbed by two cameras filming him from a very close distance. Probably the man would have reacted to Yuri's approach and to the presence of cameras in a different manner, if he had been sober. Both his verbal expressions and body language were those typical of a drunk Russian man. He put his hand on Yuri's shoulder, trying to persuade him not to take the case to his superiors. He promised never again to come to the area and offered to help Yuri out whenever needed. But Yuri was very firm and told him that the video clip will be shown at the session of the public chamber and declared that: "It is high time to punch your general director in the nose". The Lukoil man was disappointed and his face turned serious.

When we were driving off from the truck, Yuri was very satisfied. He had once again defended his territory and had sent a message to the Lukoil people that it is not wise to mess with him. He also possessed video material he could use in his fight with the oil company and local authorities as the license to use the Vatyogan area could be taken from Lukoil if its workers violate the agreement. For me the entire incident had been very un-nerving, I was afraid that the oil workers (besides the drunk man and the driver, there were some people sitting in the wagon of the truck) might try to get hold of the video footage; and as at least some of them were drunk and probably there were also firearms in the truck, it could turn ugly very easily. I asked Yuri if he was afraid of any consequences of this incident, he answered with irritation that there won't be any, the oil workers would not do anything to us. A bit later, after some thought, he added that the most the oil workers could do is to come back with police and check our papers. And he continued with a smile "But our papers are in order, right?" But I sensed that there is more to this than that.

When we finally reached the autumn camp we unloaded the *uazik*. As so many things had happened since the morning and Yuri was obviously in a very good mood, I wanted to get on camera his reflections about the whole issue with Lukoil in general and with the Vatyogan area in particular before the excitement of the day "cools down". Yuri was in good form: he gave me a lengthy explanation why he was so diligently fighting with the oil company and how he



*The incident with Lukoil workers. Stills from author's video footage.*

would hold on to his tribal land as long as he could without signing anything for Lukoil. In response to my question about the use of a video camera in the incident, Yuri told that when he still had the old camera, he tried to record all his encounters with oil people or representatives of authorities on video. But the camera broke down some years ago. A few months before the incident, in spring 2009, Yuri Vella had been given a new camera by the Regional Multimedia Center of Clans project at the Yugra State University in Khanty-Manziysk.<sup>27</sup> Yuri was eager to use this technology for his political ends.

While my camera was still running, Yuri took out his mobile phone and called someone at the Multimedia Center. He told the person about the incident and asked whether the center would upload the video clip of the encounter on their Internet site. Although the person said that they would, Yuri remained skeptical, reminding that previously the center had censored a similar piece of information before putting it on the site. Yuri had switched the phone on loudspeaker and held it towards the camera to ensure that I could record the person's responses during the entire phone conversation. He was making it easier for me to do my job as a filmmaker, but he was also creating another document he could use if the Center forgets to keep its promises.

It was getting dark, but the day's events were not over yet. Yuri decided to follow the tracks of the Lukoil truck and see where they went. We had been driving only for some minutes when Yuri's mobile phone rang and Kolchu informed him that he had spotted a car not far from the camp. Yuri immediately turned the *uazik* around and speeded towards the camp. Driving through camp, we saw Kolchu waving his hand to the direction the car had disappeared. We followed the car tracks and soon saw a UAZ jeep in the midst of pine trees. It looked like something out of a Russian mafia movie: a black car with dark windows and extra beamers. Yuri blocked its way out of the woods with his *uazik*, got out and opened the driver's door of the jeep. He waved me to come out of the *uazik* and asked me to film the face of the driver and the number plate of the car. Like a few hours earlier, Yuri accused the men in the car of violating the license agreement and threatened to inform the general director of Lukoil. The men, who were wearing leather jackets, were apparently some kind of bosses. They remained calm and explained that they just want to fish there. They hinted that Yuri has no reason to complain, because he has probably received material help from local oil people. Yuri left them by saying that they should save their explanations for the general director of Lukoil.<sup>28</sup>

When we were driving back to the camp I brought up again the issue of the possibility of retaliation from the oil people. Yuri said: "The most they could do is to kill me. That's it, there is nothing more they can do". And then he added: "But, please, do not ask these kind of questions in front of Elena Fyodorovna

[his wife]”. After some moments of silence he continued by saying that the oil people would not dare to do anything to him, maybe only when they are drunk. He pronounced it with a serious, inwardly reflecting face while looking straight in front of him. The way he said it sounded like he was trying to persuade himself to believe in his own words.

Yuri told me later that he has caught a couple of trespassers on camera in the past, but he has never done anything with the material. One man begged Yuri on his knees not to inform his superiors and Yuri felt sorry for him; the other brought three tanks of petrol, and as Yuri had a shortage of fuel at the time, he promised not to take the matter any further. This time he seemed to be very determined to make the most out of this video footage. When we got back to the camp he asked me to edit the material into a short video clip in order to show it at the Public Chamber meeting in Khanty-Mansiysk. And when I checked the web page of the Multimedia Center in the beginning of November 2010, I found that the 8 minutes video clip on both trespassers were available for viewing there. But there was no additional information about the issue, no explanation what it was about, the video clip did not even have a title (*Yugra State University*).<sup>29</sup>

## THE FUTURE OF INDIGENOUS AUTOMOBILITY

Due to good off-road ability and easy maintenance, the *uazik* cars have proved to be very suitable for the rough road conditions of Western Siberia. It would be probably far-fetched to speak about a “*uazik* revolution” in Siberia but there is no denying that the car has considerably changed the way of life of many indigenous people in Siberia. Yuri Vella is a good, though slightly exceptional, example how a *uazik* has been adopted into an indigenous economic and socio-cultural system.

In many ways, the extensive car use by indigenous people in Western Siberia has been made possible through the oil companies’ presence in the region. The road system that links remote areas around oil wells with major highways, using oil companies facilities to get cars repaired and obtaining illegal fuel from oil workers, all this facilitates a unique way of indigenous car use in Western Siberia. Yuri Vella’s “personal automobility” may look very local, but it is a part of that “extraordinarily powerful *complex* constituted through technical and social interlinkages with other industries, car parts and accessories; petrol refining and distribution; road-building and maintenance; hotels, roadside service areas and motels; car sales and repair workshops...” (Urry 2004: 26, citing Freund 1993). This technical and social interlinking with the outside

world via car use is constantly changing and increasing. As I have demonstrated in this paper Yuri Vella has to find new ways of exploiting his *uazik* because the physical and social environment he is acting in, is in constant transformation: if an oil company destroys a bridge, he has to build a new one; if a governor gives away his land, he has to come up with a strategy to maintain his control over it. He is using modern technology to adjust to a changing environment, much like his forefathers adapted to the severe habitat of Western Siberian by sustaining themselves on fishing, hunting and reindeer breeding.

What is the future of this kind of automobility? Seeing Yuri Vella's determination to fight for his way of life, I would say, he will continue spending a big part of his time and energy behind the steering wheel, either taking care of his reindeer, moving between seasonal camps, obtaining fuel and spare parts, or chasing away trespassers from his land. But what about the next generation of indigenous automobilists? Would they do the same? Or would they use cars in a totally different way, maybe even "give in" and retreat from a traditional way of life to villages and towns? Some hints to the answers can be found, if we look at the "car culture" of Yuri's grandsons.

Yuri Vella and other native automobilists living in the forest have been using cars mainly for utilitarian tasks, like changing camp and providing access to modern facilities like shops, post office, ATMs, schools and local authorities. But there seems to be a young generation of native men engaged in traditional subsistence activities that have a different, more hedonistic attitude towards the car. These young men are part of a generation that grew up in the period of the early market economy in post-Socialist Russia. They have been called Generation P<sup>30</sup>, which stands for the generation of Pepsi Cola, as "they do not avoid the 'fruits' of the global (that is, Euro-American) mass culture and – if possible – are highly attracted to consumer culture" (Ventsel 2009: 9).

Like many of their peers in villages and cities Yuri's grandsons Kolchu and Anton, are fascinated by cars. Yuri gave them his first *uazik* to use for bringing firewood from the forest and to "make road" from the camp to the nearest oil well when there is lot of snow. The boys took it apart and rebuilt it to their own liking. They had found a set of used truck wheels in the forest, probably left or lost there by a Lukoil driver, and used them to turn the *uazik* into a "monster truck". The car is really impressive: a minivan on big wheels with extra headlights and the letter M painted on the front door (that is all they managed to write of "MONSTER 2008", before they got bored).

The boys have even constructed a kind of car repair shop in a shade next to a sauna at the summer camp. They have collected there a few piles of second

hand spare parts and potentially useful junk that they have found in the forest, and have even set up two old car chairs with a “coffee table” in-between as a rest area of the repair shop. That is the place where they spend most of their spare time when in the camp, either fixing and tuning their Monster truck or just hanging out in the “rest area”.

Once I accompanied them with my camera on their daily ride in the nearby forest and it felt like being in a Hollywood teenage movie about car-crazy American youth. The boys had installed a laptop computer along with the set of huge loudspeakers in the car. Anton kept shuffling through the loud pop music, while Kolchu was speeding down the forest road, trying to hit the deepest water and mud pounds on the way. It was kind of a surreal but at the same time revealing experience for me: there I was in the middle of a Siberian forest, with two Nenets boys who for me had always been associated with reindeer and with the sustainable life in the camp, and now realizing that they are part of the global youth culture and addicted to dominant consumer ideology – “culture of excess”. I might not have approved of this off-road frenzy in my mind, but I did understand its appeal with my body. Driving there with loud pop songs hammering in my head, brought me back to familiar corporeal sensations from a distant past when I, an adventurer in his early twenties, was in a similar situation in the Arizona desert, chasing a terrified rabbit in a friend’s truck while roaring to the music of the *Red Hot Chili Peppers*.

When we reached an abandoned oil well, Anton got out of the car and took pictures with his mobile phone while Kolchu drove the *uazik* over steep man-made sand hills. Apparently there is a network of young people who share their taste in monster trucks, and the boys send them photos of their car whenever they re-tune it or do some crazy driving with it. I learned that the site of this oil well has been their playground for many years: even when they come here by car, they like to spend some time climbing up and jumping off the rusty electric posts or throwing high voltage ceramic isolators into the oil well pipes and, by looking at the bubbles of oil in the top end of the pipe, counting the time it reaches the bottom end of the pipe which can be up to 3 km underground.

Koltchu and Anton did not enter into the world of excessive consumption when they started to do their off-road trips. It has always been there, all around in the form of the oil companies’ infrastructure and symbols, and as pollution and trash left behind in the forest by oil workers.

The question for Yuri Vella is whether his grandsons are strong enough to resist the lure of modern consumerism in the long run. Failure to do that would in a local context mean either moving to a village or a town in order to enjoy the comfort offered by “civilized life”, or sign off land for the oil compa-

nies and use their financial support for “easy living” in the forest. Yuri knows that in both cases it often means consuming a lot of alcohol.

Yuri Vella would like to see his grandsons staying in contact with the traditional way of life. But he knows from his personal experience that this is best achieved when the boys first learn more about the outside world and work on their intellect. Therefore, he has been trying hard to persuade them to continue their studies at a university level. So far, he has had very little success. As the boys have always been more interested in tuning their monster truck and playing computer games than reading books, none of them is getting ready to study in the university at the moment. Kolchu is in the army, hoping to get his driving license there. Anton decided not to continue with his studies at the forest school and is now getting his vocational education in the city of Nizhnevartovsk – at the graduation, he will get his driving license and a car mechanic’s diploma. It is definitely a wise choice in a local job market as, due to the ever-spreading oil industry, automobility is penetrating even into the remotest corners of the Western Siberian Plain. Whether Anton and Kolchu will return to use their driving and mechanic’s skills in the grandfather’s forest camp while being engaged actively in reindeer herding or will work instead, for example, at a local Lukoil truck depot, remains to be seen. But, as Yuri Vella admits, the ideal option would be if those two antagonistic worlds could exist in a friendly symbiosis. The indigenous people need and will always use infrastructure built by oil companies in order to maintain their automobility and to lead a sustainable life in the forest with their reindeer. Hopefully, one day the oil industry will learn to value the indigenous way of life, too.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Confused national and cultural identity is one of the reasons why alcoholism is wide spread among indigenous peoples of Northern Siberia, causing violent deaths and demographic problems (Pika 1993). For updated analyses on population dynamics and changes in the demographic structure of indigenous minorities in Russian North, see Petrov 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Yuri Vella got his first car in exchange for six reindeer from the authorities of Nizhnevartovsk rayon.

<sup>3</sup> UAZ stands for *Ulyanovskiy Avtomobilny Zavod* – Ulyanovsk Car Factory.

<sup>4</sup> I am not referring to those anthropological films where explicit generalizations are presented by a voice-over commentary, or by “talking heads” statements.

<sup>5</sup> In summer of 2009, I did field and film work at Yuri Vella’s place with ethnologist and translator Eva Toulouze, who is an old friend of Yuri. Her insights and help have been extremely valuable for writing this paper.

- <sup>6</sup> Yuri Vella got a mobile phone connection in 2000 when Lukoil set up a mobile infrastructure for the neighboring Povkh oil field. Florian Stammler who has written about the “mobile phone revolution” in Western Siberia points out that it happened “when in the capital of the YNAO (Yamal Nenets Autonomous Region) people just got into using pagers” and “it felt almost like from another world to sit in a Moscow apartment and talk to a reindeer herding activist in the taiga. Such an impression led me to my first thoughts about the broad impact of mobile communication in the tundra” (Stammler 2009: 61).
- <sup>7</sup> *Buran* is a reliable and unpretentious snowmobile that has been manufactured in Rybinsk factory without major changes for more than 35 years. It was created on the basis of the Bombardier Alpine Ski-Doo 640E of 1967 – this two tracks and one front-ski snowmobile was originally designed for working in the forest, pulling heavy loads (hence, the two tracks), and being easily navigable through branches on the ground (hence, the single front ski). (Stammler 2007: 54) *Buran* is still one of the most popular snowmobiles in Russia due to its high permeability and simplicity of maintenance.
- <sup>8</sup> Florian Stammler argues that, unlike in Fennoscandia, the snowmobile was not the driving force of technological change in Russian Arctic because it was collectively owned, whereas in Fennoscandia it was individually owned. The socio-economic change in Russian northern hunting and herding did not happen on the initiative of the indigenous people themselves. The centralised planners used the mechanised transport as a tool to turn the Soviet North into a giant open-air meat factory and nomads into workers of the ‘agro-industrial complex’. (Stammler 2009: 56)
- <sup>9</sup> For example, French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch made already in 1950s films, like *Les Maîtres Fous* (1953) and *Moi, Un Noir* (1959), to evoke embodied knowledge and sensory experience in his audience (MacDougall 1998; Rouch 2003).
- <sup>10</sup> Russia ranks 118th out of 133 countries (alongside with Burundi and Mozambique) in terms of the quality of its highways and it occupies the second place in the world in highway death (25.2 per 100,000 people), second only to Kazakhstan with 30.6 deaths per 100,000 residents. Many believe corruption in road building and in driving schools are to be blamed. (Globe 2010)
- <sup>11</sup> Soviet citizens could start buying cars much later than people in the West, only after their elementary consumer needs were met. Even in 1965, for instance, 11 out of every 100 families owned a fridge, 21 in every 100 a washing machine and 24 in every 100 a TV. (Siegelbaum 2009: 16)
- <sup>12</sup> Siegelbaum gives a telling example of the extent of such activity in the Soviet Union: at least 75 percent of all gasoline used by private car owners in 1982 was obtained illegally (2009: 24).
- <sup>13</sup> In 2006, for the first time in history, the number of sold foreign cars exceeded that of domestic car in Russia (Yurov 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> GAI is an acronym for *Gosudarstvennaya Avtomobilnaya Inspeksiya* – State Automobile Inspectorate.

<sup>15</sup> Due to the poor draining and permafrost it is very expensive to build and maintain roads in Western Siberia. For example, it has been estimated that when roads were built in the region in 1960s, the construction expenses were 1,6 – 1,7 times higher than in western part of the Soviet Union, and yearly cost of road maintenance averaged about 30 % of the capital investment (Mote 1983: 34).

For Yuri Vella's fictional description of difficulties in road building and on road pollution in the region, see Vella 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Russia's oil industry burns every year around 50 billion cubic meters of natural gas that rises from its oil deposits. This is roughly one third of the world's total, which equals more than five percent of global natural-gas production. (Mrasek 2007)

<sup>17</sup> The term 'bush mechanics' refers to the practice of using materials typically found in the Australian remote areas to make urgent repairs to cars and motorbikes. Bush mechanics use anything they can find, including pieces of wood, grass and rocks to fix anything from flat tires to broken axles. The term is most strongly associated with the Warlpiri aboriginal group living in Yuendumu, in the Western Desert of Australia. They have found "ways around the material deprivations that characterise much of Yuendumu life. They have devised their own ways of being men with wheels, based on an impressive disregard for the orthodoxies of individual car ownership, the economics of the car market, and the professionalisation of automobile repair" (Clarsen 2002).

<sup>18</sup> A joking relationship is an institutionalized form of interaction between certain pairs of people in some societies. It is generally found in situations in which conflict or rivalry is possible but must be avoided.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Rouch put the idea of performance at the centre of his filmmaking. He has stated that people, who are being recorded on camera, have reactions that are infinitely more sincere than those they have when they are not recorded (MacDougal 1998: 111).

<sup>20</sup> According to Yuri Vella it corresponds in Russian to the term *nuzhnyi chelovek* (necessary person) – a conception that was extensively used for operating during the shortage in the Soviet economy. The transcription of Forest Nenets words used in this paper has been made by Kaur Mägi, an Estonian linguist specialising in Samoyed studies.

<sup>21</sup> A driving pole is a 3–4 meter long pole used for driving a reindeer sledge.

<sup>22</sup> According to Yuri that is what had happened to his neighbour's herd: the neighbour had to shoot the reindeers in order to catch them for meat.

<sup>23</sup> Yuri Vella was born in 1948.

<sup>24</sup> "The house with stripes" was designed as a school project by a talented high school student from Khanty-Mansiysk as a modern, more comfortable version of the *chum* to meet the various needs of a reindeer herder.

<sup>25</sup> The area was declared a land reserve, at least partly, because in 1995 Yuri organized a rather "media-friendly" campaign to cancel the auction of the South Vyintoisky oil fields and succeeded in suspending the auctioning for ten years (Novikova 2002; Niglas 2005: 124–128).

- <sup>26</sup> The Russian Public Chamber – an advisory panel created in 2005 to serve as a liaison between Russia’s civil society and the executive power.
- <sup>27</sup> Since July 2007, the Institute of Language, History and Culture of the Peoples of Yugra of Yugorsky State University has been carrying out the Regional Multimedia Center of Clans project with financial support from the UNESCO Bureau in Moscow. The aim of the project is to create a regional multimedia centre for indigenous small people of Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Yugra, who are keeping a traditional way of life as the basis of their identity maintenance.
- Two multimedia points were deployed on the territory of the Surgut region: one for the tribal association of Yugansk Khantys and the other for Yuri Vella’s family group. In 2009, the UNESCO Bureau in Moscow additionally furnished these multimedia points with equipment for providing access to the Internet. The objective of the project is: formation of the cultural heritage archives and community mobilization program; creation of an educational site of the technical literacy for communities users; production of multimedia DVDs on traditional rituals and folklore of Khantys and Forest Nenets; creation of Internet portal on basis of web site of two communities in Russian and English, German, Hungarian, Finnish languages; etc. (*Regional...* 2007)
- <sup>28</sup> In a recent telephone conversation with Yuri I learned that his strategy of chasing and filming trespassers has been successful: he has seen only a few cars in the Vatyogan area since autumn 2009; once he caught four men there who left the area immediately after Yuri filmed them and threatened to use the recording if the trespassers did not leave within 30 minutes.
- <sup>29</sup> When I checked the link to the webpage a month later, the clip was gone and there was no mention of Yuri Vella. The Internet address consisting of his name contained information about the Scientific Educational Centre for Studying and Protecting the Languages and Cultures of the Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of North.
- <sup>30</sup> Generation P is a book by modern Russian author Viktor Pelevin (2000). The book describes the life of youth in the Russian Federation – the generation Pepsi Cola – who are trying to earn their living by unlawful means in the period of the early market economy. One of the central themes in the novel is consumerism (see also Ventsel 2009).

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# MAPPING EVENKI LAND: THE STUDY OF MOBILITY PATTERNS IN EASTERN SIBERIA

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**Abstract:** In this article the Evenki way of moving is studied with an intention to reformulate the place of movement in modern hunter-gathering cultures. Firstly, the data collected during the fieldworks among two Evenki groups will be presented in a form of special maps carrying information not only about the routes but also various activities. Both groups are cut from each other by a mountain ridge and live in slightly different ecological and social environments, which have a contribution to the difference in their movements. With the one group of horse herders living on the frontier between steppe and taiga and the other group relying on reindeer herding and living deep in taiga, the consequential differences in their mobility routes did not touch the basic patterns in the way their mobility is organized. The second part of the article is devoted to one of this shared basic pattern, the way the Evenki walk by foot. This part is devoted to a comparison between how this cultural practice is understood by Buryats, cattle breeding people, and our own interpretations based on fieldwork materials. The comparing of this two views of outsiders on the one of the most basic and routine practice will give the opportunity to study the relationship between a specific way of moving and hunting. The remained part of the article tracks the interrelations between such aspects of Evenki culture as ways of moving, the idea of self and territory organization.

**Key words:** Evenki, landscape, maps, walking

Hunter-gatherer communities are usually very mobile, the trips they conduct in a year could cover thousands of kilometers<sup>1</sup>. Modern hunter-gatherers even when sedentary manage to spend most of their time travelling, practicing hunting and foraging in the vast surroundings of their villages and camps. Evenki hunters of East Siberia present a fine example of such a mobile ethos. During our fieldworks amongst two neighbouring Evenki groups we discovered that the everyday routines at camps and villages consist of packing and preparations for various trips, in the direction of the central settlements or to the taiga, waiting for somebody and welcoming the returning people. Sometimes these trips took most of the family resources, increased petrol usage and were time consuming, bringing no obvious benefit to the families fortunes. Yet still the emotional reward of moving seemed to outweigh any material losses.

In this article we will try to delve into Evenki movements and formulate its place in modern hunter-gathering culture. In the first part of the article with the help of special maps we will show the data we collected during our fieldworks on various routes that the Evenki take through their territories. Here we will compare two families from neighbouring Evenki groups that are cut off from each other by a mountain ridge. These families live in slightly differing ecological and social environments. One family is more involved in cattle and horse breeding and lives on the frontier between steppe and taiga. The other relies on reindeer herding and lives deep in the taiga. Despite the obvious differences in their mobility routes we have discovered that there are basic common patterns in the way their mobility is organized. The second part of the article is devoted to one shared basic pattern, the way the Evenki walk on foot. In this part we compare this cultural practice with the information we get from the Buryats, cattle breeding peoples, on the way they walk. The presented differences will help return to the problem of relations between specific ways of moving and hunting. In the last part of the article we will track the interrelations between various aspects of Evenki culture such as ways of moving, the idea of self and territory organization.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The strategy for the study of mobility of hunter-gatherers depends on the analytical frame through which the notion of hunter-gatherers is interpreted. The classical approach is to see them as people that practice a special kind of hunter-gathering subsistence, and as a result their mobility is an inevitable part of it. For example, Kelly (1995) summaries the basic approaches to the mobility of hunter-gatherers looking at the residential and logistical forms of it. He assumes that the most common goal, besides changing places, is maintaining information about the current and potential state of resources. A traditional subsistence approach focuses on the natural environment and natural resources that are used by hunter-gatherers, such as springs, wild animals and plants. But Kelly also makes slight hints on the changes in these environments of modern hunter-gatherers and speaks about the shifting of the mobility modes to a form of associated foraging, when the routes taken by people depend on the centers and settlements where un-natural resources are accumulated such as petrol, alcohol, bureaucratic and education institutions.

The other strategy is to study moving not as a part of subsistence strategy, but as a form of cultural existence. Here it is possible to do so either through the study of narratives devoted to moving (Kwon 1998, Legat 2008) or the

embodied skills of walking (Tuck-Po 2008, Widlok 2008) in the tradition of “communities of practice studies” (Lave & Wenger 1991). Both approaches help to illuminate tacit processes of culture transmission and socialization.

In the frame of this research we tried to combine the strengths of both approaches and study the patterns of Evenki mobility that are embedded both in the local social and natural ecological system and the cultural system presented by the Evenki hunter-gatherer ethos. The analytical vocabulary that seemed most suitable for this purpose we took from Gregory Bateson, that developed the cybernetic approach equally effective for the study of social and natural phenomenon (Bateson 1972). The research question that we were engaged with in the frame of this study could be formulated as the following: How does the spatial mobility of modern hunter-gatherers in Siberia reflect the internal cultural processes and ethos transformations aroused by rapid changes in the outer social and natural environments. We came to the conclusion that the way the Evenki move in itself is one of the mechanisms of cultural preservation or adaptation. Routes can be changing, forms of transport can also be different, but the basic patterns of the movement organization stay the same. They are so deeply connected with internal elements of the Evenki self that as a result they facilitate the strengthening of the Evenki ethos and changes in the outer world do not lead to dramatic changes in the constitution of Evenki culture. In summary, the following parts of the article show different aspects of this self-correcting mechanism of culture adaptation (Bateson 1980).

The Evenki (35 000) are one of the few hunter-gatherer peoples living in Russia. They speak a northern Manchu-Tungus language. They live in small groups, 200–300 people scattered between the Yenisei River and the Pacific Ocean. They entered social history because the word “shaman”, now used worldwide, comes from their language. Their social organization prefers egalitarian relationships. They have elaborated a complex strategy to communicate and interact with the Russians and other surrounding societies (Russians and other Slavic peoples, furthermore Buryats and Chinese) ruled by authoritative relationships. Recently two processes could be observed among Siberian hunter-gatherers. On one hand their communities become more and more isolated, on the other hand newcomers (mostly Russians) massively migrate to their areas in search of economic profits from taiga-forest exploitation. However anthropologists have witnessed that the Evenki culture is not devastated even where the Evenki language is being lost. Evenki people maintain their customs and behavioral patterns such as routine sacrifices to the spirit of fire and successfully include new technologies into their everyday life (petrol saw, tractor, etc.).

The following study is based on the field works, totaling two years between 1995 and 2009 among different Evenki communities living in the Baikal region. In this study we compared two neighbouring regions in East Buryatia, Baunt and Kurumkan, where Evenki people live. The authors worked as anthropologists for 16 months in these regions: in Baunt two months in 2004, and ten months in 2008–2009 and in Kurumkan 4 months in 2006. Baunt Evenki are Orochens, ‘reindeer herders’, Kurumkan Evenki are Murchens, ‘horse keepers’. Reindeers and horses are used for transportation during their main activity of hunting.<sup>2</sup>

## **MAPPING EVENKI ROUTES**

Evenki wander between situations or events that provoke and intensify the circuits of companionship (Safonova & Sántha 2007) and experiences of autonomy (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003), rather than geographical points. With this in mind, describing Evenki land with an ordinary map imposed with spots and symbols on the continuous space or landscape becomes a real challenge. But if we inverse the main premise of map making in accordance with the logic of Evenki social organization we construct a depiction of Evenki land which will also grasp important traits of the Evenki mind. The task is easier than it seems, because the streams of Evenki paths covering their land are analogous to the changes (experiences of autonomy) from one companionship to another. Mapping Evenki land with an Evenki social organization could help us to find other such analogies between places and social interactions.

The presented article includes 10 maps (5 pairs), which are not cognitive maps. We drew them to summarize the results of the project. We traveled and walked together with Evenki people in their environment and observed and practiced the skills which are necessary for living in this environment. These maps are not ordinary topographic maps. Only, the first pair of maps, as the starting point in our ‘map project’, contains names and landmarks, similar to the ordinary topographic maps. In ordinary life people associate places more with the actions they do there, than with official names. At the same time, when we started drawing these maps it turned out that the whole process of map making is based on a hierarchical pattern with some information subordinated to other information. For example, the network of rivers is subordinated to the roads, and blue lines are covered with black ones. To maintain the Evenki way of perceiving the environment, we had to change the colors and break associations with the standard hierarchical organization of information, and make various maps in which different information is depicted in different

constellations – presenting the situated character of the landscape order. That proved a rather difficult task, and it will be hard for the reader to learn to use these visual materials we called horizontal maps.

We constructed maps of two neighbouring places in which Evenki live. These places are separated by a high ridge, which presently people do not cross, preferring instead to travel through the central city by bus. Evenki living in these two, separate places do not have a strong relationship with each other, although they may be distant relatives.

Two main differences predetermine the infrastructure of these places; the scale of the inhabited territory, and the landscape. The groups are roughly the same size and share much in common while living in very different environments. Knowing how these common traits evolved and why this happened will help us determine the premises of the Evenki mind constituting the same patterns, modified in accordance with the environment. In constructing these maps, we focused on the activities and life circumstances of two Evenki families living in the taiga, neither too far from the village nor from the reach of strangers.

The family of Grandfather Orochon lives in the first region (Kurumkan). It is covered with patches of steppe surrounded by taiga and crossed by numerous big and small mountain rivers, which flush their waters into the Barguzin river. Here Evenki live 15 or fewer kilometers from the village, the only gate into civilization, though the village itself is a rather undeveloped and gloomy place. Here Evenki breed cattle, horses and cows.

In the Baunt region, the family of reindeer herder Maradona (this nickname comes from his real family name – Mordonov) lives more than 100 kilometers from the village, but his summer camp is near the pathway along which all-terrain vehicles are circulating between the district center and the nephrite deposits. This area is covered with mountain taiga, strong rivers, and unstable roads.

The first two maps depicting the main roads, pathways, rivers, and summer and winter habitations, show the strange context and environment in which the Evenki live. A comparison of the two areas shows how the scale of the inhabited territory strongly effects how these objects interrelate with each other.

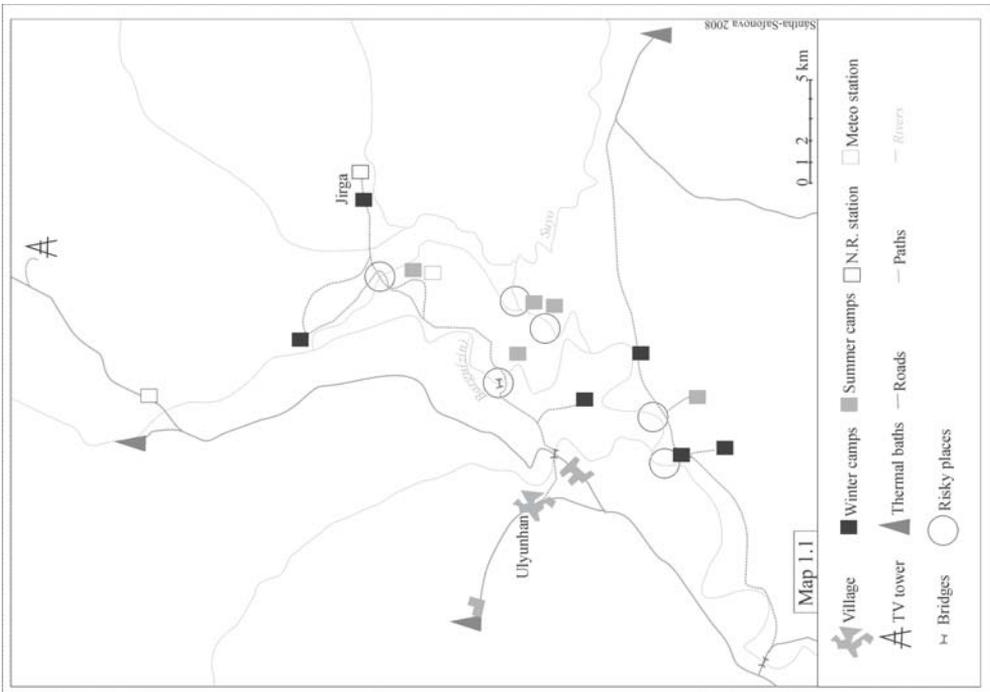
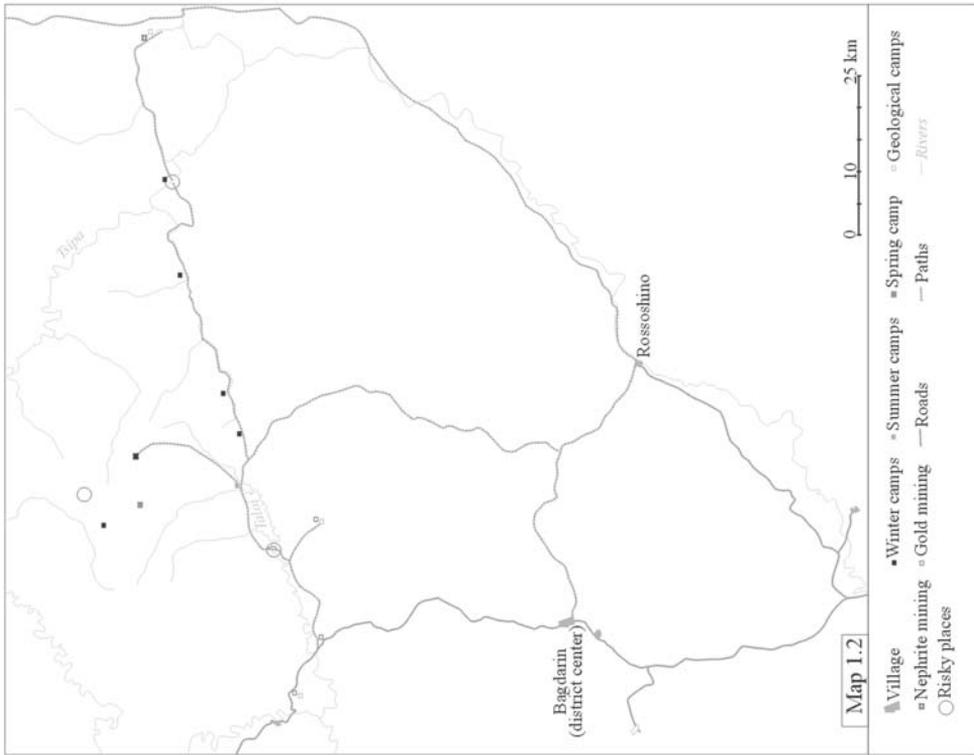
If travelling longer distances, people must be more independent and autonomous from any strange or general contexts, because they may deal with serious risks. Beginning a trip that will take several days without any communication with others is a situation in which you cannot afford to make a mistake, or have an accident which you cannot resolve without help. To minimize risks you must concentrate on travelling and avoid complex intrusions of other

contexts. This is why roads and rivers are interconnected and coordinated in Baunt, more than Kurumkan, and why lines of transport trajectories are much straighter.

Another type of infrastructure development, which can be associated with soviet era territory management, can be found in Kurumkan (see **Map 1.1**). In Kurumkan it was typical to build a network of roads not necessarily orientated to preexisting communication. New roads have been built not for people, but for cars, with price and ease of building taken into greater consideration than efficacy of logistics. As a result, the main Baikal-Amur Magistral (BAM, the alternative to the Trans-Siberian Railroad) railroad built in the Kurumkan region to bring railroad supplies to the neighbouring district is presently not very useful for local transport. Numerous small roads built to help construct the BAM remain, but do not connect important places. To get from one place to another people have to combine and make loops through existing roads. The structure of roads does not take into account the numerous rivers, making travelling in the region even more difficult. As a result, people are dependent on the roads which were built for projects that do not exist any more. This makes travelling more complicated by the strong possibility of accidents.

In Baunt, people try to determine their routes without integrating predetermined landmarks and landscapes. They do not use the few roads in this region to plot their routes through the taiga, but use the roads without a predetermined path. The infrastructure depicted on **Map 1.2** shows a system of roads and rivers connected to provide channels between the main destinations: villages, summer camps and deposits. This network of channels is constructed within the non-Evenki framework of nephrite excavation, but resembles the way Evenki used to travel. Groups of people travelling across these channels are autonomous teams who can deal with potential risks without external help.

The other important difference that exists between regions is the position of Evenki people and their attitude towards contact with strangers. In Kurumkan, because of the proximity of the village and the existence of numerous roads, the Evenki are not cut off from the outside world and may even be intent on restricting contacts. The Evenki may even exaggerate the complexity of travelling here to prevent the intrusion of strangers. In the Baunt region, however the Evenki live far from the village, and cannot go there whenever they want, but are interested in strangers travelling to them.



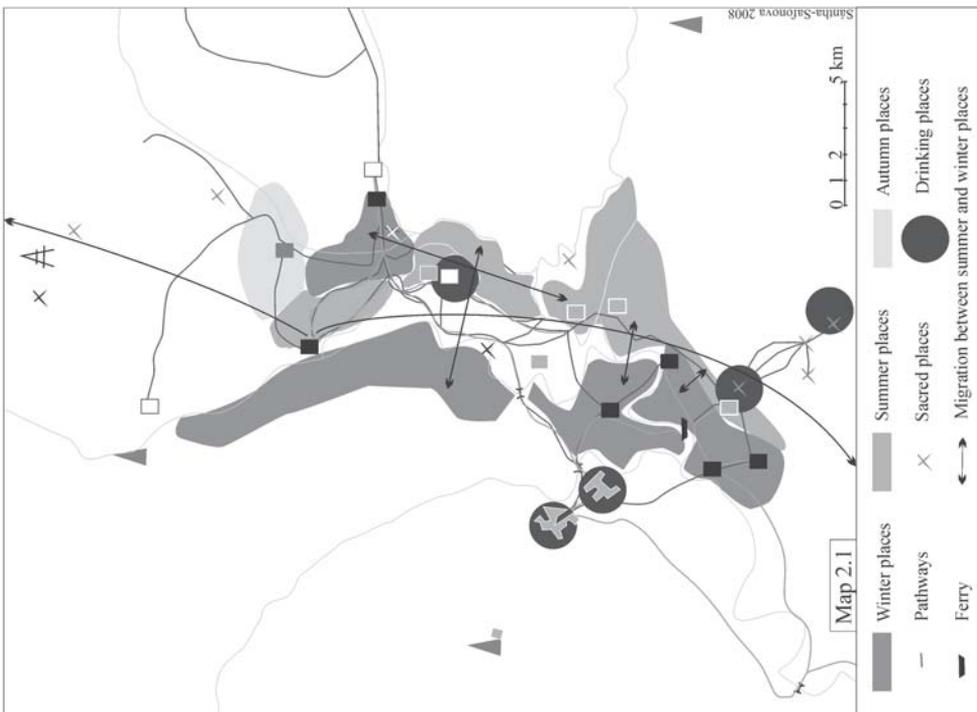
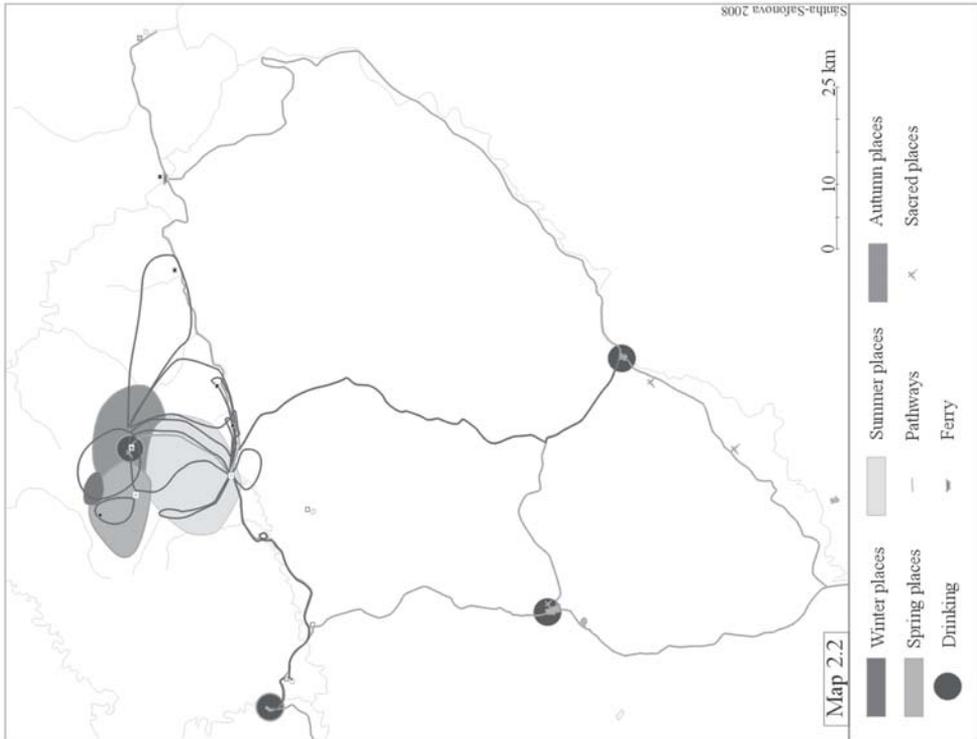
## PATHWAYS AND ROADS

The next set of maps show the various means of transport used in these areas. These maps show seasonal changes in logistics. It is difficult to guess whether people live in places because they are reachable, or if places are accessible because people live there. With the Evenki, however, it is clear they live in open (which can be reached by strangers) places in one season, but stay far from outside communication in another. Though these rhythms of communication and avoidance are common in both regions, the yearly cycles of movements in Kurumkan and Baunt are the inverse of each other.

**Map 2.1** shows destinations that can be reached by car and by foot in Kurumkan. Most places on the map are accessible by foot, but not all can be accessed by car. Places beyond the map can only be reached by car, and are dominated by strangers (Buryats or Russians who can afford cars and petrol). This divides the territory into zones controlled only by Evenki (only Evenki will try to reach these places by foot) and zones of potential contact between Evenki and strangers.

In winter, Grandfather Orochon's family stays at the winter camp, which is connected to the village by road. This road is usually unproblematic for drivers in winter due to the firm ice on the rivers crossing it. During this time, the Evenki go to the village at least once a week. In summer they migrate to the summer camp, separated from the mainland by the Sujo river, which they cross only by boat. In summer, their travels are reduced to short trips between the summer and winter camps. Stepan's family stays at the summer camp and carries out the tasks involved with cattle breeding. Elder people stay at the winter camp, which becomes a kind of summer camp for the children of relatives living in the village. As a result, winter becomes a season of intense contact and heavy drinking in contrast to the summer, which is associated with isolation and hard work.

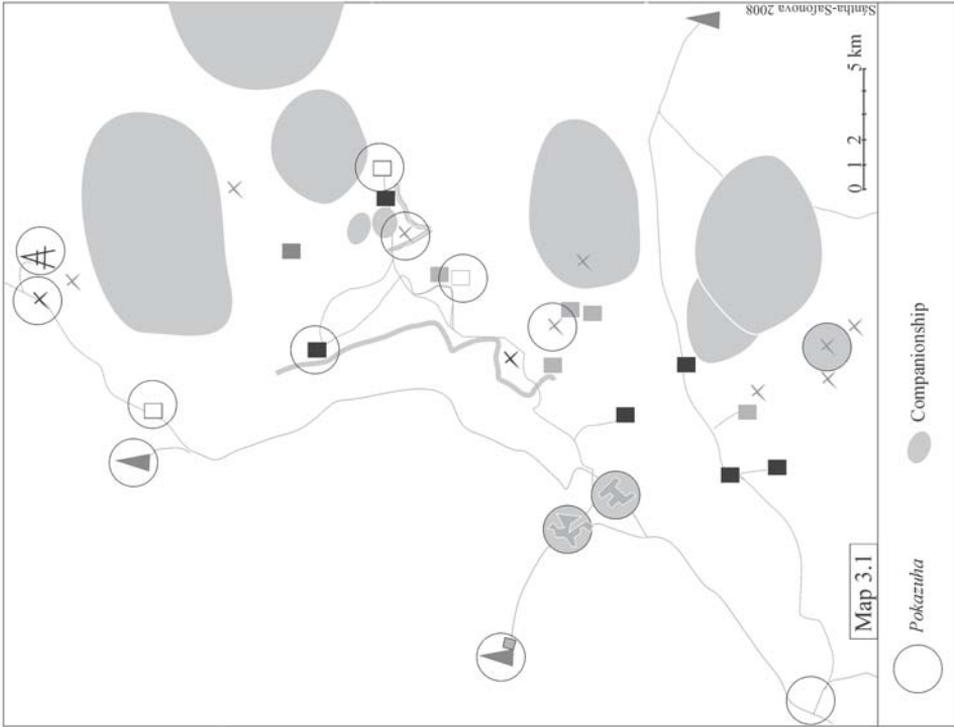
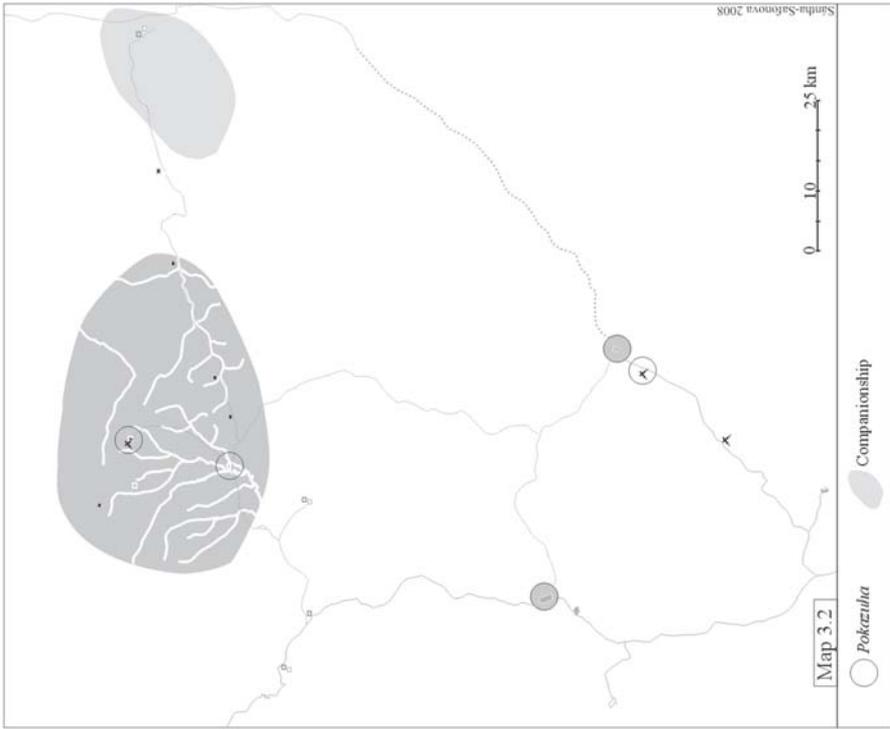
**Map 2.2** shows the relative distance from the Maradona family to settlements and villages. In summer, they live approximately in the middle of the main route between the district center and the nephrite deposit, which means they host teams (official brigades as well as poachers) travelling between the deposit and the village at least once a week. These brigades carry food and other supplies the Evenki ask for in advance, especially vodka. When in Kurumkan, Evenki themselves go to the village in winter, in Baunt, they receive guests in summer with the same frequency, approximately once a week. This open season, when they search for contact with strangers, is not predetermined by the household cycle of tasks, because reindeer need places of much



higher in altitude in summer because of the heat and insects. Evenki do not plan based on the needs of their reindeer, but on the calendar of strangers. In winter, they migrate to the winter camp, which could also be reached by car, but is ten kilometers from the road to the deposit. During this time, when there is no nephrite extraction, visitors are rare.

As we can see, in both cases, the season of communication for the Evenki is predetermined by strangers or strange obstacles, such as the timetable of workers or the state of roads. But in both regions these seasons last approximately seven months, from October until April in Kurumkan, and from April until October in Baunt. In accordance with their interaction with strangers, the Evenki can manipulate this schedule. For example, they can migrate to the summer camp later in Kurumkan to prolong the season of leisure. Or, they can migrate to the winter camp in Baunt earlier if tired from intensive interaction and frequent visits by strangers. Evenki use household needs as a scapegoat for these manipulations, but the Evenki can easily reverse their decisions and return to the camp or unexpectedly leave it. The motivation behind these changes is the wish to balance periods of solitude with periods of intense communication. These observations lead us to the conclusion that for the Evenki, household duties serve as an instrument in managing communication; their lifestyle and calendar of migration is not predetermined by the household economy or traditions (whether connected with cattle breeding or reindeer herding), but are based on their communicative strategy. Success of the household is not based on the number of reindeer or amount of stock, but its flexibility and ability to keep the fragile balance between involvement in and avoidance of communication with the outer world.

**Maps 3.1** and **3.2** show the zones in which Evenki participate in companionship and *pokazukha* (the pattern of behavior based on the expectations of strangers and not on Evenki intentions). Zones of companionship differ in shape and are much less bound to objects of infrastructure, they cover a great deal of space in both regions. Here, Evenki hunt, fish, travel and execute other tasks, regaining collaborative coordination of mutual actions without sophisticated narratives. Places covered with geometric circles are object-bound situations, during which the Evenki cannot avoid contact with strangers and behave according to their stereotypes or expectations. Places dominated by *pokazukha* interaction, without the possibility to establish companionship, are sacred places appreciated by local Buryats; cordons and houses left after the *kolkhos*, TV towers and resorts with spring water. Strangers can usually access these places, and because of this, the Evenki cannot establish their own, private interests. In Kurumkan, *pokazukha* and companionship coexist only in the main villages. These spaces provide the buffer zones between the stranger and Evenki places,

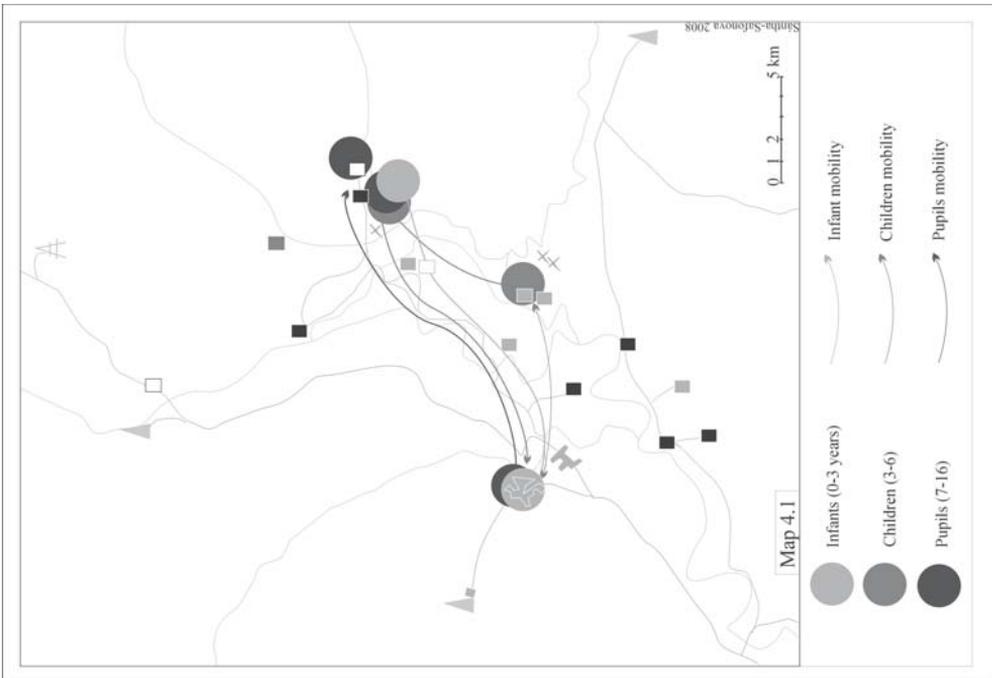
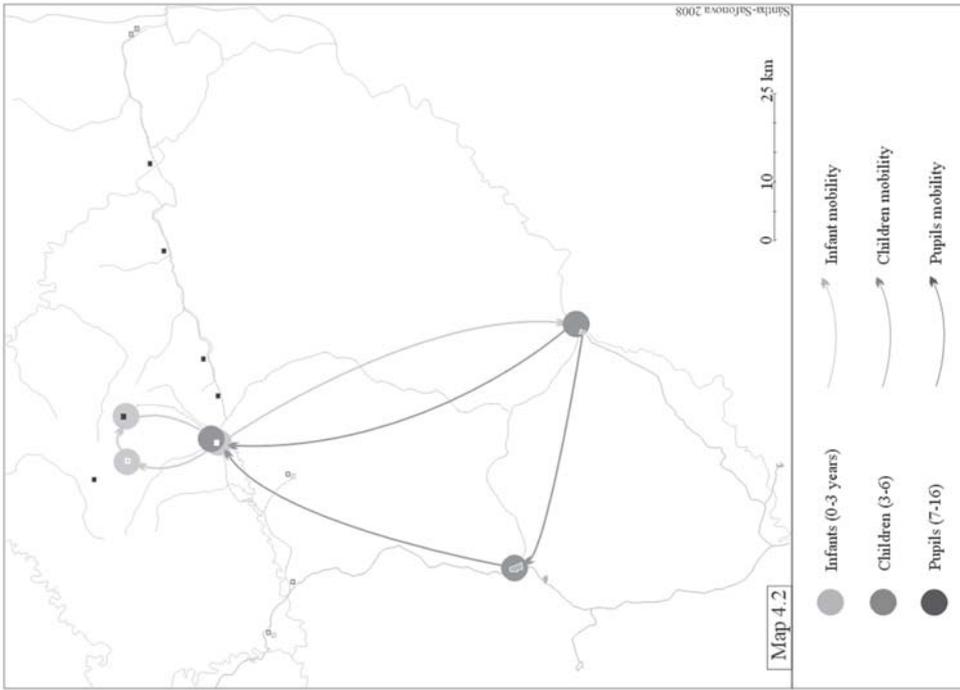


and most exchanges take place here. In Baunt, *pokazukha* exists exclusively in one place. In all other places, *pokazukha* is always counterpoised with the possibility to establish companionship. *Pokazukha*, like a point on the map, has no continuity and no relationship with the context of the outside world. The frontiers of the zone of companionship are not strictly justified, and are deeply connected with the context (landscape, routes and seasons).

## CHILDREN AND DOGS

**Maps 4.1** and **4.2** show the movements of Evenki children of different ages. Children stay with their mother or relatives in the village until the age of two or three. When the child can walk, he/she joins the parents at the winter camp in Kurumkan, and at the summer camp in Baunt. During the season of isolation he/she returns to the village. Between the ages of three and seven, the child stays with his/her parents in the taiga and migrates with them to the summer and winter camps. After the age of seven, when the child enters boarding school, his/her independent life begins. After that he/she stays independently at the boarding school, and joins his/her parents in summer, but can easily leave them to visit friends or carry on their own business. Evenki children from the village follow similar patterns, they stay with their parents until the age of seven when they enter school and migrate to the winter camps to live with their elderly relatives during summer vacation. They follow trajectories much closer to town children, who spend their summer vacations with their grandparents in the village (although they travel from the village to the winter camp, situated in the taiga). These personal circles of movements change due to much wider circles of movements made by Evenki families. All of the Evenki families we met lived for periods (from one to ten or more years) in the town, village and in the taiga (in summer and winter camps).

This constant movement from early childhood provides a crucial element in the nomadic socialization. For Evenki children living in the taiga, three distinct periods appear in their life, which can be linked with the Piagetian psychology of development stages. The first stage occurs in the village before the child can walk and participate with adults in the first and most important companionship by walking together. As soon as a child can walk with adults, he/she starts to live with his/her parents in the taiga. During this phase, he/she is cut off from the village and spends his/her time at summer or winter camps learning to participate in a wide range of companionships. The child becomes an integrative part of the conjugal unit. At the age of seven, with the first experience of *pokazukha* behavior, learned during the first days at school,



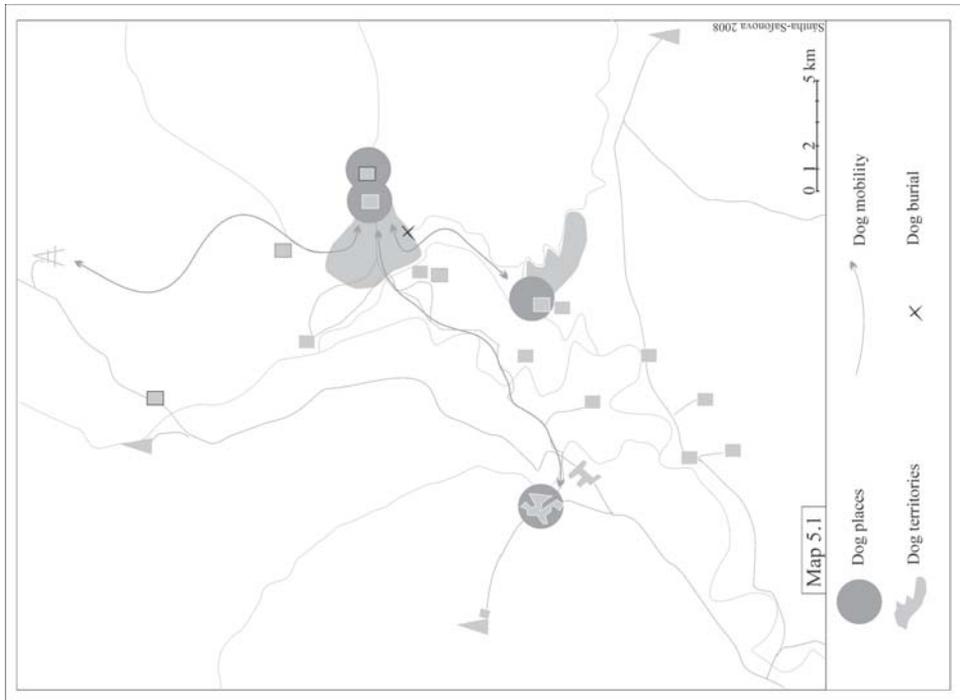
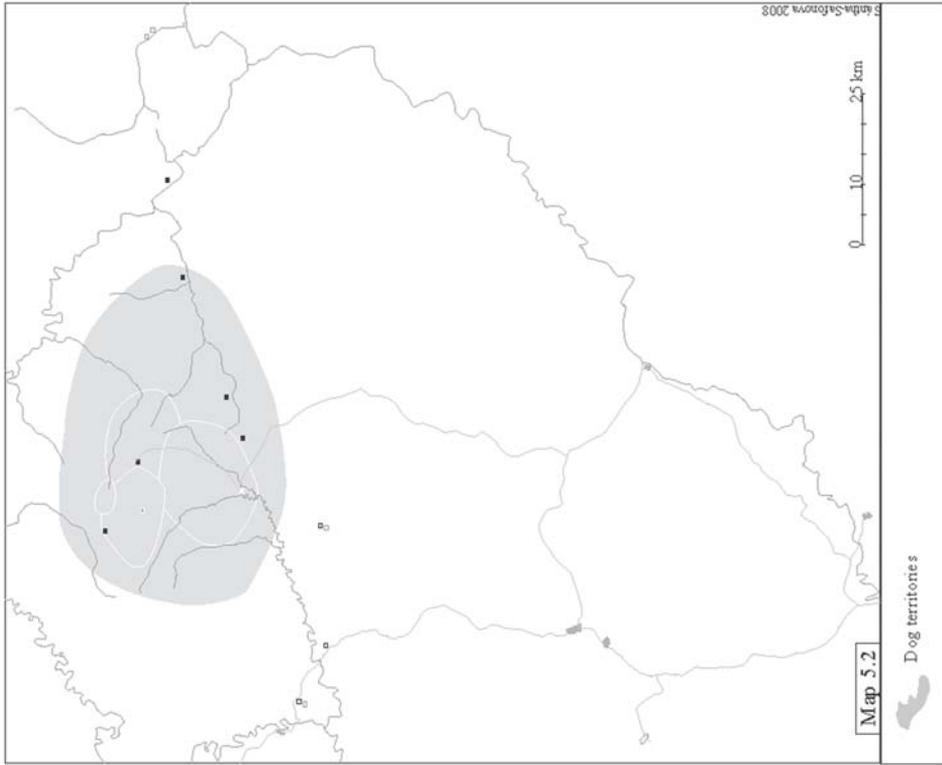
the child becomes relatively autonomous from the parents, sharing fewer and fewer companionships with them by establishing his or her own companionships with other people.

The autonomy that evolves from the age of seven comes from the ability to walk and travel alone. This experience of *manakan* ('making your own way' in the Evenki language) is crucial for the development of Evenki ethos. The territory also plays an integral part of this ethos, because the areas one can walk through alone predetermine the tension of *manakan* feeling. Evenki land in the Kurumkan district is rather small, and distances can be covered much easier, but the experience is less impressive than in Baunt, where travel from the summer camp to the village consists of several days of risky solitude. The Evenki ethos also applies to the characters of Evenki dogs, which share a great deal with their human companions.

**Maps 5.1** and **5.2** show the routes and places where we find more Evenki dogs living. In Kurumkan, the routes of Evenki dogs are identical to the routes of Evenki children age seven and older. Here, dogs freely travel from the village to the winter camp as the trip is neither difficult nor dangerous. Although some dogs prefer not to go to the village and wait for their human companions in the taiga, they still show traits of autonomy. In Baunt, Evenki dogs are much more like Evenki children of between three and seven years old, and try to stay with their human companions at all times. This could be explained by the great distance between the village and the camp, which is impossible for the dog to cover alone.

These observations highlight the difference between how Evenki from Kurumkan and Evenki from Baunt experience their initially common ethos. For the Kurumkan Evenki, they become autonomous through the land much earlier than their Baunt neighbours, but their experiences are less impressive. Their autonomy does not give them satisfaction, and they compensate the absence of danger and risk by drinking. In the Baunt region, Evenki who remain in the village the whole year are in the same position as the Kurumkan Evenki. Those who live in the taiga, however, struggle for their autonomy and experience it in more difficult circumstances, making them less dependent on alcohol, though they also can be deeply affected by it.

Comparing Baunt and Kurumkan, we see the self-corrective systems (Safonova & Sántha 2007) that evolve in these regions are wonderfully counterbalanced. Children's movements balance the movements of their parents. The autonomy of dogs is counterbalanced by the additions of people. Spots of *pokazukha* exist with zones of companionship. The intensity of contact or solitude follows similar seasonal timeframes in both regions. The difference in dis-



tances affects the ratio of interaction with strangers and isolation. The patterns that evolve are the same, though stretched due to the distances that these patterns cover.

### WALKING AS CULTURAL PRACTICE<sup>3</sup>

Walking is a relatively new and increasingly popular topic at the moment, and we may in this context recall the book *“Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot”*, edited by researchers from Aberdeen University (Ingold & Vergunst 2008). The following arguments presented here are the results of collaborative fieldwork that the authors conducted in 2006 among the Evenki people in the Baikal region. In the course of the study it turned out that we could not continue our studies avoiding the topic of walking. Walking together proved to be a format for interaction and communication between local Evenki and strangers (including anthropologists).

Walking is an activity that reveals several levels of cultural diversity, as the technique of walking, routes and rhythms of movements can be traits that are not shared by different cultures. What this means is that the mutual accomplishment of walking is a situation of cultural contact; people who walk together are communicating with each other and coordinating mutual actions and decisions. In doing so, they need to overcome differences in socialization. For example, for Bargai (Ekhirit-Buryat shaman; Safonova & Sántha 2010a), the Evenki way of walking was a mystery, because for Buryats the ability to walk is less important than the ability to stand. An Evenki child is accepted as an individual when he or she is able to walk alone, whereas for the Buryats a child becomes a human when he or she is able to stand upright. This difference in the starting point of the socialization process crucially affects the way people walk. The Buryats prefer to ride and whenever possible try to reach their destination using transport. One of our neighbours, Bair, who was a Buryat, rode a horse or bicycle when he went to the village. This was an exception in the area, where the local Evenki did not even have bicycles and preferred to travel on foot. Even if they started out by car they always managed to find reasons for conducting part of the trip on foot. In comparison to the Buryats, whose footsteps could easily be heard, the Evenki are light-footed. Bargai shared his amusement with us about how the Evenki managed to cover enormous distances without showing any signs of tiredness, and even when they had a horse they were always walking beside the animal, which was used only to carry baggage. The Buryats by contrast, tried to travel on horseback until the very last moment, and even attempted to ride in the taiga when hunting. Even their footwear was different. For the Buryats it was important to have heavy

shoes that keep the legs warm and protect them. The Evenki sometimes made their own shoes, which were relatively light and flexible and allowed direct surface contact to the ground. They even took several pairs of shoes with them, with every pair specially designed for different surfaces and soils.

The difference in walking was obvious for Bargai, but he did not manage to learn how the Evenki walked, although he had spent a lot of time with them when he was young and they taught him how to hunt during the hard times of hunger. The Evenki taught him explicitly using explanatory words and advice, which they never did with their own children, saying that if they were born Evenki they had to know everything in advance. This difference in attitude of being much more explicit and open towards a stranger, practically secured that the Evenki way of walking was not learned by Bargai, who was not in the position of an apprentice, but just an observer, who had no clues for transforming narratives into practice. Bargai could only be amazed but failed to learn the Evenki way of walking.

Neither Bargai, nor we ourselves were able to acquire this embodied knowledge. Only after we repeatedly watched the video recording that we made quite casually with Orochon walking in front of us through the taiga during one of our trips together, did we begin to notice some features of the particular Evenki way of walking. Orochon went through an animal pathway as if he was moving in a tube with thorny bushes as walls. He was carrying a stick on which he leaned. He took this stick in his right arm, but changed hands when some branches of the bush prevented him from going further. Then he took his stick in his left hand, and used his right hand to break the branches. The sound of this cracking was rather rhythmical and synchronised with his footsteps, which we could not hear as they were rather light. There were two images that we caught after watching this tape. One is that he was marking the path with these half broken branches he left behind. We supposed that these marks will be useful in winter, when the snow will cover the path, and only such marks above the snow surface will show where the narrow path is. Orochon himself told us that it is very important to clear pathways, because this is the basis for future hunting luck. He only commented that animals also preferred to use clear pathways, and if there were any such available then there would be plenty of prey. The other point was the importance of keeping balance. Orochon was moving through the taiga in the same way as if he was floating on a boat with a stick that helped not only in pushing forwards but also in keeping his balance. When Orochon was crashing through the branches he was also balancing himself, as his leap was counterbalanced by the inertia of branches. At these moments he had four points of support as if he had not two but four legs.



Orochon was moving smoothly, and this smoothness was achieved because he kept his balance all the time and coordinated his movements in such a way that all his muscles were involved. This kind of walking was reminiscent of the now popular Nordic walking technique using sticks, although in Orochon's case the walk was even more balanced and light. We should not forget that Orochon was already 70 years old, but his movements had not lost any of this lightness. He wore high rubber shoes through which he could feel the surface on which he walked. When we had to leave the forest and walk along the old BAM road, which was covered with stones lending it a pressed and rough surface, Orochon was obviously suffering and tried not to walk on the road, but at its side, closer to the bushes and grass. Feeling the pathway with his feet was very important, because this sense freed his eyes. Orochon never looked down to his feet, but at the surroundings, and mostly those in the distance. That helped him not to grow tired of the ever changing information of the moving objects close by, but to deal with the concrete objects at a distance, which did not change as quickly. That helped him never to lose the sense of destination and feeling of where he was. When we once asked him if there had ever been cases where an Evenki got lost in the taiga, Orochon only laughed. Even if

drunk, Evenki could never get lost in the taiga, unless they were suffering from mental problems caused by an injury. This ability to always find your way was not even the result of sound knowledge of the territory, but the way of walking itself. Two young Evenki were hired the summer before our arrival by a party of geologists as guides and horse keepers. These two people showed the way and helped to navigate in the taiga forest that was a considerable distance away from the place where they lived. The Russian geologists were satisfied and paid them a good sum of money for their services, they hired them because they were sure that the Evenki had known the territory from their childhood. As we found out these two boys had never been there before, and entered the territory with the geologists for the first time in their lives. But their skill in finding the way and never losing their attention and involvement with the surroundings while walking worked quite well as an alternative to elaborate knowledge of the land. The Russian geologists did not even notice this 'cheating'.

To explain why the Evenki never lose their way in the forest we must examine their social organization. To be lost means at least to miss your destination and to fail to reconstruct the coordinates. Emotionally this results in a state of fear and not knowing where you are. All these experiences become even more painful if the quality of knowing and being sure are important for you to feel comfortable and even feeling yourself as human. In an egalitarian society, along with the rather schematic existence of social distinctions and roles, which are not supported by the internalized strict rules of conduct, even such routine activities as walking are not shaped by pre-existing routes and purposes. When Evenki people walk somewhere they can easily change their destination or even have no aim at all and walk just for fun or out of curiosity to see what is there. The absence of a prescribed route in practice means that the path is made by walking, that people will walk and with every next step they will change their path according to the changing circumstances. You can never know in advance where you will go. As a result of this active involvement in the process of route making losing your way is scarcely possible, as there is no place for mistakes when preconceptions are in contrast with the reality. Evenki never lose their way because they never lose their involvement in the process of walking and they do not have a prescribed purpose. Walking for the Evenki is an activity that is very concentrated on the moment, in which there is no place for other thoughts than those that are connected with the road. Walking with Evenki is a very pleasant experience, because these are the moments when they tell stories about places and the forest, when they share everything with you and when they feel themselves fully interested in the situation.

For the Buryats the moments when they do not exactly know the geography of the place and cannot coordinate their knowledge with their practical experience are rather painful (Safonova & Sántha 2010a). The preconception of the place is usually so strong that if there is no preconceived idea about the place, Buryat people would tend to avoid going there and would express no curiosity about it at all. Evenki people learn from their earliest years not to be frightened and to be interested in and not exclude the new possibilities of hazardous situations – for the Evenki exploring new territories is a pleasant experience. The Evenki will prefer to go and have a look just for fun, even when there is absolutely no need to go anywhere. Looking for new places is a wonderful opportunity for experiencing companionship, and as a result it is a widely accepted thing to go somewhere with the intention just to look around. In company or alone, a trip to an unknown territory is also a fine experience of *manakan* (which signifies ‘independence’ and ‘solitude’ in the Evenki language), because even when together with somebody else, you perceive the place in your own unique way and take your own path.

Once we participated in a ritual, in which the Evenki visited secret places in the forest. There was no obvious organization of movement from one secret place to another. Everybody was walking separately and they finally united in one place, the way hunters meet with their dogs at some moments, only to separate again without a shout or an order being given. The Evenki made their routes ever more difficult and complex. By walking in circles and making different loops they walked with the intention of looking around, thus raising their chances to come across somebody or something. The way the Evenki navigate explicitly shows their social organization, in which individuals each float freely, but are nevertheless eager for encounters and contacts with each other, uniting for a brief moment and then splitting up again to continue their individual free movement.

The emotions experienced are determined by the absence or existence of a concrete purpose for the trip. We have not only once witnessed how excited and happy the Evenki were when they were travelling without a specific purpose and also with risks (i.e. to new places) that could challenge the initial purpose. A broken wheel immediately transforms the situation during a trip, because you have to change your aims and figure out new ones, for example you need to go to your neighbours to borrow a new wheel and nobody really knows what will emerge from the new situation. Breakdowns, river crossings, drunken encounters and other occurrences, all of these incidents liberate you from the hegemony of the initial purpose, you receive the right to spontaneously change your route and combine different tasks and possible resolutions. All these conditions fill the situation with excitement and joy. In contrast to

the predetermined purpose, for example the need to come back from the village to the camp to perform your household duties, this spoils the pleasure of the road and prevents total involvement in the travelling itself. Whenever possible the Evenki try to avoid moving under such conditions. For example, they find new reasons to stay in the village, even if they have no real place there and no money to spend. If they finally start on their way, the first coincidental encounter with someone will stop their movement and they will come back to the village accompanying the people they met. If there is no chance to escape from a trip with a predetermined aim, the Evenki look gloomy and keep silent, as if the existence of this concrete purpose prevents them from feeling free and getting pleasure from the trip.

## WALKING MIND

Following the study by James Leach about the Reite people (Leach 2003), in which he described the coherence between land, kinship and person, we can also look for the same coherence in the Evenki case. The Evenki land is perceived through the possibility of companionship, the unity in social organization of the Evenki people which takes the place of kinship for the Reite. Walking great distances and through hazardous places is a practice which unites people and constitutes situated social bonds. The Evenki are nomads and thus need the rhythm of this unity and alienation, which we previously described as moments of companionship alternating with moments of *manakan* experiences (Safonova & Sántha 2007). The land is the condition and scene of these meetings and separations and is thus part of the social organization itself. Without the Evenki land, which exists on the periphery of hierarchical societies, there is no possibility to conduct the Evenki nomadic way of life; this means that the Evenki land is part of the Evenki mind, which we can figuratively call a *walking mind*. The term mind is taken from Bateson's works and designates the pattern which connects elements and integrates the self-corrective system (Bateson 1972). The walking mind is a pattern which connects the Evenki land, Evenki companionship and Evenki people. The nomadic relational self needs space to walk through, the periodic company of others to cooperate with situationally and moments of loneliness and silence when there are no social obligations. Only the Evenki land can provide such conditions of connected isolation in which the Evenki live and which is essential to their perception of themselves.

The western distinction between mind and body is inappropriate for Evenki people, for whom motion and the ability to move from one place to another is

the main trait of a person. Madness is the state when you cannot go or cannot fully participate in walking, and as a result you can be lost. To be lost in practical terms and to be lost mentally are identical, because there is no distinction between thinking and moving. Words that represent thoughts are about experiences of movements, news from the distant place where you have been, stories about the places you are now, which are articulated as long as you experience the place through walking together. Babushka Masha, a woman who had not been able to walk for a long time was perceived as mad and not a whole person. The youngest, Tamara, who was 3 years old and was not yet able to go together with the others and walk for long distances was also perceived as not being a full person. Dogs accompanying their human partners during their trips were persons, because they shared the experience of travelling together with the people. And for Orochon it was very important to have such a partner, because he needed the company that his wife Babushka Masha was not able to give him. The bear that lived on the neighbouring hill and which Sveta met several times during the spring we spent on camp, was also a person whom you can meet occasionally. The ability to speak and think, the ability to reciprocate or establish social relationships in their usual sense were not the criteria to ascribe to personhood. It was the ability to walk that was important and that divided the world into the animated and the non-animated. From this point of view, Evenki animism is part of their social organization in which individuals are involved if they can participate in companionship. Walking somewhere together or meeting somebody on the way are the principal and basic companionships that constitute the Evenki community. As a result, all the creatures, even the hunting prey, the bears and dogs are involved as you could meet them on the way or share the experience of walking with them.

It is also important to study children's socialization, because the first efforts to participate in others' companionship initiate the process of becoming a social creature and the first steps are the first marks of the potential to become one. Evenki people become Evenki before they start school and this explains why their culture is so resistant to assimilation. At the same time, when the Evenki are separated from their land and start to live in towns, where they have no possibility to constantly move from one place to another and experience the rhythms of loneliness and companionship, they immediately lose their identity and fully accept the main elements of the culture in which they have to integrate. The only Evenki who maintain their culture are those who succeed in having several places to stay, between which they can circulate all the time. Walking through the Evenki land and being Evenki is one and the same and it is the main prerequisite for staying with the Evenki if you are an anthropologist with the ambition of carrying out fieldwork among them.

We once attended a ceremony, where grown ups were so drunk that they were unable and unwilling to perform the ritual. The state of *manakan* they experienced was sufficient to feel the sacred moment. But as the effects of the alcohol wore off, there was a need to do something together and a walk to the sacred place with the children turned out to be this common activity that somehow involved all of the participants. Kolya who was 6 years old took the initiative. Holding his grandfather's hand, he led him to the sacred place. For Orochon and Stepan it was very important to emphasize that Kolya had never before been in this place and that he showed the direction to the sacred place by intuition. They said that as he was born Evenki, he knew everything in advance and did not need instructions what to do and where to go. This appeared to be rather impressive, as Kolya was walking with some assurance carrying his little stick the same way as his grandfather held his. This walk was rather interesting, as all the participants, exhausted after several days of drinking, proceeded in the direction given by Kolya, but all the people kept to their own individual pathways. Although Orochon said that Kolya knew the place, but had never been there before, the whole party was moving more or less simultaneously, and we could not see if they were following Kolya or whether Kolya was simply coordinating his movements to the tendencies of the others. It did not matter whether Kolya knew the way or not, whether he had been there before or discovered the place by intuition. Quite possibly there was no concrete sacred place, we could never be sure. But at some point the whole party climbed a rather picturesque rock, which provided a panoramic view of the taiga. That was a sacred place, where they conducted a ritual, again led by Kolya. To our minds, it was important to state that Kolya knew the place in advance not so much to introduce magic into the situation, but more as a matter of forestalling any attempts to teach Kolya directly where to go. For the Evenki it is very important not to give express directions and orders to their children, and thus to keep their attention fixed constantly on the movements of the others, so they would learn how to see where people go, instead of asking them. These were the elements of ostensive communication, which was important for Evenki coordination within the framework of companionship.

Alcohol also forms a pretext, its availability or even its absence is a good reason for Evenki to ignore their household duties and to start a trip in search of it. Alcohol is like a trophy that must be found and drunk. The state of drunkenness is not a state in which the human mind is lost or changed, on the contrary it is a state in which the Evenki can feel themselves as full persons. This means they can look for risks, go somewhere without having a concrete purpose and look for occasional contacts and encounters. Drunkenness does

not affect their ability to find their way in the forest, cross the river on a boat or drive a car through the night. The last moment of drunkenness is experienced as being *manakan*, which is associated with switching from one companionship to another. This switching is part of the Evenki mind itself and shows the rhythmic nature of their social organization, which balances loneliness with potential openness to multiple companionships and concrete involvement in the companionship.

## CONCLUSION

Being nomads the Evenki are very interested in all possible means of movement and travelling. New transportation gives the possibility to move faster and carry more things. These new capacities change the world of the Evenki because as they can carry more with them, they can possess more in general. And if they have more things, it makes their life more stable, localized and less nomadic. New types of transport bring new kinds of dependencies on the outer world. The other aspect of this dependency is the fact that new transportation is either not powerful enough to cross the big distances in the taiga or it is too expensive to exploit independently. So most of the latter is controlled by strangers and the Evenki cannot use them for their own interests. Old forms of transportation such as reindeer and horses are still kept by the Evenki, although they are not used as intensively as before the integration of cars, all terrain vehicles and tractors. But until these new means of transport are not totally controlled by the Evenki, their life in the taiga is impossible without horses and reindeers.

New resources such as alcohol, petrol and money provide new causes for trips and travelling, and as such they facilitate not only the process of acculturation, but also the process of the maintenance of the Evenki culture. While the most secure mobility form for the Evenki is walking by foot, this practice is reintegrating all the aspects of the Evenki hunting ethos. What we called in this article a walking mind is a pattern that connects various aspects of Evenki culture through practice and not through narrative. Through walking together the Evenki teach their children to be autonomous persons, coordinate their actions with the Evenki dogs and conduct companionships with others. And this is how the Evenki culture is transmissible. New resources presented by the outer world construct frames for new challenges, they become trophies in new forms of hunting and as such they are assimilated into the matrix of the Evenki culture. The main finding of this research project could be summarized in a statement that moving is playing an important part in the self-correction

(Bateson 1980) of the Evenki culture. In prospect this could lead to the comparisons with other hunter-gatherer communities. Previous approaches studied it as a part of subsistence strategy or a form of cultural transmission, but not as a device that helps to maintain a culture and counterbalance assimilation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is a common and widely shared view that hunter-gatherers are nomadic while cultivators are settled. Recently this was questioned, because in a long term perspective hunter-gatherers tend to stay much longer on their original territories and cultivators need to move and leave their territories behind because of the ecological constraints (Brody 2001). Anyway moving is an inevitable part of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and everyday experience.

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<sup>3</sup> The first version of the following part of the article was published as a research report (Safonova & Sántha 2010b).

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# MOVEMENT AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH

*Eva Toulouze*

**Abstract:** In the process of integrating the Northern areas into the Russian world, both missionaries and Soviet activists have endeavoured to change the local population's minds and worldview, in order to get it in compliance with the new world they were bringing. But the indigenous population was nomadic. This presented a considerable challenge to the enlighteners. How did they cope with it? Did they attempt to become "temporarily" nomads themselves or did they try to compel the people to change also their way of life? Were there differences in strategies between the Christian missionaries of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and the Soviet "cultural construction" activists? These are the questions this article attempts to find an answer to.

**Key words:** cultural bases, education, enlightenment, nomadic school, nomadism, Orthodox missionaries, sedentarisation, soviet activists, Western Siberia

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of their contacts with aliens, the natives of the Russian North have often met people who wanted something from them (furs, fish) and others who wanted to change something in their lives. Among the latter, some were bearers of what they considered a universal truth – the Christian gospel and the promise of eternal life in the case of the Orthodox (and lately Protestant) missionaries, the Marxist dogma and the promise of earthly communism in the case of the "red" missionaries. As far as nomads – and "primitive peoples" in general – are concerned, this issue was complicated by a parallel attempt – either to enlighten or to change them altogether both in their worldview and in their way of life.

But nomadism presents its own peculiar features and difficulties: through movement, nomads are more easily able to escape those who interfere with them than sedentary cultures are. Thus, movement becomes an obstacle for the enlighteners. How did they cope with this challenge? How did they, how do they adapt? Do they become nomads themselves? Do they try to change this custom or do they attempt to fight the mere fact of nomadism? A study of this

question will allow drawing a comparison between the methods of the two different kinds of ideologists.

Why nomadism is a problem?

1. Nomads are difficult to encounter. As they are permanently on the move, those who seek them can never be sure of where they are located at the moment. Actually, in the beginning of the encounter, even semi-nomads present a challenge, as they are scattered over huge territories, unknown to the “enlighteners”. So movement is a challenge, no less so than their general lifestyle and environment. Moreover: if nomadic people wish to avoid meeting someone, they have the means to escape. Even when the encounter has taken place, the nomads are very easily able to flee and pursue their journeys if the contact does not please them.
2. Nomads are difficult to control. The following up of “results” achieved is extremely difficult. Baptised natives may never again get close to a church if they do not wish it and nobody is able to compel them.

What are the possible ways of coping with these problems? There are two basic approaches that may be implemented: either the enlighteners follow nomads on their routes, and this strategy becomes mimicry and leads to those people becoming nomads themselves<sup>1</sup>; or they force nomads to change, give up mobile lifestyle, i.e. they sedentarise them.

Both strategies have been implemented in the North of Russia by missionaries as well as by the Soviets. There are yet some significant differences between the two.

## **BECOMING NOMADS**

### **The Christian missionaries**

Both Orthodox and Protestant missionaries, in the 19th century and nowadays, share a general approach: they must go to seek at the edge of the world the last pagans. They must go to them, in order to bring them the Christian faith. Although this ideology is clearly implemented and proclaimed by the Protestant missionaries, especially in the fundamentalist protestant groups that consider missionary work as the core of their task (e.g., Vallikivi 2005, 69), and nowadays the Orthodox Church is not active in missionary work, still

the Orthodox Church in the 18th and 19th centuries organised missionary expeditions.<sup>2</sup>

The first that deserve to be mentioned are **Filofei Leshchinskii's**<sup>3</sup> expeditions (1704–1728). He was sent to Siberia to implement Peter the Great's policy of eliminating Russia's paganism, a stain on the image of the modern Russia he intended to build (Istoriia II 1968: 324; Forsyth 1992: 154). Actually, Filofei worked to convert to Christianity the Western Siberian aborigines, who were not fully nomadic, but who dwelt deep in the taiga. In order to find them, he had to organise expeditions and to sail along rivers, in quest of the Khanty's and the Mansi's camps (Vanuyto 1994: 101). So they compelled the missionaries who wanted to reach them to move in a systematic way, because of the immensity of the territory and their great isolation.<sup>4</sup> The Northernmost natives opposed most fiercely conversion to Christianity and they resisted attempts made by the missionary to preach in their lands: Filofei was not allowed to reach the nomad Nenets' territory and his boat was blocked before he could land (*Kratkii ocherk* 1892: 28; Irinarkh 1905b: 22).

The following experience of mass conversion concerns the European Nenets, whose evangelisation was achieved quite successfully by Ivan Smirnov, named **Veniamin** as a priest, who spent most of the time between 1825 and 1830 travelling in the Western tundras in search of Nenets groups to proselytise. He spent five years in the tundra and nearby settlements.<sup>5</sup> Actually he was not really moving all the time, but during these five years he was pretty often on the move, living like a native, with a reindeer herd (for transportation) and a conic tent. He even had a mobile Church erected whenever the need was felt, a device that would be imitated later by the Siberian mission (Mavliutova 2001: 78–79). When Veniamin was not in the tundra, he did not have a mission headquarters to turn to, he just dwelt in the small town of Mezen, probably in the house of a merchant. This is an interesting example of mimicry: although Veniamin was not able to spend all the time of his mission in the tundra, he still adopted, in order to reach the people he wanted to convince, the same kind of lifestyle and ways of moving. He is the only one of the missionaries to have chosen this uncomfortable strategy and it certainly explains his massive success.

Roughly after the end of Veniamin's expedition, a mission was founded in the fair town of **Obdorsk**<sup>6</sup>. With some early interruptions, it functioned until the Revolution and we have pretty good documentation about it, especially a detailed "History of the Obdorsk mission" by the last head of the mission, Ivan Shemanovskii, called by his Orthodox name Irinarkh (Irinarkh 1906). The existence of headquarters "sedentarised" missionary work. Still, working with semi-nomadic or fully nomadic peoples required movement. So part of the

missionaries' duty was to go out of the mission and to spend most of the time travelling. The Obdorsk missionaries more or less happily fulfilled these obligations – some of them, who do not leave for expeditions, do not remain long. Actually, to be a missionary in the conditions of the Russian North was very demanding indeed: life conditions were really poor. Life at the bases was very confined, three missionaries were living together; often, as the “History” reveals, they did not get along well. They had to travel in a harsh natural environment, defying the cold in winter and the mosquitoes in summer, to bring the Gospel to people whose language most of them did not understand, and whose behaviour was strange and unpredictable, sometimes even hostile. Although they would have liked to be independent, the missionaries needed the natives' assistance to move around. They even bought in 1857 a small herd, which later caused lots of problems to the mission, for the missionaries were not able to manage it (Irinarkh 1905h: 306; 1905m: 156–157; 1905n: 86). At the beginning of the 20th century, while the mission develops, the expeditions do not completely cease; we have interesting accounts of tundra travels by Irinarkh, but the mission is more and more the place where the missionaries are to be found, and where they are visited by those natives who wish to keep in touch with them.

The Obdorsk mission tried to develop **schools** and to spread Christianity through education. Actually the school was at the beginning, in 1856, a private initiative of one missionary, Petr Popov, who maintained it by his own means (Mavliutova 2001: 87–88). Only later, in 1882, it became officially under the supervision of the mission (idem: 89). But the missionaries, in general, were not very inventive in their attempt to create schools. Schools for native children were fully stationary, nearby missions, monasteries or churches. One early school for the natives was even opened in Tyumen, very far from the Khanty regions: of the 15 boys that were recruited, several died and the few that persisted remained stuck between the two worlds: “Living far from their parents, from their families, from their region, they forgot their country and lost all contact with their people; but they were not able to assimilate into Russian society and they found themselves deprived of any ethical support, so important for young people; they fell into alcoholism and died, driving apart more and more the Natives from school and written culture” (Irinarkh 1905q: 328). Thus one of the school's goals was to uproot the children from their parents' way of life. It is not surprising that parents were not keen on sending their children to school. This was the main problem missionaries had to deal with. Irinarkh<sup>7</sup>, at the beginning of the 20th century, was perfectly aware of the problem. He was even surprised some parents accepted separation from their children. One has the impression, while reading his texts, that he sympa-

thises with the Nenets who do not want to give their children to school, because they love them, and that he approves of them more than of the Komi, who are eager to have their children educated into the Russian world (Irinarkh 1905g: 251; Irinarkh 1905u: 293). Therefore Irinarkh envisaged developing nomadic schools and even attempted to put his project into practice, but was hindered by several practical problems, like the cost of a herd and the lack of proper teachers (Irinarkh 1904: 300–301). Actually for these reasons, the native students were mostly orphans, unwanted by their kin, often brought by families that did not want to be encumbered by them<sup>8</sup> (Irinarkh 1905u: 295).

The massive presence of **Protestants** is a new phenomenon in the North after the 1990s. More precisely, what is new is their expansion among the indigenous population, for in cities like Vorkuta they have long been present, even in Soviet times. But since the 1990s they have developed missionising in the wild around, and have convinced to convert to Baptism a conspicuous part of the Yamb-to Nenets group, a community of European Nenets that were never collectivised. They regularly go to the tundra to visit the believers. In the case of the Yamb-to Nenets, the movement started with one single convert, who introduced the Baptist missionaries to the community. The first conversion had been made while the person was in town, and only later it spread in the tundra (Vallikivi 2009). What is important for the missionaries enabling them to go and meet the nomads, is that they have an all-terrain vehicle (*vezdehod*), able to bring them “to the edge of the world”.

So the missionary’s approach is complex: on the one hand, the people they want to meet may move towards them, and often they do so, but they are also ready to move themselves towards the people, to seek them where they are. Although not all the men appointed as missionaries are ready to accept the hardships of life as a wanderer in the Northern nature, most of them consider it as part of their duty.

## **The Soviets**

There are clear similarities in the approach, if not, of course, in the propositional dimension. As with the Orthodox missionaries<sup>9</sup>, the Soviet emissaries came to enlighten those who had still not received the message of the earthly paradise. So they intended to change deeply the heart and the understanding of all the people living in Russia. They intended to build up a State in which all the people, according to their understanding, are civilised and integrated into the same framework. Therefore their project is not mainly spiritual, but political. And, much more so than in the case of the Orthodox missionaries, they repre-

sent the State and they serve it explicitly. At the same time, their personal devotion and commitment to the cause is also comparable to the missionaries': often they started from scratch, had to build schools themselves, to invent teaching methods, etc. They shared with their Christian predecessors the pioneer spirit.

In this framework, having the people they want to change moving around did not create favourable conditions for their aims: the impossibility to follow them systematically, the difficulty to control them becomes a real problem and therefore the enlighteners naturally start to try convincing them to change their habits and to drop nomadism. Therefore, from the beginning, the Soviets took full advantage of the movement towards them: they were based in towns or villages and they took hold of the nomads as they passed through the settlements.

Though there were some exceptions, such as the extensive expedition led by Vladimir Evladov (Evladov 1992) in 1927 in order to enquire about the possibility for the state of ensuring reindeer against any accident or natural catastrophe destroying the herd and to assess more widely the situation in Yamal. Evladov was a communist civil servant, who carried out his mission with great humanity and was clearly sympathetic towards the Nenets. He spent around 20 months in the Yamal tundra, travelling all over the peninsula and taking advantage of his meetings with the nomadic Nenets to explain the Soviet power and to gather information about their culture. One could argue that Evladov is also an enlightener, although his mission was as much about data collection. He endeavoured to explain the new world and to convince the Nenets that the "Red tsar" was concerned about their welfare. But this ideological work was attempted very cautiously. He had neither the means nor the will to implement anything forcibly.

As far as schools were concerned, the Soviets ultimately were not any more original than the missionaries, although they tried to reflect on the possibilities of having schools closer to the population. The discussion about boarding schools was quite fierce in the Committee of the North: Lunacharskii, the Minister of Education, was perfectly aware of the weaknesses of the system (Lunacharskii 1927): it was clear, also for early Soviets, that separation of small children from their families was not a good way of bringing up well balanced personalities. We know of one attempt of a nomadic school in the Surgut region in 1925, but the final solution adopted is, as before, the boarding school<sup>10</sup>.

## TO ELIMINATE NOMADISM

### The missionaries

Did the missionaries attempt to eliminate nomadism? They were opposed to it in principle. The official instructions are quite clear: the missionaries are supposed “not only to preach the Lord’s Gospel to the natives, but also to teach them to read and write through translations and to spread a sedentary way of life, i.e. to help them make the first steps leading them to become citizens of the Russian State” (*Kratkii ocherk* 1892b: 17).

Still, if these were the default positions of the Orthodox Church, they were carried out by men who were closer to the realities of the nomadic world. Their positions varied. Undoubtedly, the official one represented the inner conviction of most missionaries: Russian way of life was for them the highest form of culture, which had to be spread. But they had not the means of implementing their aims and were compelled to stick to more easily achievable goals. Still there were some alternative reflections within the Church, led by individuals, some of them of considerable influence.

Nikolai Il’minskii is certainly the most remarkable of them: although he did not act directly in the North, his ideology influenced also his Northern followers. He had developed a whole ideology about native enlightenment, based upon the observation of the Tatars<sup>11</sup>. He had a whole strategy for bringing the non-Russian peoples closer to Orthodoxy and to be faithful subjects of the Tsar. The main change he wanted to achieve was in their spiritual way of being, as he was convinced that Christianity was the basis that would lead to other changes. Thus, he did not try to change the native’s way of life, as many others did in pursuing their work as enlighteners, and commented himself about this issue, in the case of a missionary who complained that the natives did not want to change their way of life: “He gives too much importance to the improving of habits, to civilisation. According to him, the Amur aborigines ‘are more attached to their ethnic traditions than the Buriats’. The Giliak, the Gold, etc, even after baptism, refuse to give up the norms and customs they are accustomed to from childhood. But if they are so attached to their way of life (which is by the way totally natural), why must we deprive them of it? Why make war to such a rooted, resilient obstacle? For simple people who are adepts of shamanism, the Christian teaching and cult are per se acceptable and congenial, if they do not interfere in their concrete life. But Christianity, which illuminates, ennobles and strengthens men in their hearts and spirits, in their understanding and in their disposition, leads in a way most direct and secure to their way of life’s enrichment and correction.” (Il’minskii 1898: 195). Although

in this letter, Il'minskii is not referring to nomads, the point is clear and the same strategy has been used by missionaries working with Western Siberian nomads.

Irinarkh was a disciple of Il'minskii's and followed his steps in his demeanour. His approach to nomadism is interesting and unique in literature – especially if we consider Irinarkh as one of the enlighteners involved in the Northern societies. Irinarkh goes further than Il'minskii: he does not consider nomadism as proof of backwardness, but as “the only natural way of life in regions where agriculture is out of question” (Irinarkh 1904: 300). It is not right to think, as Russians often do, that nomadic life is degrading and insufferable: on the contrary, “it is neither as horrible nor as dangerous as it seems from far away” (idem: 304). No “white” man has yet in Russia gone as far as Irinarkh in respect for the traditional aboriginal way of life.

The Protestants nowadays do not object either to nomadism: it is not for them to decide, but for the Holy Spirit. Still, they are convinced that when the essential is obtained, the rest, including the settled way of life, will automatically follow and does not deserve particular human endeavours (Vallikivi 2009). Thus, the Protestant missionaries are on positions that seem externally quite similar to Il'minskii's. At least as far as priorities are concerned, they both focus on the spiritual. The difference is in the agency: for the Baptists, the Holy Spirit is the sole force in question, while for Il'minskii the process is a “natural” one and no special interference is needed.

## **The Soviets**

The Soviet enlighteners wanted both to change the people's worldview and their way of life. They start from a point of view that is very similar to the Church's, but the difference is in the means involved: the Soviet enlighteners' ideology correspond to the State's and it expresses the Soviet State's fundamental ambition, which encompasses the whole of the country and inspires all other aims.

### ***The goal: to fight against backwardness***

The people concerned are considered to be at the most primitive stage of human evolution. The evolutionary scheme dominates the Soviet way of thinking. The natives are primitive people, who have skipped the capitalist phase and benefit directly from the goods of socialism. A whole theory is developed in the Soviet times in order to justify the existence of these backward people in

the Soviet society<sup>12</sup>. But this was only acceptable if it was combined with an attempt to get rid of their primitive ways, of their uncomfortable way of life that was not fit for a Socialist state, guided by progress.

***The method: how to get rid of it?***

There were different ways, which were all attempted at some phase:

- **Demonstration.** The aim was to show the indigenous communities that “civilisation” is better than their “primitive” life. The Soviet enlighteners, led by the Committee of the North and its ideology, tried to implement this point through the “*kultbasy*”, the cultural bases, which were, among other functions, to show the achievements of the regime and the comforts of modern life. For example, in the areas where the missionaries had worked some decades earlier, they built the Kazym cultural base, a huge complex of buildings including a school, a medical point, veterinarian services, a hostel, a “house of the native” with books and press, etc. (Leete 2002: 44–53). Actually, the results were not as encouraging as expected: in the concrete case of the Kazym cultural base, the local communities felt mostly provoked and entered into a rebellious process (Leete 2002). Usually, the Soviets did not adopt a mobile way of life, but they delved deep into the indigenous habitat and adapted themselves in crucial points. There are of course examples of Komsomol activists, who learned the vernacular languages and lived very close to the local people. Still, those enlighteners usually did not become nomadic: they were fixed in villages and thus their action could have a wider impact on the semi-nomadic or sedentary communities. A good example are the Prokofievs, a couple that started teaching in 1925 in Ianov Stan, on the Turukhan river. The husband learned Nenets (he later became one of the first specialists in Nenets and even wrote a textbook for adults (Prokofiev 1936)), and the wife learned Selkup. Both taught in the vernacular languages, but they are not known to have become nomadic (Alekseenko 1971: 295).

- **Constraint.** If demonstration and education was the method that corresponded best to the understandings of the Committee of North, constraint becomes the State’s policy, in a later period, corresponding to the collectivisation process. Collectivisation, in the North as well as elsewhere, was mainly forced: while in the previous years people were encouraged to join in cooperatives, after 1931 they were compelled to give their reindeer to the collective farm or to join hunting and fishing cooperatives, and to have their life organised by the collective unit; people were forcibly taken from their camps on the riverside to be relocated into villages<sup>13</sup>. Sedentarisation becomes one of the key notions of

the Soviet policy in the North. Different systems were tested in order to reduce the reindeer herders' need for movement, and some of them are still used nowadays. While the enlighteners were the main implementers of the first strategy, they are not the central instrument of this one, although many of them were more or less connected with the State institutions and helped to achieve many of the goals, as civil servants (for example Evladov).

- Education. Education is a keyword throughout all the periods of Soviet policy. Children are more easily convinced than adults, and natives might be brought to civilisation through schooling. It was easier to change children and to alienate them from the ways of their parents. Education is really the main point in Soviet strategy: it permits to achieve both

- o learning “civilisation”: washing, wearing underwear, eating vegetables, sleeping in a bed, in other words learning to become Russians;
- o and, even more effective, “unlearning” nomadic life, and forming young people who are unable to follow their fathers' and forefathers' path, who lack the necessary skills to rely on hunting, fishing and reindeer herding (cf. Yuri Vella's positions about school, expressed for example in Niglas 2003).

The result is most satisfactory from the Soviet point of view: it is very well expressed by Anna Nerkagi in her story “Aniko from the Nokho clan” (1977). It is the story of a Nenets girl who had studied at the Institute of the Peoples of the North in Leningrad. She dreams of coming back to the tundra. But when she goes back after graduating, she is disappointed: she discovers that she is not able to live in the tundra anymore, that she misses the way of life she has become used to, that she cannot stand her father's smell. And she starts to dream of her “Russian” life... This story is very characteristic of the natives' experience, of the life of those who have undergone the school system and lost many dimensions of their identity. Still a recent analysis leads to different conclusions: Liarskaia asserts, that boarding schools have become a channel to transmit adaptation tools to children towards the double world they shall have to move in (Liarskaia 2003: 284–286). Still, this seems to be a rejoicing development of the late period: she emphasises the variety of strategies throughout the life span of the Soviet Union (ibidem). Nerkagi's story (which is more or less autobiographical) represents thus a previous period.

### ***The situation nowadays***

Still: nomadic life has not disappeared. It is very much rooted in the Northern natives' psychology. Also, the historically evolved patterns of subsistence and relations with the authorities have created considerable regional differences. For instance, in Yamal boys coming from boarding schools and even from universities still choose to nomadise with their reindeer. When asking them why, there are several answers, but the main are: "we have the reindeer" and "we are free: we are our own bosses"<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, as Liarskaia observes, "in last times, the Nenets' cultures status has started to change, and respect towards it from the outsiders has slightly grown (Liarskaia 2003: 286).

On the other hand many children of the Northern natives have abandoned the nomadic life for good. They have become settled and they are not able to rely on themselves in nature anymore. From this point of view, the survival of nomadism is nowadays confronted with a serious gender problem. Males seem to be more attracted by life in the wild than females. It seems that girls have been more receptive than boys towards the comforts of civilisation, creating serious problems for young herders who are in need of wives ready to share their lives<sup>15</sup>.

Moreover, it would be interesting to analyse on a scientific basis the behaviour of former nomads in their stationary locations<sup>16</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the changes the missionaries wanted to bring about were very fundamental, they did not actually interfere with the forms of everyday life, mainly because they lacked the means of transforming the reality around them. They had no choice but to adapt themselves, to sacrifice their own way of life and they changed themselves. We cannot say they became natives, but they attempted to meet the natives somewhere in between their areas.

The Soviets are globally less ready to find a compromise. They made no compromise; they were required to be met on their own terms and they were able to impose them, in spite of their permanent assertion that all their policies were for the accomplishment of the native's desires. One may still wonder whether the difference between them is not actually merely a question of time and means. Each of the examined groups of "enlighteners" acted within their range of possibilities and their priorities. The Soviets arrived in a historical period that inherited much of the past: in the previous centuries, missionaries (as well as merchants and civil servants) had woven a network of contacts that

had brought Northern Siberian natives closer to the Russian world. Missionaries, who were the ones that wanted to bring about a fundamental change in their way of being, were not able to achieve capital transformations, but they were the ones who went to look for the natives in their natural environment, adopting their own principle of movement. Later, the Soviets took all the benefit of this preliminary work and could take advantage of the habits the nomads had developed of passing through towns and villages visiting their acquaintances and bartering products. Thus, they could avoid imitating their permanent movement and choose to take posts in crucial points of their routes in order to bring them towards the new order.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Actually missionaries are usually fairly mobile: they go to see for proselytes where they are. Still, we cannot call them “nomads”: they usually have a pretty solid base to come back to. Movement is a “professional” obligation, but not a chosen lifestyle. It is easy to move towards fixed points, but most unbalancing to move towards movement itself.
- <sup>2</sup> The political aspect of these expeditions has been emphasised by researchers. It is not my goal here to discuss the part of the political and of the religious dimensions in missionary work.
- <sup>3</sup> About Filofei’s expedition, we have direct data from Novitskii (1973); other, later commentators, Abramov 1846, 1854 and 1854a, Nosilov 1898; in more recent times Vanuyto 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> One must be careful when talking about isolation in Siberia: the isolation of Siberian aborigines was only relative. They had direct or indirect contacts with merchants and most of them attended fairs. They could also travel to visit neighbours. But their network of relations with the Russian world consisted of occasional points (e.g. Ventsel 2005: Chapter 1).
- <sup>5</sup> The main sources about Veniamin’s expedition are his own writings: besides one scientific article (Veniamin 1855) about the European Nenets’ culture, he published a kind of diary he held for its ecclesiastical authorities (Veniamin 1850, 1851). These two substantial articles are most precious for understanding Veniamin’s enterprise, although they have been less used than it could be expected in Russian specialised literature.
- <sup>6</sup> In 1832–33 Makari attempted to systematise missionary work. He did not go very far from Obdorsk and was able to baptise some Khanty and Nenets who were themselves looking for baptism, but he was dispirited by native resistance and from the obstacles connected with unknown languages (*Izdes’* 2003: 60–61; Mavliutova 2001: 49–50). The mission was closed in 1833 and reopened only in 1854.
- <sup>7</sup> For more details about Irinarh’s personality, see Toulouze 2005; a collection of his works has been published recently (Shemanovskii 2005, 2011).

- <sup>8</sup> This is actually the reason why Irinarkh was compelled to open in 1901 also a nursery for small children, usually orphans abandoned by their kin.
- <sup>9</sup> The term “red missionaries” has been widely used to define the persons who were sent into the North to develop education and the faith towards communism in the 1920s. See, for example, Znamenski 2003: 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Actually this debate still continues. Today, everybody is convinced of the unsatisfactory character of the boarding school system, but although there have been endeavours to find alternatives allowing the education of children without uprooting them, none has been widely convincing.
- <sup>11</sup> The literature about Il'minskii is considerable, from early research (Znamenskii 1892) to more recent analysis (Lallukka 1987; Geraci & Khodarkovski 2001; Werth 2002). For a shorter but comprehensive presentation, see Toulouze 2004.
- <sup>12</sup> There is in libraries a huge amount of literature on this subject, whose interest nowadays is only of documenting this ideology that lasted at least three decades. For instance Sergeev 1955, Budarin 1968, Kisselev 1974 and many others.
- <sup>13</sup> This is the starting point of a long and painful process that was not achieved until the 1950s, not without many difficulties from the point of view of the state.
- <sup>14</sup> Look at Liivo Niglas' film “The brigade” (2000), in which a reindeer herder, who has studied for a couple of years at Tiumen University, explains his choice exactly in these terms.
- <sup>15</sup> These points have been superbly developed by Vitebsky & Wolfe (2001). Although their material is far from Western Siberia, the processes commented on are pretty much the same. Still, there is the Yamal exception to be noted. While my fieldwork data from the Forest Nenets and life in the taiga confirm Vitebsky's assumption, Liarskaia discovers that the Yamal does not present such features of gender shift (Liarskaya 2010).
- <sup>16</sup> It seems to me intuitively, on the bases of my fieldwork, that the nomads' apartments are different from the sedentary people: much more frequently they change completely the furniture's place...

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# SIBERIAN MOVEMENTS: HOW MONEY AND GOODS TRAVEL IN AND OUT OF NORTHWESTERN SAKHA<sup>1</sup>

*Aimar Ventsel*

**Abstract:** In this article I want to discuss the notion of distance, movement and civilisation in Siberia. I focus on a particular type of people – traders – and their movements. The travels of traders in Siberia accompany the movement of goods and money and this movement is the main reason for their travels. In Siberia there exist many different perceptions of space and time. Incomers perceive the territory as a network linking the islands of civilisation. A Siberian native or *sibiriak* views his country as a large territory that is harsh and where movement needs a special investment in time and energy. I would like to show that traders as both incomers and *sibiriaki* define space, distances and time in a way that unites both discourses. The construction of space and distance is affected by economic, social and cultural factors that are rooted in the history of the region and a life style caused by the climate, economy and historical development of the region.

**Key words:** movement, post-Socialism, Sakha, trade

Perception of space and time is a popular topic in anthropology. However, there are many possible ways to discuss these issues. Relation to space (and in general approach to territory) and time (time spent by moving in the territory) is not objective but depends on social, economic, cultural and even historical settings and has been widely studied. In an Arctic context, the relevance of the means of transport, and the social and cultural setting is analysed in many works that discuss these topics foremost in a herders' and hunters' context (Pelto & Müller-Wille 1987; Croll & Parkin 1992; Ingold 2000; Vitebsky 2002). In this article I want to discuss the notion of distance, movement and the perception of civilisation in Siberia with a focus on a particular type of people – traders – and their movement. The movement of traders in Siberia is accompanied with the movement of goods and money and this movement is the main reason for their travels. I chose the traders because they are a small but constantly mobile group whose income depends on their ability to cross vast distances.

The collapse of the Soviet state caused several changes in everyday life such as the appearance of free trade, a process that is analysed by some scholars (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones 1997; Mandel & Humphrey 2002). The exchange of goods in a post-Soviet Russia is a complex sphere and only one segment can be discussed in this paper. The new breed of traders in English are often called “entrepreneurs”, in Siberia they are commonly known as *kommersanty*<sup>2</sup> which means “trader” although sometimes the term *predprinimatel’* (entrepreneur) is used. In my opinion there are two specific features about trade in Siberia: these are the high prominence of traveling and the practice of barter. Private traders operate through shops and markets but they also travel to remote villages (in order to sell their goods) and to big markets (in order to buy goods). Because distances are so vast in Siberia, traveling (i.e. spending a huge amount of time moving from one settlement to another) is an important part of trade. Private traders can spend more than a week on the road to reach a village by truck. As one driver working in this business said, he does five or six such long – approximately 2000 km – trips during the winter and earns money this way for the rest of the year. Siberian indigenous villages were always producers of meat, fish and furs, and in some regions other products like velvet reindeer antlers, mammoth tusks, pines, etc. These products are bartered with local or traveling traders for (usually big quantities of) food, clothes, equipment and even furniture (Ventsel 2005; Stammmler & Ventsel 2003; Stammmler 2005; Ziker 2002).<sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION OF THE FIELDWORK REGION

My main fieldwork region was the Anabarskii district in the Republic of Sakha, the biggest subject of the Russian Federation that lies in the eastern part of the Russian Far East. The territory of the Republic of Sakha is more than 3 million square kilometres and is sparsely populated with less than a million inhabitants. That means that settlements are scattered over the land and hundreds of kilometres are between them. The Anabarskii district (located some 2000 km north from the republic’s capital Yakutsk) in the most north western district of the republic, located on the coast of the Arctic Ocean is populated by 4000 people within 45,000 square kilometres. There is a winter road from Yakutsk to the district and also two airplane lines connecting the district centre village of Saskylakh with Yakutsk and the diamond mining town Mirnyi. Most of my fieldwork time in 2000–2001 was spent either in the village of Iuriung Khaia (150 km north from Saskylakh) or in the tundra with people from the village. The village of Iuriung Khaia is mainly inhabited by Turkic

speaking Dolgan people, who are traditionally engaged in reindeer herding as well as wild reindeer or fur animal hunting. An additional activity for people in the whole district is also seasonal fishing and geese hunting.

Historically the district has always been a region that is crossed by two huge waves of reindeer migration – one from the Taimyr peninsula, another from the eastern tundra (Ventsel 2005: Chapter 1). Therefore the Anabarskii district was before the revolution a region where hunters and traders traveled from afar. According to historians, trade had impact on the economy of the region since the 18th century. Local hunters were engaged in sable and arctic fox hunting to satisfy the demand of traders who traveled north to barter flour, tea, alcohol, metal items, etc, for furs. In the Soviet era the district was an important meat producing region where collecting arctic fox furs was of secondary importance. The local indigenous population was sedentarised and collectivised into collective and state farms. They became wage labourers and were able to buy imported goods from local state shops that were centrally supplied by government organisations. My older informants told me that in Soviet era shops in the Anabarskii district there was a broader assortment than the shops in Yakutsk.

When I arrived in Iuriung Khaia in 2000, there existed only three privately run shops and no government owned one. All three shops were like tiny supermarkets, on sale in small rooms was literally everything the shop owners were able to provide – alcohol, clothes, video-recorders, food, sweets and more. Additionally, in the village lived some people who were introduced to me as “local *kommersanty*” i.e. traders who bought big quantities of fish or meat from local people and sold to them food items in big quantities. These traders were not only engaged in grocery and meat barter, people even ordered snowmobiles or furniture from them. A lot of this trade was a credit business meaning that local people bought huge amounts of food, equipment and ammunition at the beginning of the winter and paid for it at the end of the hunting season in spring.

## **TWO EXAMPLES OF LOCAL TRADERS**

In a small building near to my host family’s house was located one of the three shops. This was a two-room facility, the front room (ca. 12 sq metres) served as a shop and the back room as storage. In one corner was a small table with a few chairs around it, in another a counter and behind the counter was a shelf. The counter and shelf were overfilled with goods from children toys and sweets to canned food and sugar. The shop was owned by a woman in her fifties.

I visited the shop often and became friends with the owner. I dropped in quite often not only to buy something but also to drink tea with her and have a quick chat. Sveta used to be a primary class teacher in the Iurung Khaia school and many of her customers were her former students. She had lived in the village for decades and was one of the five Russians in the settlement who did not leave after the state farm and Soviet economy collapse. As Sveta told me, she came to the village to spread “culture” and to “civilise” the local nomadic population (e.g., Anderson 2000b: 189–191). In the 1990s, when salaries arrived late or were not paid at all, she decided to quit her job at the school and opened the shop. According to her words, the local population has become now “non-cultured” (*nekul’turnye*) due to lack of work and alcohol abuse, “even women drink now” she said. Due to this, she was forced to sell more of her goods on credit that customers paid later when they had money. Over the years she became very successful. As Sveta told me, she insisted that her husband, who used to work as a mechanic at the local state farm, quit his job and came to help her with the shop because the income from the trade was bigger than a mechanic’s salary. The goods in the shop were sold for cash, or bartered for meat and fish. As in all village shops in Russia, there was also an option to buy goods on credit, paying later when one had money. This possibility is often used by local indigenous women who needed sugar, tea or some other foodstuff in small quantities. Beside that, Sveta supplied many hunters and even hunting enterprises with goods like food, fishing nets, or other equipment. She ordered big quantities of goods from wholesale trading enterprises in Yakutsk and bartered these for fish and reindeer meat. For this purpose she had to organise container transportation to bring ordered consumables to the village or to ship meat and fish out of the district to the market.

During our conversations I heard that shop keeping in an Arctic village was not easy. First of all she had to pay the local police officer a few thousand roubles every month. The local constable in an Arctic village is like a Southern small town sheriff in a bad Hollywood movie. He is the law and any conflict with him can initiate harassment, tax and hygiene controls, arrestment of relatives for minor indiscretions etc. Apart of that, Sveta had to deal with the village administration which produced a lot of paperwork. Moreover, she had competitors in the village, other shops and illegal traders, who sold alcohol and food from their homes. Therefore Sveta had to be aware of the prices of other shopkeepers and illegal entrepreneurs, and also find her own niche in the local market. Sveta’s niche was fashionable clothing and work clothes. Especially young girls were very interested in the latest fashion. As a rule, people from remote villages preferred to buy clothes in cities or asked city relatives to send them. On the other hand, travelling to Yakutsk and other

Sakha towns was expensive, also sending parcels to Iuriung Khaia is complicated<sup>4</sup>. This way fashion orientated people sometimes were forced to buy their clothes in district shops. In general, the clothes locally available were not cheap or good quality but very often it was the only option especially when the village was cut off from other settlements during winter or spring snow storms and one needed something for a birthday party next week. Last but not least, Sveta had to maintain good relations with the local people which means being very delicate when asking people to pay their debts. In a village where people are closely linked via kinship and friendship, maintaining good relations with everybody required serious political maneuvering. For that reason she had to write off minor debts when some families were unable to pay them on time. Nevertheless, I was struck when I found out that in general this small shop and the additional wholesale business brought in sufficient resources to build a house back home, in the Yaroslavl oblast in European Russia. As Sveta told me, her children were supervising the building process but the mother provided the money for the new house. However, she was not very sure about moving back to the European Russia, because she considered the village her home.

One day at the end of May in 2001, when visiting Sveta's shop I found her packing. She was pressing folded empty bags into a huge plastic bag closed with a zip. When I asked where is she planning to go she answered that she is flying to Nizhni Novgorod which is a city on the Volga, the northern part of European Russia, a city famous for its architecture. "There is a huge market where I buy clothes and bring them here to sell in the district," Sveta told me. She told me that she buys usually several huge travel bags full of new clothes. I admired her courage because she was travelling only with her twenty something year old son. According to Sveta, in the market she had to cope with local mafia and often bribe police or airport customs. "One good way of making money for them is they want to 'control' the content of my luggage before the plane. I have squeezed everything into the bags so that they are almost exploding. When they open the bags, I cannot pack everything in a hurry to catch the plane. So, I have to pay." The travel plan of Sveta and her son was to take a plane from the Anabarskii district to Yakutsk, then change to another plane and fly to Moscow where they wanted to take a train to Nizhni Novgorod. By coincidence we were in the same plane to Yakutsk and I wished her good luck when departing in Yakutsk airport. I have not seen her since but heard from friends that she still has the shop in Iuriung Khaia.

When I was in the district centre Saskylakh, I met another *kommersant*, Sergei. Together with his partner Pavel he runs a big scale supply business. Sergei lived in the Anabarskii district whereas Pavel was there only a few

times a year. The rest of the year Pavel lived in Novosibirsk. The couple did not have a shop or even an office but they ran the business from a room in the local guesthouse where Sergei stayed when in the district. Sergei and Pavel supplied local hunting enterprises with food and equipment, also local people ordered snowmobiles, furniture and home electronics from them. Moreover, they ran a canteen in the village, were involved in the local food processing industry, invested some money into the local meat and fish smoking shop and were aiming to establish a small “milk industry” producing milk from imported milk powder. When Sergei had collected enough orders and people made their advance payments, Pavel bought the necessary goods and sent them to Saskylakh via cargo plane from Novosibirsk. Sergei traded with reindeer meat which he bought by the tons and transported to Yakutsk using cargo planes or trucks. Before the winter season, hunters and reindeer herders ordered big quantities of food and equipment paying in spring by foraged wild reindeer meat. The distances that goods had to pass were huge – from Saskylakh to Novosibirsk approximately 2600 km and 1600 km from Yakutsk to Saskylakh as the bird flies. Involvement in such a large scale business meant a lot of networking for them both: they had to be on good terms with local people in the Anabarskii district to buy meat and secure orders, know people in the airport customs of both ends and so forth. This kind of trade requires great organisational competence to coordinate the movement of goods, obtain licenses for reindeer meat export, manipulate taxes, find workers, manage staff and so forth.

As we stayed often in the same hotel, I had plenty of chances to talk to Sergei. Sergei was registered in the district as a permanent inhabitant and literally “knew everybody”. He arrived to the district already in the Soviet era and started his business activities in the 1990s. He saw some of his projects (wind mills, milk producing work shop) as part of the “civilisation” process with the aim to make life in the district more comfortable i.e. *kul'turnyi*. Sergei did not distance himself from the local people, as many other incomers in the village of Saskylakh did, and I noticed next to no prejudice in his attitude to the indigenous population. He was valued by the indigenous people as someone who was not afraid of hard work, and I saw him often in the polar night guiding the work of the wind mills. Local people described him often as “*svoi*” i.e. one of our kind, an appreciation that was not given to everyone. To some extent, Sergei was the embodiment of the *sibiriak* ethos, being reliable, fair in business, hard working and modest with the alcohol (e.g. Antipin 2011).

## DISCUSSION

Space is socially constructed and is filled with meanings and symbols (Foucault 1980; Harvey 1990; Lefebvre 1991; Watts 1992; Weiner 2002). There are different strategies to mark the space: name it (Basso 1984), fill with tracks (de Certeau 1988) or concrete buildings and other human made constructions (Brandtstädter 2001). Foucault states that history is written in spaces, similar to Watts who adds that the space is defined by the existence of social control (Watts 1992; Foucault 1980)<sup>5</sup>. However, beside the inhabited space exists an empty space or “wilderness” that lacks all the previously mentioned markers. The anthropological literature shows that the border between meaningful and empty space is usually not fixed, in constant movement and needs to be redefined time by time (Gow 1996; Gray 2000).

Siberia is the region where the border between the “civilised” and “wild” space is especially obvious. “Administrative practices” have always played a great role in regional “imaginary geography” (Burbank & Hagen 2007: 5) and fixed the border between the “civilised” and “wild” territory. Since the appearance of Russians in Siberia, the vast territory was divided between state controlled settlements and trading posts or “culturally significant places” (Kennedy 2002: 11) and the “wild” territory (see Kozlar 1955; Stephan 1994). Due to the industrial expansion and resource extraction since the 1950s settlements in Siberia are scattered over a vast territory leaving huge distances between the islands of “civilisation” (cf. Forsyth 1992; Mote 1998). The notion of the “civilised” space became especially strong with the building of new industrial towns all over Siberia, a process which became very rapid in the 1960s. One indigenous woman referred to the establishment of state farms as “the time when civilisation arrived to us” and one Russian bus driver told me proudly “When we arrived in this country, it was completely wild and empty”. The industrial expansion had an ideological dimension, i.e. bringing “civilisation” to the “uncivilised” territory inhabited by “backwards” people (Forsyth 1992), an ideological dimension that found admiration and acceptance even among a few Western intellectuals (see Mowat 1970). In Siberia exists a popular perception of distinguishing “civilised” and “wild” space using the term “culture” (*kul'tura* in Russian) as also did Sveta and Sergei. David Anderson discusses the notion of “*kul'tura*” in Siberia and concludes that it should be translated as “civilisation” (1996: 104). Also in my observation “cultural” or “*kul'turnye*” are places that have running water, TV, electricity and in general “*kul'tura*” is associated with the arrival of “civil society in civic islands” (Anderson 1996: 111–112). Here Anderson refers to general opinion because in Siberia settlements are indeed

interpreted by (especially incoming) people as islands of civilisation surrounded by wild nature and often wild people (cf. Anderson 2000b: 189–191). Here must be noted that this approach is not specific to the Russian or Soviet state and can be found throughout the history of the expansion of imperial states to territories that were seen as “empty” and “uncivilised” and are “open” to be filled with meanings through human activities (cf. Buchan & Heath 2006; Ginsburg & Meyers 2006; Wolf 1990; Bothe *et al.* 1993). Territories like Siberia were and still are viewed as a frontier that should be conquered and re-organised to link them with the already existing “cultured” world.

Historians show that already in Tsarist times European Russia was viewed as “proper Russia” (Sunderland 2007: 43). Therefore, from a Russian (and later Soviet) perspective Siberia was an uncivilised and empty territory on the outskirts of the country (*okraina*) that should be rationally mastered (*osvoevat'*) and exploited (Kotkin & Wolff 1995; Forsyth 1992; Mote 1998; Gerasimov *et al.* 2009). The reason for the interest in this “empty” territory were its rich mineral resources and therefore Siberia became a “resource frontier”. This was the official Soviet political view accompanied with economic strategies (Slavin 1961), so was it also presented to foreigners (Mowat 1970). In the capitalist and socialist worlds, the frontier has always been associated with a “sense of contested space” and progress (Hine 1984; Brightman *et al.* 2010; Forsyth 1992). A frontier is an area where living conditions are rather harsh and people have to be tough. States use different strategies to control a frontier: they send in settlers, sedentarise indigenous nomads, establish military and trading outposts (Cañas Bottos 2008; Bassin 1991; Dederling 2002; Dick 1965; Kozlar 1955; Tilly 1975). Sometimes the process of annexation of frontiers can have backlashes: some scholars suggest that the policy of conquering and protecting the resource frontier is also one reason for the continuing economic problems for Russia as a state (Hill & Gaddy 2003).

Social construction of a frontier is similar in all continents where “empty” territories were “heroically civilised”. An archetype for the frontier in this sense is the Western frontier of the United States that has provided material for countless stereotypes, legends and cult heroes (Hine 1984). The typical American frontier inhabitant is a white man [because the frontier was a “world without women except Scarlet O’Hara” (Hine 1984: 287)] who rejects corrupt authority and lives in self-contested freedom. To stay alive, these men had to be innovative and use all possible means to literally survive. For example, historical research demonstrates that soldiers of US cavalry outposts had to make their own clothes, grow vegetables and hunt (Dick 1965). Therefore it is not surprising that in American popular thinking the heroic mastering of the frontier is often seen as the origin of national democracy (Billington 1956). At

the same time the historical research shows that many of the stereotypes about the Western frontier are not true: for instance the US-frontier was mainly populated by men but not only by white men because quite a big number of soldiers, trappers and cowboys were blacks (Hine 1984: 223–225). Siberia as a frontier shares many similarities with other historical frontiers. Not only the American West was quite masculine, a similar lack of women also concerned men in Siberia or New France (Collins 2004). Ironically, Siberia, the American West and the Scandinavian North were seen as quasi-feminine “virgin” lands that became “domesticated” (i.e. gender wise neutral) not before women moved in and settled down with men (Argunova-Low 2006/2007; Kolodny 1984; Linde-Laursen & Nilsson 1995). In Siberia, this approach was also shared by the Tsarist government who had a policy of sending women forcibly to Siberia to create a socially “domesticated” environment for men (Gentes 2003). Nevertheless, Siberia is still seen as a masculine space, where “real men” do work in mines, hunting camps or at the steering wheel of a truck in a male space with very few women in sight, and the place in society has to be earned through heavy work and toil. The sex separation was also introduced into the lives of the indigenous population during the process of “bringing civilisation” (Vitebsky & Wolfe 2001; Gracheva 1980). Like Sergei, one has to earn the respect and social position by demonstrating hardness through behaviour. This has also helped to establish a specific *sibiriak* ethos as morally and physically superior people to the “soft” inhabitants of European Russia (Antipin 2011). Siberian popular history is full of legends similar to the American frontier, when tough men have established villages, roads or mines or explored the land in order to map it and “conquer” it (Obrutšev [Obruchev] 1957). Typical to the colonialist perception of the frontier is that in all cases popular imagination ignores the fact that territories of the frontier were and are home to numerous indigenous people who have lived there for generations before “civilisation” was brought to them (Brightman *et al.* 2006/2007).

It seems that the main difference between the American West and Siberia as frontier areas is that Siberia is still an unfinished project. When according to public understanding, the American frontier was closed after the Wounded Knee massacre (Wilkie 2010: 49) then Siberia is still a territory that is in a state of being conquered. Moreover, the “civilized society” at the “edges of the polity” in Siberia has demonstrated its fragility (Brightman *et al.* 2006/2007: 9) like the stories of Sveta when people sink back into the wildness when work is gone and alcohol abuse has arisen. “Wilderness” is constantly threatening “civilisation” and in recent decades has been taking back its space. Due to the economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union, mines and settlements have been closed, out-migration increased and in many regions the former

“civilised” space has been decreasing (cf. Vitebsky 2002: 184). One way of recreating “civilisation” was the constant import of industrially manufactured goods, construction material and non-regional food that helped people to feel they are in a “civilised” environment. This surplus was guaranteed in the Soviet era mainly by state trading structures providing shops in remote villages. With the collapse of the Soviet economy, the private traders replaced the state shops. Metaphorically, private traders are central in the struggle against the “wilderness” helping to demonstrate peoples’ *kul’turnost’* providing fashionable clothes, chocolate, bananas, watermelons and so forth.

Entrepreneurship in Siberia is often discussed in the context of indigenous activities in a post-socialist period. Dmitriev (2004: 154–155) distinguishes four different kinds of indigenous entrepreneurship – traditional forms of land use (hunting, reindeer herding, fishing), revival of traditional handicrafts, developing local services and infrastructure, and tourism. The particularity of indigenous business is that the actors tend to start and run their activities in their home communities and are often female (Dmitriev 2004: 154). In the wider context of modern Russia (and former socialist countries in general), entrepreneurship is in academic literature often discussed as a sphere linked with criminality and the shadow economy (Humphrey 2002; Holzlehner 2007; Kaneff 2002; Konstantinov 1997). What has been given less attention is the non-indigenous small scale entrepreneurship. The “small scale” means here everything but geography. Discussing the barter in Siberia, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov demonstrates the wide range of trading networks reaching from Central Siberia to Central Asia (Ssorin-Chaikov 2000).

Trading entrepreneurs here follow the general pattern and are nothing exceptional. People in Siberia move a lot and cross huge distances (e.g., Argunova-Low 2007), the main difference between local indigenous people and entrepreneurs according to my observations is that entrepreneurs totally ignore the existence of any kind of life outside of the villages. I was surprised when I found out that most entrepreneurs have very little knowledge of how people live in the tundra. Even Sveta, after living in Iurung Khaia for a long time, had never been in the tundra. The traders’ world of Siberia is a small world, staying mostly within the limits of the village and centering around the shop, hotel, home and the village administration. Traders were very similar to incomers working in local administration who spent every holiday in the “*materik*”, in places that were “civilised” and “cultural” (Ventsel 2005: 127). In this sense, entrepreneurs lived literally in the “civic islands” mentioned by Anderson (1996: 111–112), places that were “actually governed” (Fondahl 1995: 4) and avoided consciously the “wilderness”. Like Alaskan Inuits, the incoming population in Siberia tends to shun any communication between the tundra

and villages (cf. Bodenhorn 1993) only contrary to the Inuits, the Siberian incomer population tend to ignore the space outside of the village. For entrepreneurs, villages are not only “spaces for economic practice” (Smith 2002) but also “inside” places that make sense and where they feel emotional and social links to their environment (Hirsch 1996). Tundra and the life in it embodied for entrepreneurs an “outside” place and had little to do with their everyday life, whereas shops, streets, airports and so forth as a meaningful context formed the everyday, un-reflexive form of experience (see Bourdieu 1977). On the other hand, traders can be part of the society because they have proved they are worthy of respect. Some of them, like my informants, consider the village their home and are unsure of leaving it even when they have the possibility.

The movement of entrepreneurs and goods in the context of civilised islands has more nuances than just crossing distances between different settlements. Piers Vitebsky argues that after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of subsidised transport, the distances in Siberia are a burden (Vitebsky & Alekseyev 2000). In the Siberian Arctic, airports and air routes form a network of civilisation. However, peoples’ attitude to this burden is very stoic. Flying around in Siberia involves a huge waste of time. Not only are distances large and flying time between the settlements takes hours but there is additional time to invest in the whole process of travelling. To catch a flight, one has to be at the airport several hours before the plane takes off. Very often flights are postponed and one can get stuck in a strange place not only for hours but days (as has happened to me some times). All Siberian airports are full of people with huge bags waiting for their flights. I can easily imagine Sveta and her son sitting in an airport on a huge travel bag surrounded by a dozen of other bags waiting hours for a connecting flight. Sveta would sit on the bag, even sleep on it and stand up only to go and buy hot tea at the canteen. This deep stoicism of Siberians is in sharp contrast with the pictures of hysteric Western Europeans getting stuck in airports during bad weather in December 2010 or due to the volcano ash panic earlier that year.

Time consuming travelling has always been part of living on the eastern side of the Ural mountains as long as people can remember. As already mentioned, travelling in Siberia is a process taking not only hours but sometimes days. People know it and this belongs to living on this land. Entrepreneurs, as other inhabitants of Siberia, know that spending a long time on the road is the only possibility to reach other villages or going to the town. Coping with this kind of distance (to paraphrase Vitebsky & Alekseyev 2000) is their lived experience and social relationship to the land, discussed in another context by so many scholars (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Hirsch 1996). In many aspects, viewing

inconvenience and problems as part of the process of movement mirrors the frontier ethos in Siberia which expects that a man or a woman has to be above hardships and only this way demonstrate that they are able (and worthy) to live in this hard country. This attitude is fundamental for the regional identity of Siberians or *sibiriak* and is something that distinguishes Siberians from people of the *materik*. Both in the past and in modern times *sibiriak* means consolidation of a regional identity around aspects of life that should be a disadvantage but are turned into a matter of local pride (Czaplicka 1916; Antipin 2011).

Moreover, the *sibiriaki* have only one chance of being in the “civilisation”, on the side of *kul'tura* and this option is to bear the long distance travelling and inconvenience linked with it. Entrepreneurs not only brought in “civilisation” by importing goods from the *materik*, but also moved inside this network that connected them with “civilisation”, i.e. only space that matters. Outside of the villages and their airports exists for them the “wilderness” which for incomers is equal to the empty and non-inhabited space they have no relationship to. From a trader’s point of view, their living environment is a “civilised society at the edge of the polity” (Brightman *et al.* 2006/2007: 9) which means that they are moving in the network that keeps the “civilisation” together in an otherwise untamed frontier. When mapping the movement of traders and their goods and money then it is obvious that they limit their activities within the network of *kul'tura* avoiding too close contact with the space outside of it. Importing goods is, among others, the trader’s contribution to the eternal process of establishing and supporting a fragile frontier against the “wilderness”. I would not claim that the Siberian traders have a deep ideological mission to keep civilisation alive in the frontier’s everlasting struggles, their main motivation is to make money. However, in many settlements their shops and backrooms are the only source of products that symbolise *kul'tura* for both indigenous people and incomers. Selling these goods, traders use the money to create their own civilised space as well – to raise their living standards or build houses such as Sveta. The only way of having these goods is the movement within the huge network that is filled with symbols that in Siberia mark the expansion of civilisation and the siege against the wilderness – airports, polar aviation and trucks. On the other hand, moving these goods is hard work, that one has to manage as every other *sibiriak* in mastering the hardships of life. In their ethos and world view, traders typify incomer ignorance of the “wilderness” by living in the “network of civilisation” with the *sibiriak* ethos of hard work and tough personality. In short, globalisation that includes the spread of international fashion and goods should cause deterritorialisation (see Appadurai 2002: 54) but the Siberian case demonstrates that under certain circumstances the reverse process of fostered territorialisation occurs.

## CONCLUSION

In my article I discuss the movement of traders and their goods and money in the context of a frontier. Viewing Siberia as a (resource) frontier has long been a tradition and in popular perception Siberia still is a space where “civilisation” and “wilderness” are in constant conflict. The world of the traders is not much different from the environment of other people living in Siberia – they have to cope with huge distances, a harsh climate and inconvenience due to the lack of civilisation and progress. My main arguments in this article are that the general interpretation of space and movement in Siberia is specific for a frontier and this is the reason why people are willing to accept such a life in this environment. On the one hand, travelling long distances has always been part of living in that region. “Coping with distance” (Vitebsky & Alekseyev 2000) is an expression of the frontier ethos that is embodied in the identity of *sibiriak*. *Sibiriaki* are tough frontier people that have to fight to survive. Climate, living conditions and distances are part of the Siberian “lived experience” (Bourdieu 1977) that distinguished local people from inhabitants of European Russia, and makes them proud of their achievement. On the other hand, newcomers do not live in a “wild world”. In their activities and travels they try to avoid “wilderness” as much as possible. Traders combine both views. Travelling thousands of kilometres does not mean to them travelling around in a wild and uncivilised country. On the contrary, the movement of entrepreneurs and their goods stays inside the “network of civilisation”. Not only does private trade contribute to the survival of the civilisation in a frontier, it takes place in a space that local people interpret as fully “civilised” – settlements, airports, airplanes, trucks. The hardships, linked to travelling, are seen as an organic part of the Siberian lifestyle and nothing unusual. Enduring long waits, long journeys and moving heavy luggage is a sign that one can cope with the harsh environment and one has the right to be there.

By following traders we also see how space is socially and culturally constructed and supported by economic activities. To understand the specific Siberian point of view interpreting space and movement in the region one has to take into account the historical context that sees Siberia as an unfinished frontier.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory CECT), University of Tartu and Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale), Germany.
- <sup>2</sup> The content of the expression *kommersant* is an ambivalent one. It is linked to the semi-legal activities of the traders which is caused by the non-regulated market economy in Russia. Trade in Russia includes cooperation with criminal groups, corruption and the shadow economy. On the other hand, traveling and local *kommersanty* are in many Siberian villages the only access to imported goods. The ambivalence of private entrepreneurship is very well discussed in several publications (e.g., Humphrey 1991; Mandel & Humphrey 2002)
- <sup>3</sup> One reason for the barter is the ever changing value and mistrust of the rouble. Anderson (2000a: 343) argues that in the mid-1990s ‘financial crises ... disqualified the rouble from the role as instrument of social integration’. Another reason is that via barter traders can manipulate prices more efficiently as I have shown elsewhere (Ventsel 2005: Chapter 3).
- <sup>4</sup> The most common way of sending parcels to the district was to ask people at the airport to take parcels with them. It always depended on whether one was able to find someone who was generous enough to take more weight with them.
- <sup>5</sup> Social construction of space is especially well demonstrated in the drawing of maps. The research shows that cartography is not “objective” but rather “subjective”, one can state that the map is how the drawer’s eye sees (Gow 1996; Tagirova 2007; Petto 2006; Skocz 2006).

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# ADAPTING CHRISTIANITY ON THE SIBERIAN EDGE DURING THE EARLY SOVIET PERIOD<sup>1</sup>

*Art Leete, Laur Vallikivi*

**Abstract:** The focus of this article is on different adaptations of Christianity by the northern indigenous peoples of Russia in the early Soviet period. We shall examine the community of Yup'ik Eskimo maritime hunters who experimented with Christian ritual forms in order to overcome the crisis caused by the intrusion of the Soviets. Naukan Yup'ik developed a Christian-influenced ritualistic practice to fight back against growing pressure from the Soviets. We propose that the spiritual developments of this community on the edge of Siberia were tightly related to changing economic, social and political conditions.

**Key words:** Christianity, reforms, Soviet period, the North, Yup'ik Eskimo

Early Soviet reforms had predominantly a secular and materialistic character. At the same time, these reforms produced unexpected outcomes in the religious attitudes, ideas and behaviour of the state's population. The intensification of religious feelings as a reaction to the public secular ideology and administrative measures was a common phenomenon from central Russia to the Siberian periphery. It spread amongst different ethnic and social groups from the very beginning of the Soviet period (*A Collection* 1919). Among others, the radical atheistic turn in Russia also provoked an upsurge of various Protestant groups who acted as conservative, anti-modernist and anti-Communist movements. Significantly, there was a period of mutual imitation between Communists and Protestants that has some importance for our analysis below.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the competition between secular and spiritual worldviews was developing rapidly in Siberia like everywhere else in Soviet Russia. The main architect of the anti-religious policies, Emelyan Iaroslavskii characterised these processes as a "search for ideological forms". As Iaroslavskii insisted, the poorest were more empathetic towards the anti-religious propaganda (Iaroslavskii 1922: 141–142). This statement is in accordance with the principle of the Communist ideology that envisions the urban and rural proletariat as a leading force in the socialist development. But besides this formal ideological correctness, Iaroslavskii described the *real* situation of the contemporary religious "front" in Siberia differing considerably from the ideological statements he himself made.

In this article we examine the remote community of the Yup'ik Eskimos who live in the easternmost corner of the Far East in Chukotka (see Kerttula 2000). Our aim is to bring peripheral events into a wider historical and anthropological context and demonstrate how the introduction of the Soviet regime in the border areas created a certain kind of border management through spiritual options. We rely here on written sources published both in the Soviet Union and elsewhere during the early Soviet period. These sources reflect contradictory perceptions of the situation because of divergent ideological perspectives the participants entertained. In dialogue with the recent anthropological scholarship on the area (see especially Schweitzer & Golovko 2007), we elaborate some issues we have started to focus upon elsewhere (Leete & Vallikivi 2011).

Unlike many Siberian groups, most of the Yup'ik remained un-baptised in the tsarist period, as they encountered Christian missionaries infrequently and relatively late. The change of the state regime in 1917 hit (although with delays) not only indigenous communities of Siberia but also missionaries whose activities were destined to stop. If the 1920s was a relatively benign period for some, especially for Protestant missionaries and shamans, from the late 1920s onwards, all religious specialists were effectively silenced, imprisoned or executed by the Soviet state. Since then all religious activists, not only the Orthodox clergy, but also the members of Protestant churches and the shamans were categorized as “the enemies of the people”. Proselytizing the ideology of Marxist-Leninist “scientific atheism”, the state itself acted as a secular missionary force causing widespread resistance.

The Yup'ik group underwent significant social and religious transformations in the early Soviet period. In one of the Yup'ik communities, a few people started a series of religious innovations in a vaguely Christian style at the beginning of the 1930s. We are not here going to discuss which category of “movement” these Christian-inspired actions could be classified as (see Leete & Vallikivi 2011; Schweitzer & Golovko 2007) or whether the actors could be called Christians (cf. Cannell 2006; Robbins 2009). Instead we will look at the broader field of imitative practices between the Soviets, Christians and the Yup'ik in that period which hopefully helps to capture what was at stake in these economic, political and religious transformations.

One can find little mention about the northern peoples' growing interest in Protestant missions within contemporary Soviet accounts. In 1925, Bonch-Osmolovskii writes that the American economic, political and cultural impact has had a positive influence on the development of the Chukchis (a term that comprised also then the Naukan Yup'ik). In his depiction, during the tsarist

period, American missionaries had worked in Chukotka and taught English to the natives. After the Russian Revolution, Americans intensified their missionary activities. Groups of evangelical missionaries (young American men and women) arrived to Chukotka. They presented sermons “in *yurtas*<sup>2</sup>, under the blank sky, on the rocks and boats” and the missionary work was allegedly having some success. The interest of the Chukchis towards America was supported also by stories about the life of the Eskimos, told by persons who had visited Alaska. Bonch-Osmolovskii claims that many Alaskan Eskimos had obtained higher education, had respectable jobs as engineers, medical doctors or lawyers. Alaskan indigenous peoples were represented in the Parliament, a network of schools and medical aid was organised brilliantly. The government supported reindeer herding and dog-keeping generously. His conclusion is unambiguous: “Naturally, our natives feel an attraction towards America. They see that the living standard of their American relatives is higher and everything looks more attractive there” (Bonch-Osmolovskii 1925: 84)<sup>3</sup>.

Another Soviet author Mel’nikov, who had spent two months among the Chukchis, supported the idea that the American influence had an indisputably positive effect on the indigenous peoples on the Soviet side of the Bering Strait: “What do the Chukchis need? For them, the free trade with the American merchants must be maintained. They get from the Americans all they need for their households. If the Chukchis have a good rifle, they can always find food” (Mel’nikov 1925: 161)<sup>4</sup>.

Before looking at the case of the Yup’ik Eskimos more closely, we shall discuss the mutually defined dynamics of Soviet and Christian imagination and practices. We propose that in the early Soviet period imitative engagement was not only specifically an issue of some indigenous groups on the margins of the empire but was practiced widely across various societal sections. This kind of “institutional mimesis” [mimesis in Taussig’s (1993) sense] was a mixture of admiration and accusatory practice between enemies who attempted to avoid yielding to each other. The idea that the borders had to be managed was underlying these relations. From the perspective of some Christian groups, in the early years at least, the revolutionary events were seen to contribute to the Christian evangelization. The soaring numbers of converts were proof of that. From the perspective of the early Bolsheviks, “sectarians” (*sektanty*) alongside Northern “natives” (*tuzemtsy*) were semi-acceptable groups as they bore some family resemblance to Communists. These classificatory and border management practices were also something imported to the indigenous communities for whom identity had not been historically an issue of rigid fixedness.

## **CHRISTIAN COMMUNISTS OR COMMUNIST CHRISTIANS?**

The Soviet state in its religious policies focussed above all on the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) because of their tight relationship with the tsarist regime. The ROC was portrayed as the ultimate adversary, the old regime, that spread “the opiate of the masses” and hindered creation of the socialist society. During the New Economic Policy (NEP) years (1921–28), according to the official party line, “anti-religious work was conceived as a long-term educative process rather than as ‘destructive and negative’” (Walters 1993: 8). As the hope for sudden conversion to Marxism-Leninism was not realised, leading ideologists became convinced that the uneducated masses had to be re-educated over time. Yet the ROC as an institution needed to be destroyed first. On the one hand, people had to be alienated from the Church as a necessary step to alienate them from their faith. On the other hand, there were material motives at play as these anti-church attacks were strongly motivated by the Bolsheviks’ desire for the wealth of the church. By forcibly taking church valuables, the new government aimed to gain twofold (Peris 1998).

In practice, Bolsheviks were considerably inconsistent and divided among themselves over anti-religious policies. While the ROC was being disintegrated, the Old Believers and Protestants enjoyed greater toleration and even occasional support from the authorities. As a result, in the 1920s, the number of evangelicals (most of them Baptists) increased manifold to the surprise of the revolutionaries. An Old Bolshevik Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, Lenin’s secretary from 1917 until 1920 and a student of the Old Believers, saw in the non-Orthodox a positive force against “the reactionaries”. According to him, dissident believers who had suffered during the tsarist regime alongside atheist revolutionaries were using the cover of religion merely to express their political protest (Coleman 2005: 158). The theory was that once the old regime was defeated, freedom and happiness could be built on earth. Believing in the power of the Bolshevik message (content), he had before the revolution even proposed to use the Christian language (form) more widely when explaining Marxist concepts on morality to the peasants (Williams 2001: 82). In addition to that, many Bolsheviks – being fascinated by the efficiency of the hardworking and cooperative spirit among sectarians – encouraged them to establish collective farms (Etkind 2003; Savin 2004). They seemed to be “the Christian proletariat” and a good example for the rest of the country (see also Nikol’skaia 2009: 66–92).

Looking closer at the relational dynamics of Communists and sectarians is instructive for understanding how important imitation and especially accusations of imitation were in that period. The 1920s saw a widespread mirroring

between Christians and Communists from various angles that created unavoidable distortions. Misrepresentations though were often deliberate. While the Bolsheviks' language was filled with Christian imagery and metaphors, either disguised or not (cf. e.g. Kharkhordin 1999), so the Protestants' language was not entirely free from Communist revolutionary motifs either. Some Baptists called their central organization "Ispolkom", that is a Soviet acronym denoting an "executive committee". Although this kind of mimicking was certainly not practiced by all evangelicals, these examples gave the authorities a good pretext to construct the image of Baptists as serious competitors who imitated the Bolsheviks' agenda. Communists in the press nicknamed the Baptists youth organisations "Bapsomol" or "Khristomol" (from the acronym "Komsomol", i.e. the Young Communist League) which portrayed evangelicals as cunningly stealing "successful" methods from the party (Coleman 2005: 199; Savin 2004: 63-64).

Iaroslavskii who led this accusatory campaign did not share Bonch-Bruevich's view and instead supported harsher measures towards sectarians (Savin 2004: 36-37). He considered imitation dangerous. In this context, an example he gave was about a Baptist meeting in Siberia where an evangelical song was sung to the melody of the "Internationale" and the lyrics contained motifs from the Communist revolutionary anthem. Calling it an "Evangelical Internationale", he concluded: "The religion attempted to meet the demands of masses" (Iaroslavskii 1922: 140-141; cf. also Coleman 2005: 199, 270 n. 5). It is not clear how widespread these revolutionary feelings among believers were. Yet they served as perfect opportunities for making accusations. One of these accusations was that they diverted the "masses", especially the youth, from the path of the socialist construction by means of copying party methods and thus creating a parallel society (Coleman 2005: 209-211; Savin 2004: 62-64). Accusations of copying were a means in an ideological campaign against sectarians who threatened to hinder the creation of a new Soviet person and society, or in other words, their own programme of conversion. The idea that it was possible to come to exercise power over the proletariat by copying Communist methods (especially the organizational form and not content) yet seems to confirm the power of mimesis in the Bolsheviks' thinking.

Although the Orthodox were less assertive than Protestants in defending their positions, there were many of those who were ready to adapt themselves to the new ideology inside the Orthodox Church. In 1922, the Soviet authorities, by supporting an existing schismatic movement in the Church, helped into power "Renovationists" (*obnovlentsy*). These so-called red priests, managed by Bolsheviks, adopted the language of class conflict in order to demonstrate their allegiance to the power (Roslof 2002). Although the Renovationists'

success remained short-term, this episode (alongside the attack against the Patriarch Tikhon) marked a beginning of the period of deepening crisis inside the ROC. A real crisis for all Christians arrived at the end of the decade with the beginning of the Stalinist cultural revolution in 1928. Virtually all religious unions were shut down by the mid-1930s. Attempts to convert believers into Communists were replaced by destroying them. At the same time, the proportion of Christians in the population had not decreased significantly, despite Stalin's objective to eradicate religion completely by 1937 (Walters 1993: 15).

### **PRIMITIVE COMMUNISTS OR COMMUNIST PRIMITIVES?**

In the eyes of the state northern indigenous peoples were quite a different case compared to various kinds of Christians. They were seen as promising raw material that could be shaped into new Soviet men and women through an accelerated civilizing process. When the so-called Committee of the North was formed in 1924 in order to manage the northern natives, debates about the integration of the northerners into the broader society became common (Slezkine 1994)<sup>5</sup>. The members of the Committee were convinced that indigenous reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen lived in classless groups. They were seen as "primitive communists" who in their primitiveness did not exploit each other (exploiters in the North were Russian old settlers, American traders and other "capitalists"). Natives had to be taught first the significance of the October Revolution and the central role of its leader Lenin. Using widely the expertise of ethnographers, the Committee despatched to the tundra and taiga "missionaries of the new culture and of Soviet statehood", as a well-known anthropologist Bogoraz put it (Bogoraz-Tan 1925a: 48). Enthusiastic ethnographers educated by Shternberg were sent to the North for surveying what was out there and for teaching the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism and civilization to the Siberian aborigines. In practice it turned out to be no simple task. Once in the tundra or taiga, they met similar difficulties to their Orthodox predecessors ranging from cold and hunger to the enmity of the Russian old settlers (Grant 1995; Leete 2005a; Slezkine 1994; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

Both Protestants and the northern peoples came to occupy a somewhat ambiguous place in the (divided) imagination of leading state ideologists of the 1920s. From their point of view both sectarians and northern natives could be sympathised with to a certain extent because they had suffered during the old regime. Also they were considered "natural" socialists (or Communists), as they had no class division in their ranks (a position that was revised in the late 1920s). And yet they were seen as misguided or ignorant and therefore in need

of (re-)education. Illiterate natives had not received any formal education before except for a few. Sectarians who were more often literate (thanks to their everyday Bible reading) than party officials, could not be represented as uneducated. Challenges of converting these two minorities were thus different. Unlike the northern peoples, evangelicals could be approached without difficulty, as they were seen everywhere, even on the banks of the Moskva River where they performed baptisms. The problem was that the Protestants did not want let to go their beliefs despite the systematic efforts of the state-managed League of the Godless (Peris 1998). Because of their “stubbornness”, the hostility of the authorities towards them was growing.

In 1928, the protectionist policy towards indigenous northerners started to disappear, as the Committee of the North had to align with the cultural revolution. Northerners were facing the acceleration of time and a leap from the Stone Age to socialism within ten years (Grant 1995: 9–10; Slezkine 1994: 220, 265). With the introduction of an ideology for total class struggle, the earlier, natural, gradual development of small northern peoples was replaced by a programme of enforced transformation. Widespread protectionist calls such as not equating shamans with priests (e.g., Leonov 1929: 226) were no longer published in periodicals. The other way around, now shamans became equated with priests and declared to be exploiters alike and thus subject to punishment under the law (Skachkov 1934). They were taxed, expelled from the local “native councils” (*tuzemnye sovety*) and their regalia taken away. Some were just arrested or shot, others managed to stay hidden, concealing their practices or turning them into artistic performances (Leete 2005b: 59; Slezkine 1994: 226–228; Vitebsky 2005: 231–255).

Thus in the 1930s, as mentioned above, the Orthodox clergy, the members of Protestant churches and the shamans were categorized as “the enemies of the people”. Ordinary people who had been allegedly duped by the believers had to be shown the light of the scientific truth and their false idols had to be destroyed. For example, Soviet officials and police were sent to the tundra to confiscate shamans’ drums, statues of spirits and other items definable as “religious”. They repeated what they had done in the South where they shot icons in order to show that God did not punish them (Brovkin 1998: 94). The Nenets in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, still seventy years later, tell a story how a “Russian communist” came to a reindeer herders’ camp and asked to see an image of the female spirit of the tent. In order to prove the figure’s “mere materiality”, he took a rifle and shot it. But the bullet bounced back and killed the Russian (see also Vallikivi 2009). Similar stories are numerous from all over Siberia.

Bearing in mind changes over the time in power relations, we shall next focus on the case of the Naukan Yup'ik who became a part of the ideological battle for minds. The results were sometimes quite unexpected.

## TRANSFORMATIONS AMONG NAUKAN YUP'IK MARITIME HUNTERS

In the coastal village of Naukan (Nuvuqaq) on the East Cape (Dezhnev), the north-easternmost point of Asia, the local Yup'ik Eskimo community became home for a heightened ritual activity in the early 1930s (especially 1932–33). Anthropologists Golovko and Schweitzer carried out an interview with a Naukan Eskimo called Nikolay Ivanovich Yaken in 1993. From that we learn that in Yaken's childhood two local men called Nunegnilan and Kantaggun and a woman called Aminak organised gatherings and performed rituals inspired by Christianity. Nunegnilan was known to be a shaman who then became a *pop* ('priest'), the name that Yaken attributed to all three. They came together on Sundays in a tent (*yaranga*) and invited people to participate in these gatherings. The *poppy* (the plural for *pop*) wore black gowns with wide long sleeves and self-made crosses hung on their chests. One of the *poppy* who had a white handkerchief in his hands went around in the *yaranga* and muttered something. After "talks" dances were performed. According to Yaken, one third of the village was engaged in this new ritual activity. The *poppy* did not go and hunt for themselves but the "people who believed in them" brought meat and blubber to them. They did not allow their children to attend school. "They hated those who attended school," recalls Yaken who was then a schoolboy himself. They also spoke against washing with soap. Yet not all in the village shared their feelings and there were those who opted for relations with the Soviet Russians. Yaken claimed that "everybody" respected his brother. As a proof, he said: "When the [Russian] chief border guard came to Naukan, he stayed at my brother's *yaranga*". Yet the *poppy* disliked his brother because of his close relationship with the Russians. When his brother visited a Sunday ritual carried out by the *poppy*, one of them noticed him and said: "Oh, I feel dizzy; I can feel the Russian smell. Kick him out" (Golovko & Schweitzer 2006: 102–103; Schweitzer & Golovko 2007: 40; see also Leete & Vallikivi 2011).<sup>6</sup>

Naukan villagers had tight kin and trade contacts with Iñupiaq (later increasingly more mixed with Yup'ik) island communities on the Big and Little Diomede (across the Russian/Soviet-US border) and Iñupiaq Eskimo coastal settlements on the Seward Peninsula in Alaska. Asiatic Eskimos travelled to Alaska often in order to exchange fox pelts, old ivory and other local raw mate-

rials for food, rifles, clothes and other modern commodities that were scarce on the Russian side (Schweitzer & Golovko 1995, 1997). Also in the second half of the 19th century, American whalers became very active in the area and some from Naukan even worked on these ships (Schweitzer & Golovko 2007: 40).

American Eskimo settlements had attracted Yup'ik Eskimos already in the pre-Soviet period for various demographic and economic reasons (cf. Krupnik 1994: 69). Yup'ik and Iñupiaq communities were going through a significant demographic change since the late 19th century. Krupnik writes that there was a steady eastward drift. By 1930, almost all Iñupiaq-speaking Big Diomeders had moved to Little Diomede from where people moved to the Alaskan mainland. Yup'ik-speaking Naukan villagers settled on Big Diomede and Little Diomede. Krupnik gives as a reason for this chain-migration as better economic conditions on the American side and the restoration and viability of the communities (Krupnik 1994: 63).

Economic conditions of the Chukchis, Yup'ik Eskimos and Koryaks were relatively satisfactory by the end of the tsarist period mainly due to foreign trade (Bogoraz-Tan 1925b: 29; Bonch-Osmolovskii 1925: 81–82). During the 1920s, the American economic influence on Chukotka was growing even more. After the First World War, these regions were cut off from the Russian mainland and they were supplied almost exclusively by American, Japanese and other traders (Kuftin 1925: 67; Bonch-Osmolovskii 1925: 83–84, 86–89; *Istoria Chukotki* 1989: 156–158; Orlova 1999: 21). The Communists were aware of the attraction of the US, as pointed out above. In their civilizing mission, the Soviets attempted to improve the material side of the Yup'ik life but the success was minimal.

The import of foreign goods to the Far East was even supported by the Soviet authorities in the early years of Soviet statehood. In 1923, *Dalrevkom*<sup>7</sup> provided a right to the British company Hudson Bay to supply tax-free to Chukotka and Kamchatka in order to challenge the domination of companies from the US and Japan. In 1929, the Committee of the North complained that the Soviet state was still not able to supply goods for Chukotka (Gurvich 1987: 19; see also Vasil'ev & Tugolukov 1987: 62; *Istoria Chukotki* 1989: 169).

Yet we can see the contradictory nature of the Soviet policies similar to the one with the Protestants we have discussed above. Local Soviet officials attempted to discredit and “unmask” the American traders, as we can see from the report of the secretary of *Dalrevkom* G. G. Rudykh, written in the early 1920s:

We told a hunter that traders cheated them, paying too little for furs.  
But he answered: ‘Give us more and provide things that we really need.

Then I can sell everything to you.’ But we could not give him anything because we had no goods at all (*Borba* 1967: 135).

While visiting Chukotka in 1924, Knud Rasmussen describes his experience with a Chukchi man “who spoke a few words of English” and who was interested in doing business with him “somewhere out of sight along the shore”. Rasmussen insisted that he wanted to conform to the law, but the man “protested, urging that the shops were all empty, and one could not even purchase ammunition.” Rasmussen then refers to a case when a trader from the American side came to barter on Chukotka but was seized and fined before being released (Rasmussen 1927: 364).

As it appears from these sources, the Yup’ik Eskimos were tightly integrated into the overseas economic and religious networks. Although the Soviet reforms (including attempts to restrict communication between the Siberian Yup’ik and foreigners) had predominantly materialistic and secular aims, several unexpected spiritual outcomes accompanied the introduction of the new statehood.

As we saw above, from the indigenous perspective, certain changes had been thought to cause undesired spiritual consequences. Naukan *poppy* reacted against the Soviet policies, especially their divisive attempts to change social relations in the village, collectivise their items and manage their bodies (see also Leete & Vallikivi 2011). For instance, the resistance against washing with soap can be seen as a reaction against intrusive politics of the human body which from the native point of view can be a major focus of the change (see Vilaça & Wright 2009). Wearing underwear, washing hands regularly, weekly visits to sauna and the cutting of hair became a mandatory part of everyday life. Soviet ethnographer Menovshchikov reports cultural-enlightening step-by-step victories over the Asiatic Eskimos who “never washed themselves” (1959: 135). A special programme was launched by teachers and doctors at the beginning of the 1930s to accustom natives to wash their faces and hands, also to cut their hair. “In the beginning before coming to school, children washed themselves with urine that created an unbearable smell in the classroom for an unaccustomed person. Then an obligatory washing at school in the mornings was introduced” (Menovshchikov 1959: 136). Special sanitary commissions were created that worked in the village councils and the Komsomol was called in for the fight against filth, the major sign of the backwardness of the natives.

In many ways this was similar to what missionaries and teachers did on the American side (cf. Berardi 1999). There in various locations they met considerable resistance, especially from local shamans (Fienup-Riordan 1991: 76, 119–120)<sup>8</sup>. Nyseters, a Lutheran missionary couple, describe a situation of an Eskimo man falling ill with tuberculosis on Little Diomed:

Encouraged by his wife and mother-in-law, he expressed a desire to know the Lord. Not recovering immediately, he resorted to witchcraft – giving his gun as advance payment. His family, until then one of the cleanest in the community, cooperated by subjecting themselves to a long list of rules such as don't bathe, don't comb your hair, and don't work. Of course these didn't help. Finally Elasanga asked to be carried over to the other island, possibly because a shaman works better without opposition (Rodli 1999: 118–119).

Both Christian missionaries in Alaska and Soviet Communists on Chukotka executed their civilising mission by imposing a regime of exclusivity and hierarchy. But the way they did it and how they succeeded in it were significantly different. As most sources confirm, what likely mattered the most for the Naukan villagers was the abundance of cargo in America. It can be argued that it was a logical step to relate the presence of the missionaries with this abundance. The Soviets were not able to offer the material exchange because of the lack of goods. Material and spiritual is hard to disentangle from each other, especially from the viewpoint of the indigenous population for whom the distinction did not exist in this neat way. The sources we have seem to confirm that in the eyes of the Naukan Yup'ik *poppy* acquiring commodities must have depended on Christian spirits and successful imitation of priestly actions.

## DISCUSSION

A wider point that can be made is that in a colonial encounter of the kind as described above there are limits to permeability and receptivity in otherwise permeable and receptive indigenous communities. Especially when the pressure is understood to jeopardise existing social and religious forms of relatedness, boundary drawing between the “us” and “them” can become central. We would propose that the colonial pressure from the outside relied on boundary maintenance and thus compelled to imitate similar boundary practices by natives. This became the case especially in the early 1930s when the class enemy campaign against the kulaks and shamans was launched. Sources from all over Siberia show that collectivization, schooling, new rules of hygiene caused significant stress and resistance among indigenous groups (Leete 2005a). Despite “an active dissemination of scientific knowledge” and “atheistic propaganda by State and party workers, teachers, and health workers against the *reactionary* essence of shamanism and its *harmful* effects upon people's consciousness” (Tein 1994: 124, emphases are ours), conversions to Communism had to rely largely on repressive methods. It was not so much a matter of the institutions themselves than the “imposed choice” which drove many locals to

become defiant. The Soviet practices of exclusivity were introduced without much space for manoeuvring and as a result organised resistance emerged here and there all over Siberia. Often it took some form of ritual intensification, based either on non-Christian practices (Leete 2005a; Vallikivi 2005: 39–41) or Christian ones, as discussed here.

In our earlier joint study (Leete & Vallikivi 2011) we concentrated on the pattern of imitation that can be observed in cases of indigenous re-ritualisation in the early Soviet period. In this article, we want to stress a few other things to clarify some aspects of indigenous adaptation to economic, political and religious changes through imitating dominant social actors. The appropriation of Christianity can be seen as a form of resistance. Copying can be highly creative, or as Jebens has put it, imitation can be conceptualised as an “active mimetic appropriation” (Jebens 2004: 166). This explanation echoes Taussig’s account of the Amerindian Cuna imitating the Europeans by carving figurines of the whites (Taussig 1993: xiii). What Taussig’s account however lacks is how the Cuna protected themselves from being completely absorbed by the Other. Santos-Granero writes about the Peruvian Yanesha:

Through the act of copying, the copyist becomes the Other in the act of making or enacting that which is being copied. Mimesis is not about erasing the frontiers between Self and Other but about redressing the power inequalities that exist between both. This can be achieved only by temporarily turning into the Other to appropriate the Other’s powers. Once this objective is achieved, the mimetic agent goes back to being Self (2009: 487).

The intruding Soviets were managing a border with natives who took the practice over and thus became the Other in some sense. To put it differently, the new kind of border management itself became mimicked.

Certainly, the model of imitation does not cover *all* factors that shape the multi-directional course of a dialogic change in remote indigenous communities. Religious changes are part of larger developments in any society. As Bellah (1970: 64) has noticed some time ago, modernisation always involves some problems of a religious nature. After entering into closer contact with the modern world, indigenous societies must handle a certain identity crisis linked, according to their worldview, to the realm of the spirits. Soviets themselves emphasised some links between their materialistic reforms and Siberian indigenous groups’ spiritual world (introducing of scientific medicine was targeted, besides improving people’ health, against the influence of shamans). But many people in Siberia treated also the other Soviet reforms as a kind of spiritual attack.

We can conclude that changes in the Yup’ik worldview indicate several extreme social outputs during the first decades of the Soviet period. People were

troubled and intimidated by the large scale of changes, applied by the Soviets in different spheres of life. Often these official reforms had a violent character and, at the same time, local people could not understand the general idea that initiated these reforms. In such conditions it made sense to turn towards religious ideas and practices of a new kind, potentially more transcendent ones. Material pressure from the official Soviet side actualised religious feelings in different forms among the Siberian indigenous and non-indigenous groups. This is something that is often overlooked while analysing complex processes of sociocultural change during transitional or liminal periods.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory CECT) and the Estonian Science Foundation project nr 8335.
- <sup>2</sup> *Yurta* – skin tent of the Chukchis and other northern peoples of Russia.
- <sup>3</sup> Bonch-Osmolovskii's description of the Alaskan indigenous peoples' situation does not correspond to the reality. But this approach illustrates the idea, perhaps, shared by the Soviet ideologists, that in the US the native peoples' needs were taken into account more than in the USSR.
- <sup>4</sup> Knud Rasmussen documented the same situation during his short visit to Chukotka in 1924: "Until the American Bureau of Education commenced work in Alaska, the Siberian Eskimos were greatly superior to the American, both in conditions of life and in general estimation; now, however, the reverse is the case, and those Siberian natives who have been to Nome for trading purposes marvel at the enormous progress made by their fellows on that side, while they themselves live in a country whose government seems to take no interest in them whatever beyond getting their furs at the lowest possible price" (Rasmussen 1927: 378).
- <sup>5</sup> Its full name was the Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands of the All-Soviet Central Executive Committee of the USSR. It was active until 1936.
- <sup>6</sup> Among the Koryaks of the Karaginski district a semi-revitalistic movement also occurred. The situation in the region developed into a crisis when the 1927 catch of salmon around the coast was too poor. Indigenous communities could not fulfil the state plan for fish. The Koryak shaman called Savva declared that the spirits were angry and aimed to punish those who had abandoned the ancestors' traditions. To avoid this, one needed to give up the Russian clothes, stop visiting the sauna, consuming Russian food or have any relationship with Russians. Savva succeeded to convince many local Koryaks. Conflicts began to occur between the Koryaks and the local administration. The sauna was destroyed. Some Koryaks, that continued to communicate with the Russians, were forced to leave the settlement. Similar accidents occurred in other Koryak villages too. The problem of spreading the anti-Russian movement was discussed in the Congresses of the Soviets at district and regional levels (*Istoria* 1993: 212–213). Unfortunately, we do not have any information concerning the further development of the Koryak movement.

<sup>7</sup> Dalrevkom is the acronym for the 'Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee' in Russian.

<sup>8</sup> Fienup-Riordan quotes missionary Edith Kilbuck, a Moravian missionary in Kuskokwim River Valley, Alaska, in the late 19th century: "The gospel of service is the gospel that wins... So hand and hand with the message of salvation went the duties of teaching better living here and now. Better homes, better food, better clothes, the use of soap, and water, and washtubs of dishes and spoons and knives and forks – of individual cups and towels – of reading and writing and singing and playing – of marriage and fidelity and the training of children – and the hundred and one things that go to make up the life of us all" (Fienup-Riordan 1991: 76).

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### FIRST MEETING OF ETHNOBIOLOGISTS WORKING IN EASTERN EUROPE – PADISE, ESTONIA

The International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE) regional ethnobiology workshop “Old treasures in the new Europe: the future of ethnobiology in the East and Far East” was held in Kallaste tourist farm, Padise, Harjumaa, Estonia, October 15–17, 2010. The workshop reflected a special emphasis on the ethnobiology of the former communist Eurasia. Participating scholars were mostly conducting research in Eastern Europe and its border areas. The idea of the workshop was to share an overview of the current ethnobiological research in the region, and to establish an interdisciplinary research network that may in the future lead to joint research, publications and projects. The broader purpose was to get to know each other, and to find overlapping points in our research, that might open more possibilities for future cooperation.

First evening was dedicated to getting acquainted with each other, as most of the participants met for the first time. Also, the social program included watching the “Keeper of Seven Powers” made by Estonian filmmaker Rein Maran and a short discussion on the film. The most memorable part of the evening was visit to sauna, introduced and guided by Jan Seepter. Most of the attendees had never experienced sauna, and even some local participants mentioned, that the experience they got attending sauna after Jan’s lecture was much deeper than the ones experienced so far. Until the end of the seminar, sauna was an every evening event enjoyed by all participants.

Most of the presentations were concerned with plants and their use for multiple purposes, showing that most sustainable part of Eastern-European ethnobiology is covered by ethnobotany. The working part of the meeting was opened by the main initiator of the workshop, Andrea Pieroni (Italy), who said a few words about the purpose of the meeting and presented an overview of ethnobiology in the Central Mediterranean and the Alps. Renata Sõukand (Estonia) talked about her research on patterns of Estonian herbal knowledge, stressing the concept of herbal landscape. Ingvar Svanberg’s (Sweden) presentation concentrated on history and methods in ethnobiology. Valeria Kolosova (Russia) presented her research in the ethnolinguistics and geography-linguistics of Russian dialects, and Daiva Šešuskaite (Lithuania) gave an overview of ethnobiology in Lithuania compared with Europe. The first session was ended by Mare Kõiva (Estonia), introducing zoofolkloristics and her research on human-animal relations. In the second section Łukasz Łuczaj (Poland) gave an overview of the use of wild plants in Eastern Europe, with the main emphasis on Poland. Zsolt Molnár’s (Hungary) presentation on ethnogeobotanical studies in Hungary was followed by Anna Varga’s (Hungary) overview of the ethnobiology of used and abandoned wooded pastures in the Carpathian Basins. Aleksandra Ippolitova (Russia) presented her research on ethnobotany and plant lore in Russian herbal manuscripts, and Ülle Sillasoo (Estonia) gave an introduction to the archeobotanical approach to late Medieval religious art. In the afternoon session Iwona Kołodziejska-Degórska (Poland) introduced

her concept of mental herbaria, and Raivo Kalle (Estonia) talked about the landscape and medicinal plants. Martin Eessalu (Estonia) gave some insight into a methodological approach to most of the abstract categories of living nature in Estonia, Andres Kuperjanov (Estonia) presented animal-related Estonian astronymes and Aivar Jürgenson (Estonia) introduced the perception of mushrooms in Estonian culture. In the last session Monika Kujawska (Poland) talked about the ethnomedicine of Polish immigrants, Lisa Steker (Russia/Germany) introduced her research on wild plants in Eastern-Siberia and agrobiodiversity in Germany, and Aleksandra Anryka (Poland) gave some insight into the vegetation in rustic gardens. Zbynek Polesny (Czech Republic) introduced the ethnobotanical research of his group on agrobiodiversity use and management in traditional agriculture, and Marianna Teräväinen (Finland) ended the long day of presentations with a speech on ethnoentomology. The hard-working day was summed up by international evening program, performed by participants themselves: Daiva, Molnar and Martin. The concert was wonderful and relaxing.

The second day of the meeting was dedicated to facilitated brainstorming, clustering, and discussion about ethnobiological topics perceived to be the most crucial in Eastern Europe. Finally, we designed a concrete action plan for collaborations: several common papers on cross-cultural comparisons, exchanges between institutes, etc. Among other subject, the agreement was made, that the joint research themes would cover comparative forestry, agriculture, one-plant comparative study, cross-cultural



*The participants of the workshop made a short visit to Padise monastery.  
Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2010.*

studies and European content fieldworks. The need for mailing list, electronic directory of research centers and researchers in ethnobiology, library collections and joint grant proposals, as well as next workshop stressing comparative methods was outlined and tasks assigned to ones responsible for each step. As a step for popularizing ethnobiology as science, several concrete books were proposed: one on children toys, one about plant mythology, barely covered so far, a book on the ethnobotany in Eastern-Europe and the encyclopedia on European folk medicine.

The participants of the workshop made a short visit to Padise monastery, contrasting with the next day fieldtrip to the Open Air Museum (guided by the researchers Anneli Banner and Maret Tamjärv). Although the weather was quite cold, the participants had a chance to taste some late berries in the forest on their way to Padise monastery and to make a short stay at the wooden meadow that happened to be on our way from Padise to Tallinn.

Abstracts and presentations of the lectures held at the meeting, as well as photos of the workshop are available online: <http://www.folklore.ee/~renata/workshop/default.htm>. The workshop was supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. Great thanks to Matt Herman for the design of the web page and to Andres Kuperjanov for taking care of the presentation equipment.

The second ISE regional Eastern-European workshop was held in Királyrét, Hungary, October 14–17, 2011. The overview of the workshop by Anna Varga and Zsolt Molnár is available at <http://ethnobiology.net/conference-and-workshop-reports-2/#EEE2>.

Renata Sõukand

## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PAREMIOLOGY IN PARIS**

The international conference of paremiology “All Roads lead to Paris Diderot” / Colloque Parémiologie “Tous les chemins mènent à Paris Diderot” took place this summer from the 29th of June until the 2nd of July 2011 in Paris in Diderot University. The event was organised by the language faculty (UFR d’Études Interculturelles de Langues Appliquées) of Diderot University represented by Jean-Philippe Zouogbo in cooperation with the phraseology researchers’ association Europhras.

It can be stated that this was the first grandiose and extensive conference of phraseology researchers. There were 120 participants from all Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America. (More details can be found on the homepage <http://www.eila.univ-paris-diderot.fr/recherche/clillac/paremiologie2011/index.>)



*The organisers of the paremiology conference in Diderot University: Jean-Philippe Zouogbo, Natalie Kübler, Jean-Michel Benayoun, Ann-Marie Kilgallon.  
Photo by Joanna Szerszunowicz 2011.*

The main purpose of this conference was to bring together the more experienced and already recognised researchers and the young postgraduates or scientists newly obtained the degree.

In addition to 87 speeches, plenary speeches were held. Five basic speakers were already recognised scientists: Chilukuri Bhuvaneswar “Proverbial Linguistics: Theory and Practice in the Karmik Linguistic Paradigm” (University of Sebha, Libya), Wolfgang Mieder ““Think Outside The Box”. Origin, Nature, and Meaning of Modern Anglo-American Proverbs” (University of Vermont, United States of America), and Georges Kleiber “Pour une classification sémantique des proverbes”, Jean-René Ladmiral “Sagesse proverbiale et vérités parémiologiques”, Jean-Claude Anscombre “Pour une classification linguistique des formes sentencieuses” (France). The most important aspects in the research of proverbs from the past to the present-day were discussed. Herewith I would emphasise W. Mieder who focused on the proverb parodies but stressed that even such texts are a part of tradition and thus, the proverbs are nothing remaining in the past but are also in active use nowadays.

Most of the speeches held in English, German, French and Spanish were devoted to the nature of proverbs as folkloric expressions and their use primarily in a comparative manner, i.e. based on the folkloric matter in two or more languages (e.g. English-Russian, German-Russian, English-Spanish, French-Romanian, German-Arab, etc.). Among other things, the research material originates greatly from the literature and press, i.e. written language. A review of the development of the large-scale cooperation

project *SprichWort* was given. This project concentrates the proverbial matter in five historically related languages – German, Slovenian, Slovakian, Czech and Hungarian – into one databank as a corpus and its main purpose is the use of such databank in language studies.

One of the dominant topics was the theoretic framework of proverb research, i.e. research methods that would be optimal to treat the proverbial expressions in a modified cultural environment. It also became evident that the term *proverb* may be treated considerably wider than commonly accustomed. For example, no big difference is made between the proverbs and proverbial bywords and rather the use situations of such sayings are focused on. Functions of proverbs have always been an interesting research topic and nowadays the topic is researched on the basis of the examples from the internet. According to the researchers of databases, the proverbial nature of the texts is the most problematic case. The problem is whether the text represents a variant of a well-known proverb or language game or casual construction. This provided a basis for a critical opinion that the press texts are not an enough reliable material for the proverb researches on the basis of language corpuses because such texts represent a creative approach of one person, i.e. journalist, and no tradition. The multilingual databases raised a question about matches. The matches there tend to be the texts that are actually no matches but rather variants of proverbial sayings.

As the researchers represent very different specialities such as linguistics, folkloristics, literature science, history, psychology and pedagogy, such large-scale events allow to bring forth the different approaches and to find out the issues under discussion and to find solutions to them.

The conference in Paris confirmed again that the proverb research is popular, and not merely for the specialists of one area but a lot wider. Although the proverbs may be taken for obsolete wisdoms because of the short wording, they contain something that keeps them in use. Thus, there may again be a reason to gather to discuss the proverb as a research object. The next paremiology conference will take place in two years also in Diderot University.

Anneli Baran

## **INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL FOR HUMOUR RESEARCH (ISS11) AT THE ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM, ESTONIA**

Back in 2001, Professor Willibald Ruch organised the first humour summer school at the Queen's University of Belfast, and since then every year another country has been given the honour of hosting the long-standing and increasingly popular academic event. The *11th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications* (ISS11) was held in Tartu, Estonia, from August 15–20, 2011 (see: <http://www.humoursummerschool.org/11/> for details). It was achieved by a joint effort of the Estonian Literary Museum and the University of Zurich.

The local organiser was Liisi Laineste from the Estonian Literary Museum, whereas the course director Professor Willibald Ruch from the University of Zurich, supported by the serving ISS advisory board, was responsible for bringing together a reputable group of lecturers. The course was intended to provide a basic introduction to humour studies as well as give a more detailed insight into the research of humour and laughter. The programme aimed to give an overview of the interdisciplinary nature of humour research. Throughout the week, the 28 lectures and workshops by thirteen speakers described current humour theory and empirical evidence, addressed special research issues and applications of the theories, and gave a special consideration to discussing methodology and evaluation of research findings during the daily methodology sessions. The fact of having an unprecedented number of thirteen speakers allowed for a greater diversity in the topics covered. Lectures were given by a number of internationally renowned researchers and professors, for example Professor Christie Davies (Department of Sociology, University of Reading, UK), Professor Holger Kersten (Amerikanistik, Universitet Magdeburg, Germany), Professor Arvo Krikmann (Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Professor Alexander Kozintsev (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St. Petersburg, Russia), Professor Willibald Ruch (Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Switzerland), to name just a few. As every year, a receiver of the Graduate Student Award from the International Society for Humour Research is invited to give a lecture at the humour summer school. This year it was Clare Watters (MA, Italian Studies, University of Birmingham, UK), who delivered a brilliant lecture on stand-up. The delegates also benefitted from the *Meet the Lecturer* sessions where the participants could sign up for a one-to-one discussion with a lecturer of his/her choice on two consecutive time-slots in the



*“11th International Summer School for Humour Research: Theory, Research and Applications” opening reception was attended by all the ISS11 lecturers and delegates, as well as local academics interested in humour studies. Photo by Alar Madisson 2011.*

mornings. Topics of the lectures ranged from rather general titles as “What is humour? Etymology and taxonomic studies” (W. Ruch) and “Funny business” (J. Morreall) to very specific ones like “Can laughter make us happier?” (A. Realo) and “Jokes about particular sets of women: Mothers in law (wife’s mother), blondes, Jewish women, female car drivers and lesbians” (C. Davies). Some more practical approaches were introduced during the two workshops, one about computational linguistics and the possibilities it opens in humour research (“Build your own jokes”, G. Ritchie), and the other about assessing facial muscular movements as evidence from judging stimuli as humorous (“How to measure smiling and laughter”, T. Platt and W. Ruch). All lectures received a lot of attention and thought from the participants, and discussions could be overheard at breaks and lunch hours, and even throughout the evenings’ social events.

A new approach to making overseas lecturers available in the summer school traditionally taking place in Europe was introducing three video lectures, delivered by Professor John Morreall from the College of William and Mary, USA. His first lecture “Funny business: The benefits of humor at work” touched upon the ways the humour finds use in all kinds of professional settings like private companies, educational groups ranging from pre-schools to medical schools, hospitals and other places, using a lot of examples. The video was pre-recorded to ensure a smooth presentation (but it can be accessed also post-summerville on Youtube, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3rqPfuKt1A&feature=related>). Individual Skype consultations were scheduled to take place after the video lectures so that students could engage in discussions with the lecturer just as after regular talks. His lecture was based on three main points that his research has led him to conclude: humour fosters physical and mental health, especially by reducing stress, secondly, it promotes mental flexibility: the ability to cope with change, handle mistakes in a constructive way, and solve problems creatively, and thirdly, humor works as a social lubricant, creating rapport and team spirit, and smoothing out potential rough spots with colleagues and with clients. With a number of amusing examples from his past experience as a teacher, humour consultant and workshop instructor, he claimed that certain distance is needed to allow the mind to perceive the funniness of real-life events or other stimuli. There is a parallel research in progress that develops on the same idea (Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren 2011, ISHS conference in Boston, Massachusetts, USA), and it shows good potential to solve some of the problems that scholars trying to formulate a general theory of humour have been facing. Its basic tenet is that for something to be funny, it has to be experienced simultaneously as wrong (a violation that threatens our understanding of a proper world) and not wrong (benign or somehow acceptable). The mental or physical distance that is needed to perceive a stimulus as benign is controllable to a certain extent. The disposition to do that can be enhanced through training. John Morreall also listed a number of research results, stating that there can be differences there between women’s and men’s reactions, men’s humour being more competitive, inclusive of sarcasm and practical jokes. Criticism and sarcasm, on the other hand, may interfere with the beneficial potential of humour. Distance from one’s own actions and experiences, the art of taking oneself not too seriously, is the key to leading a stress-free life, is Morreall’s message in a nutshell.

An example of a more theoretical lecture although not void of colourful examples was that by Professor Holger Kersten from the University of Magdeburg, Germany, who gave an overview of his meta-study about the meaning of the concept “national humour”. Building on the statements of J. Berg Esenwein (1904) and Elliott Oring (2003), a century apart from each other, Professor Kersten framed his lecture “National humour: A critical perspective” with three facts about the phenomena under surveillance: it is the body of humorous material that exists in a given nation, it refers to the humorous themes, motifs, and techniques that are often present in the comedic acts prevalent in one specific country, and it applies to the cultural conventions and rules that govern them. He continued with giving examples of national humour styles (or, rather, beliefs about their existence in academic literature) in Great Britain, France and the United States. Presenting a case study that compared scholarly views of Canadian and American (US) humour, he drew attention to the fact that manifestations of humor have been regarded by literary and cultural critics as significant components in the cultural self-definition even if the listed truly essential features of a nation’s sense of humour do not always overlap. Humor has served as an important factor providing group cohesion and a larger sense of cultural or national unity. At the same time, it has been one way of distinguishing one nation from another. In this sense, discourses on humour provide one way of imagining a large group of unrelated people as members of one “imagined community” as Benedict Anderson described it in 1983.

The six days full of lectures at ISS11 were attended by 28 participants. The student body consisted of undergraduates, postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers, and university faculty members, as well as professionals. The participants came from 17 countries from all over the world, including Australia, Asia, America, and of course Europe. Academic disciplines represented included Psychology, Anthropology, Italian Studies, Linguistics, Sociology, Folkloristics, American Studies, Communication Studies, etc. The variety of participants’ experiences was reflected in the debates engendered by many of the sessions. A big event for the participants was the Summer School Symposium which featured presentations of the participants’ planned or finished research, or ideas on how to implement and use humour in applied settings. The presentations comprised of oral presentations and scientific poster presentations. Student prizes put forth by the Mouton de Gruyter publication house were received by Piret Voolaid for her presentation “On the Relations between Joking Questions and Paremiology – Proverbs in the Service of Humour Creation” (Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Tracey Platt received the prize book for “Differences of Duchenne smiles for those with fear of being laughed at” (Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Switzerland), Maria Goeth talked about “Humour in Music” (Department of Musicology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany), and a poster presentation by Bastian Mayerhofer titled “Cognitive processes during belief revision in garden-path jokes: An ERP study” (Department of Experimental Psycholinguistics, Georg August University of Göttingen, Germany) won him a book by Graeme Ritchie, *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes* (2003).

The scarce time after lectures and discussions was left for social events. The social program included an opening reception on Monday evening the 15th of August, which included lectures from Professor Peeter Tulviste (Department of Psychology, University of Tartu) and Professor Willibald Ruch as well as a singing performance by the Setu folk group *Liinatsuraq*. A stand-up comedy night on Tuesday evening with local stand-up artists as well as Summer School participants on the stage attracted a considerable audience and got big laughs, especially towards the end of the event when future and established humour scholars stepped on the stage. On Wednesday, the participants went on a guided tour in Tartu and then continued to a beer-tasting event in the German Culture Institute. The Friday evening the closing dinner was held in the Botanical gardens, culminating with an improvised stargazing boat trip on the river barge *Jõmmu*.

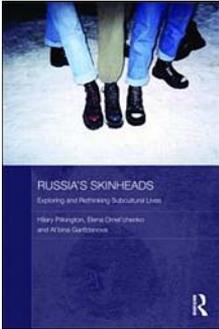
The summer school was supported by Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Cultural Endowment, Tartu Cultural Endowment, German Embassy in Estonia, Tartu City Council, among others.

The next summer school is going to be in Finland, Savonlinna campus, organised by Professors Pirjo Nuutinen and Seppo Knuuttila. Details will be announced at the Summer School website (<http://www.humoursummerschool.org/12>), and registration will be open from February 2012.

Liisi Laineste

# BOOK REVIEW

## SUBSTANCE OF A RUSSIAN SKINHEAD



**Pilkington, Hilary & Omel'chenko, Elena & Garifzianova, Albina B. (eds.) 2010. *Russia's Skinheads. Exploring and re-thinking subcultural lives*. London, New York: Routledge.**

Skinheads are usually viewed as something of an urban nightmare, young, violent street thugs who make everybody else's life a misery. Skinhead culture first appeared in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s as an off-shoot from the preceding mod culture and was an expression of working class teenagers adopting a black, especially Jamaican culture. Skinheads made a comeback in the 1970s and in the 1980s, the subculture spread internationally and exists today in cities from Russia to South

America (Marshall 1993; Farin 2001). Despite the popular image, skinhead subculture is divided into a large variety of different subgroups defined by music, style, and political views.

The first academic publication to discuss skinhead culture was written by Michael Brake (1974). It was followed by other papers on British skinhead subculture in the spirit of the Birmingham school i.e. as a working class youth culture focused on its class, territory and community (i.e. Clarke 1976; Hebdidge 1979; Willis *et al.* 1990). Interestingly, the complexity of the skinhead culture in music, style and politics has been discussed more thoroughly in German language publications (Farin 2001; El-Nawab 2001). However, there is only few works that give the reader the feeling of what it means to be a skinhead. Groundbreaking is the monograph by David Moore (1994) who has studied Australian skinheads in the 1990s. Besides giving us a picture of how English identity is articulated through adopting skinhead subculture as a symbol of Britishness, he gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of these young men and their everyday practices.

*Russia's Skinheads* promises to "turn skinheads inside out" (p. 1) and shows that the style and ideology is only a surface to cover a complexity of race, politics, social relations, nationalism, economic prospects etc. in the lives of young people from the North Russian mining town of Vorkuta. The co-authors show that skinheads are a "product of their environment" as the popular Russian saying states and that the style defines the *nature* of the group but not the *substance* (p. 12). Therefore the focus of the book is less on music or outfits but on social networks or practices. The first part of the book is focused on the environment of the skinheads and its impact on youth. Pilkington discusses in Chapter 2 the meaning of living in an isolated town arguing that ethnographic research must be engaged with time and space "that extends our understanding of their role" (p. 25). Similar to Nayak's real Geordies who grew up with "coal in their bones" (Cohen 1993 in Nayak 2003: 69), young men from Vorkuta are influenced by the town's heroic history as an important coal mining centre and now lost in the

degradation, poverty and lack of life perspectives of a post-socialist setting. The feeling of depression is increased by the following chapter that shows skinheads as “lost kids” from broken families with “absent fathers and unforgiven mothers”. Fortunately this does not mean following the path of 1990s German scholars who interpreted a youth’s violent behaviour with a lack of social skills growing up in broken families (e.g. Bohnsack 1997). The book shows that most skinheads had very warm feelings towards their parents and because of that were affected in their xenophobic views. Another source of accumulating ideology was talking with friends and colleagues. In this book it is demonstrated that the “skinhead’s movement of action” cannot exist without talking. These ideologies (i.e. local experience p.59) are transferred to the street and tied to the group which has become a new microcosm for skinheads.

Discussing Russia’s skinheads one cannot avoid the topic they are notorious for: violence. When theorising about violence, several scholars have demonstrated its connection to ideology, masculinity and rituals (e.g. Blok 2001; Gill 2007; Harrison 1993). Fighting is an important part of skinhead identity (cf. Moore 1994: 66), it is not purely xenophobic but a ritual demonstration of presence in the cityscape and a way of articulating social relations with other groups like punks or *gopniki* (proletarian aggressive Russian youth, see Habeck & Ventsel 2009). Group activities are built on a common perception of trust, masculinity and body, drawn from mining town social norms. Presentation of the hard body to the outside and establishing “homosocial intimacy” within the group form together the skinhead identity. Authors demonstrate how changes in environment initiate shifts in “performative” body politics: alongside the growth of general hostility toward skinheads the group shifts to inward activities like body decoration, training and hanging out together. Body is an initial instrument for creating male bonding and solidarity, but also has an ideologically driven purpose: a “healthy and beautiful body” is needed by “warriors” on the streets as much as for earning money (p. 171–177). Discussion around the skinhead body ideology shows its complexity and controversy of images and realities of hegemonic masculinity, manoeuvring between a homosocial solidarity of “real” men and homophobia.

The last part is dedicated to reflections of the research where co-authors show their own complicated feelings when conducting research on a group with an unacceptable ideology but having established an emotional relationship with the lads. This discussion is very welcome because such ethical emotion driven issues are not very often discussed in the research of racist or xenophobic groups.

This book shows that “real skins are less coherent than the stereotype” (Hebdidge 1982: 33) and is a fascinating case study that addresses several theoretical and ethical questions. The book should be interesting not only for scholars who are strictly focused on youth subculture. Discussions around race, ethnicity and gender make this work recommended reading for readers of social science and cultural studies.

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