

JEF

Volume 7
2013
Number 1

JOURNAL OF ETHNOLOGY
AND FOLKLORISTICS

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- Distributor Estonian National Museum
- Homepage <http://www.jef.ee>
- Design Roosmarii Kurvits
- Layout Tuuli Kaalep
- Printing Bookmill, Tartu, Estonia
- Indexing Anthropological Index Online, Central and Eastern European Online Library (C.E.E.O.L.), MLA Directory of Periodicals (EBSCO), MLA International Bibliography (EBSCO), Open Folklore Project

This issue was supported by the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory (EU, European Regional Development Fund).

JOURNAL OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORISTICS

ISSN 1736-6518 (print)

ISSN 2228-0987 (online)

The Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics is the joint publication of the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum and the University of Tartu.

Established in 2007. Published formerly as

- *Pro Ethnologia*
Established in 1993
ISSN 1406-9962
- *Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion*
Established in 1996
ISSN 1406-1090
- *Studies in Folk Culture*
Established in 2003
ISSN 1736-1192

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JOURNAL OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORISTICS

Volume 7 | Number 1 | 2013

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FOLK RELIGION IN DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

'Folk religion' is a contested category within the study of religions, with scholars increasingly advocating its abandonment. This paper encourages a new critical engagement with 'folk religion' as both a category of analysis and as a field of practice. I argue for a renewed attentiveness to the ideological dimensions of categories deployed by scholars and to the relationship they bear to the field of practice they seek to signify. Firstly, I explore the discursive nature of the construction of 'folk religion' as a category of analysis and how its semantic loading functions to 'pick up' distinctive practices from the religious field. Secondly, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Riesebrodt, I characterise the 'folk religious field of practice' as relational, a shifting site of competing agencies. My argument is illustrated with empirical examples drawn from ethnographic research in Romania and Moldova.

KEYWORDS: folk religion • vernacular religion • Romania • Bourdieu • Riesebrodt

CASE A. FROM THE 'FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE'

Aunt Katalin, as she was affectionately known, was one of the noted folk singers of the village of Pusztina (Pustiana), a Csángó-Hungarian Catholic village in Romania.¹ She could not read or write but despite this, or perhaps as a consequence of this, she was credited with having the greatest *népi tudás*, or folk knowledge, in the village. She was the best singer and she also had the widest knowledge of local traditions of prayer. She attended all the wakes and vigils where the old Hungarian songs and prayers for the dead were performed. Because of her knowledge and expertise she was well known and was one of the favourite informants of many folklorists and ethnographers and a number of CDs were released with her songs and prayers on them. Prior to her passing, she recorded her repertoire of prayers onto a cassette and requested that upon her death her children should play this recording rather than performing the officially sanctioned Romanian prayers. When Aunt Katalin died on the 9th of July 2005, her children called the *kántor*, or choir master, as was customary in the village, who recited the Psalms in Romanian. However, before the Psalms were sung Aunt Katalin's recordings of Hungarian of prayers for the dead were played. For three days, at noon and in the evening, the village people prayed next to the open coffin of the deceased in her home. The funeral was held on 13th July 2005. For the funeral, the body was taken into the Church where a mass was said for the deceased. During the sermon the village

priest proceeded to defame Aunt Katalin in front of the village congregation. The principal accusation made by the priest referred to the cassette she had left for her children to play at her wake. He also accused her of having wished that “the devil take the Romanian priest!” The funeral ended in scandal with people quarrelling and shouting as the body was accompanied to the cemetery.

Following these events, Aunt Katalin’s son László Demeter launched a civil action against the priest. A local NGO took up the case and brought it before the National Council against Discrimination set up by the Romanian Parliament. The National Council heard the case and judged that the Bishopric of Iași, of which the priest was a representative, had violated Romanian anti-discrimination law and was duly fined. The bishopric appealed against the decision but the original verdict was upheld.

These events, which were recounted to me in the village of Pusztina in 2008 by Tinka Nyisztor, and to which I shall return at the end of this article, were one of the principal inspirations for my reflections on the discourse on and the field of practice of ‘folk religion’ that follow.

‘Folk religion’ is a contested category within the study of religions with scholars increasingly advocating its abandonment in favour of a less loaded, more considered lexicon. Since Don Yoder’s classic attempt to define ‘folk religion’ substantively (Yoder 1974) and Leonard Primiano’s call for the abandonment of the term in favour of ‘vernacular religion’ (Primiano 1995), scholars of religion have begun to deploy alternatives. Marion Bowman, who in the early nineties advocated the rehabilitation of ‘folk religion’ as a descriptive term rather than a pejorative one (Bowman 1992), has since retreated from this stance, nailing her colours to the term “vernacular religion” (Bowman 2004: 6). Increasingly scholarly publications, research projects and conferences are taking on this new classificatory schema overwriting the category of ‘folk religion’. The term has also found favour amongst some theologians who in their pastoral or missiological work seek a “more value-free approach” when dealing with contextual challenges to the gospel (see Monteith 2006). It is not my aim to critique this recent discursive move on the part of some religions and folklore scholars, rather, this paper is concerned with encouraging a new critical engagement with ‘folk religion’ as both a category of analysis and as a field of practice. I argue here for a renewed attentiveness to the ideological dimensions of categories and terms deployed by scholars and to the relationship these categories bear to the field of practice they seek to signify. The recent valuable and welcome focus on the particular uses and qualities of the term ‘vernacular religion’ has prompted me to highlight distinctive associations and semantic loading that follow the term ‘folk religion’ and explain the usefulness of this term as a signifier for a particular set of religious practices that are embedded within a contested field practice.

In my view, scholarship on the problem of ‘folk religion’ is important because the term ‘folk religion’, and the field of practice that it has been used to signify, is a site of struggle for legitimacy in religious life that is both political and gendered, as my opening narrative serves to illustrate. ‘Folk religion’, even in the classic usage of the term, has been deployed by various actors to refer to aspects of religious life where communication with the divine or metaphysical is contested and where access to spiritual

and practical resources for the resolution of this-worldly troubles and the assurance of other-worldly futures is disputed. What is at stake in this struggle is the difference between approval and repression, between power and weakness, wealth and poverty and, in some extreme cases, life and death.

In what follows, I will firstly address the issue of the signifier of 'folk religion' from a social constructionist perspective, then, drawing on characterisations of the religious field by both Pierre Bourdieu (1991) and Martin Riesebrodt (2003; 2008; 2010), I shall outline what may be considered to constitute a distinct 'folk religious field of practice'. This, I argue, is the product of attempts to regulate and mould the religious field by a range of actors, represented prominently (but by no means exclusively) by clerical elites, national and political ideologues and scholars of folklore and religions. I then explain why 'folk religion' is an appropriate signifier for this power-laden site of religious struggle. I shall illustrate this section with examples drawn from my research and fieldwork in Romania and Moldova. Finally, I draw some broader conclusions regarding the ideological context and connotations of categories within the scholarly field.

Although my conclusions regarding the structure of the discourses on 'folk religion' and the nature of the 'folk religious field' may have analytical value when applied outside Europe, the conversation I am joining here is concerned primarily with scholarship on the European context and historical experience. The category 'folk religion' I am speaking about is the product of the European experience of religion as a discursive field dominated by Christian Churches, nation states, the ideology of romantic nationalism (which is currently resurgent across much of Europe), and Enlightenment and secularist thought. In this regard, 'folk religion' only becomes meaningful in the context of European modernity when 'folk' and 'religion' acquire their respective semantic loadings and meanings.

My discussions on what may be usefully signified by the term 'folk religion' in contemporary scholarship in Europe grow out of my field research amongst marginalised and minority peoples in Hungary, Moldova and Romania. In this regard, the post-socialist context is significant. The religious field in much of Central and Eastern Europe has undergone a radical transformation that has involved the renegotiation of the relationship between the public and private spheres; the socialist period saw a significant 'domestication' of religion in many countries which resulted in power and agency in the religious field being re-distributed in diverse ways. In the post-socialist era, with increased access to and freedom within both physical and discursive space, resurgent clerical influence and power in local communities and in public discourse combined with new state legal and social frameworks that facilitate the proliferation of "differentiating practices of the self" (Asad 2003: 5), have tended to intensify struggles for legitimacy in the religious field. This intensification has served to bring into much sharper relief aspects of the 'folk religious field of practice' described and discussed below. The micro-politics of these sites of religious contestation, however, are not unique to Central and Eastern Europe, they merely manifest in greater frequency and intensity. My recent fieldwork experiences in Ireland have strengthened my conviction of the applicability of this conceptualisation of the 'folk religious field' in the broader European context.

Had I engaged in field research in the American West or amongst African tribal peoples my perspective would, no doubt, have evolved in different directions. This may seem like a very obvious point but I believe it is worth making; as scholars of

religion our perspectives on our field of study and the categories we deploy are very largely determined by our educational, ideological, and field experiences. That we are compelled, and have a duty, to write these experiences into our texts on religion is not at issue but rather that we also ensure the language and categories we chose to deploy speak clearly of the political nature of that experience.

METHODOLOGY VERSUS TERMINOLOGY

Scholars have approached the problem of 'folk religion' from the perspective of both methodology and terminology. The methodological issues relate to attempts by scholars of religion to overcome the bias towards scriptural, hierarchical and institutional forms of the so-called Great Traditions. The principle methodological step that Marion Bowman, Leonard N. Primiano and others have advocated is ethnographic fieldwork and a focus on religion as lived (Bowman 1992; Primiano 1995). Drawing on the experience and insights of folklorists, this represented an important contribution to the debate in the 1990s as they recognised that the decisions of the scholar in designing a research project and the methods she or he employs in the field largely determine how the researcher comes to represent religious traditions, communities and lives. So in terms of methodology, scholars began to emphasise the encounter between the researcher and the researched in the field, as well as the triangulation of data resulting from an awareness of the *equal significance* in studies of religions of individuals, communities or social groups, institutions and texts (see in particular Bowman 2004). Empathetic perception and understanding was advocated as a methodological tool in order to ensure that the scholar's interpretations are "meaningful to their informants" and do not impose a "two-tiered" model of religion (Primiano 1995: 40). In this way, the object of study of religions scholars was to be broadened to include and take seriously the religion of the 'folk'.

The problem of terminology, on the other hand, stems from the recognition that the *category* 'folk religion' implies an a priori distinction between two discrete spheres of religious activity, often shorthanded as the folk/elite or popular/elite distinction. These two spheres underline distinctions that are drawn between textual and oral, great and small traditions, institution and community, orthodoxy and superstition and so on. The implication drawn from the term 'folk religion' is that there exists some pristine phenomenon called 'religion'. In this way, 'folk religion' comes to stand in a bipolar position in relation to 'religion' as represented by the institutions of 'official' religious bodies. 'Folk religion', of course, has often been targeted by such 'official' bodies as being the deposit of anachronistic, superstitious, heterodox, and syncretistic practices or simply the result of a deficit in terms of doctrine and narrative.² The institutional bias of academic disciplines such as sociology and the study of religions have helped to reinforce such conceptualisations and reify "the authenticity of religious institutions as the exemplar of human religiosity" (Primiano 1995: 39).

In addition to the hierarchical distinction, between high 'official' and low 'folk', the term also appears to impose another dichotomy on phenomena identified as 'folk religious' which stems from the term's composite nature: on the one hand 'folk religion' is considered proper to the 'folk', the ethnos or the nation, and therefore consonant with secular, albeit highly 'sacralised', romantic nationalist ideology.³ The objects identified

under this category could be and were put to work for national ideological purposes, for example, in the symbolic and cultural struggles against imperial and colonial powers. Aspects of culture that are designated as 'folk' must belong to a specific 'folk', and reflect the 'essence' of that 'folk' to the wider nation or ethnic community in order for them to be considered legitimate representations of their unique consciousness. 'Folk' resonates 'authenticity', and only acquires a pejorative meaning for certain audiences in certain contexts (Appadurai 1988: 37).

On the other hand, the category 'folk religion', in the European context, is also contingent on a competing ideological system represented by Christian Churches, with their doctrines, hierarchies and dogmas. 'Folk religion' represents the mistaken beliefs and harmful practices of the less educated and less powerful that require correction or elimination through effective mission, pastoral instruction and repressive sanction. In terms of the doctrine and teachings of Christian Churches, 'folk religion' belongs under the jurisdiction and oversight of Church institutions. The two ideological systems, national romantic and clerical, exist in tension. In many cases, what is valorised and sponsored by the nation and its secular elite is disparaged, discouraged or suppressed by Church and clergy. This ideological struggle has given rise to all the conceptualisations of 'folk religion' that are familiar to us such as pagan survival, Catholic superstition, dual belief, syncretistic admixture of religious traditions and so on.

These competing religious and secular national discourses impose a dichotomy on phenomena that locates 'true' religious beliefs and practices within the realm of the universal or transcendent and 'folk' religious beliefs within the realm of the material, the local and the national. One outcome of this, especially in the context of the ethnically-structured states of Eastern Europe, is that scholarship on 'folk religion' has tended to sacralise the nation through the myths and symbols of popular belief, valorising narratives and practices that in effect have the potential to weaken or undermine the universal message of Christian Churches. Related to this problem is the association of material and this-worldly concerns with the category of magic and acts of coercion, and transcendent and other-worldly concerns with religion proper. In this way 'folk religion' should be viewed not simply as a "residualistic" or "derogatory" term, as Primiano (1995: 39–40) suggests, but rather as a site of contested meanings with multiple chains of associations, some of which valorise and others of which devalue its object depending on the context.

We can see, therefore, that studies that go under the name of 'folk religion' are the site of conflicting interests, ideologies and identities. These find expression in bipolar categories and dichotomies such as magic vs. religion, prayer vs. incantation, faith vs. superstition and so on. The scholar of religion, educated in the Western tradition, reproduces these bipolar categorisations as he or she apprehends objects of religious practice and religious ideas in the field and locates them according to an inherited 'map' of the terrain determined by the discursive field. These bipolar categories are impossible to avoid and they are part of the structuring of knowledge that has shaped the lenses through which we view the world. And what is more, these objects continue to be subject to the direct application of coercive power and repressive sanction by various actors in the religious field.

All of this would seem to suggest that the category of 'folk religion' does just as Primiano and others suggest; it imposes a dichotomy on religion and religious lives and consequently should be abandoned. Primiano (1995: 38) asserts that "[c]hanges in the choice of terminology reflect substantive shifts in our perceptions of human realities" and he may not be wrong. By examining the problem from a social constructionist perspective, however, and by taking on board the conclusions that scholars have reached with regard to the debates that surround the category 'religion' – and indeed also the terms 'folklore' and 'folk' – we may arrive at alternative solutions to the problem. The term itself does not impose a dichotomy, rather the dichotomy is the result of a history of competing discursive practices that actually structure the 'field of practice' itself. The term I argue, just like any other, constitutes an empty signifier, but it has descriptive value in the sense that its 'chains of associations' can communicate something of the political nature and the power-knowledge relations that shape the religious field of practice.

Scholars have called for the abandonment of the term 'religion' on ideologically similar grounds to the call to dispense with 'folk religion'. Substantively the arguments differ but they have their origins in the same theoretical tradition that cites the dominance of Christian (and colonial) values and agendas in shaping the concept of 'religion'. This is not the place to rehearse the arguments for and against the term 'religion', however, a strong defence of the term has been mounted by Craig Martin, who argues on the basis of some basic social constructionist assumptions, namely: "Words are tools that humans use to delimit from the stuff of the world what is of interest to them, the uses of words are variable, and variable uses are all we have" (Martin 2009: 158). A similar crisis of terminology (and identity) also beset the field of folklore. The problematic nature of the term 'folklore', and indeed the category of the 'folk', was considered by some to be the cause of the disciplines failure to flourish (see Harlow 1998), however, as Ben-Amos and others have powerfully asserted "a name change is not a substantive resolution" (ibid.: 233). Instead, scholars of folklore have largely voted with their feet and continue to formulate new directions and explore synergies with other disciplines under the name 'folklore'.

The category 'folk religion' 'picks up' or 'cuts out' from reality certain things in a given context or discursive arena; in Ireland, where I currently live and work, the term picks up things that it would not in Moldova or Hungary. The following example, relating to traditions of 'folk prayer', or *halk duaları*, amongst the Gagauz, a Turkish speaking Orthodox Christian minority living in Moldova, may serve to illustrate this point. A local folklorist, in one of my preliminary discussions with her regarding folk religious phenomena, stated that the Gagauz have no prayer traditions of their own, that is to say no form of 'folk prayer'. On reflection, I judged this statement to have been the product of her particular ideological understanding of the nature of folklore and its relationship to religious phenomena, the result of a disciplinary training influenced by the Soviet-Marxist model. The term 'folk religion' for her picks up from reality things that display certain characteristics that could be defined as primordial, pre-Christian, expressed through the local Gagauz idiom, transmitted orally, and demonstrably *not* inherited from the traditions and beliefs of the neighbouring peoples. This observation was in stark contrast to my own 'experience' of 'folk prayer' amongst the Gagauz. I was

able to 'identify', using my own 'folk religious lenses' (the result of my own training and ideological assumptions) a whole range of prayers and practices with apocryphal elements, canonical prayers with alternative functions, Romanian prayers translated orally into Gagauz and so on that were 'picked up' from reality according to my own criteria (Kapaló 2011: 259–293). We were clearly not talking about precisely the same thing when we discussed 'folk religion'. This experience highlights not only the ideologically structured nature of etic categorisation frameworks but also the problematic nature of the ideal-typological tradition of genre construction within folklore, justly criticised by Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (2012: 6) and to which I shall return below.

The conclusion I draw from the above is that the term 'folk religion' functions to 'pick up' aspects of reality and what it picks up is dependent on the perspective, or the lenses, of the definer, the person who has the scholarly means and privilege to categorise reality. The concepts and conceptual schemes vary from one context to another and the scholar engages in discursive practices that "form the objects of which they speak" (Martin 2009: 158).

The issue of the definition and categorisation of 'folk religion' is embedded within the discursive field of competing ideological systems briefly outlined above. There is no one reality of 'folk religion' out there to be 'picked up', because, as Craig Martin points out in relation to the term 'religion', what counts as a particular phenomena or falls within a particular categorisation depends on the specific use one is making of a term (ibid.: 170–171). Attempts to offer 'catch all categories' that pick out all the phenomena considered to come under the umbrella of a new objective term, that would include beliefs, ideas and practices currently listed under 'folk religion' but leave behind the negative 'chains of associations', are, I maintain, mistaken. And so for instance, replacing 'folk religion' with 'vernacular religion', not necessarily Primiano's primary intention but nevertheless an outcome of his argumentation, simply results in the scholar picking up a different selection of things from the world. Objects of discourse cannot be 'liberated' by scholars of religion from the deeply rooted categories that others use to describe them. They remain subject to the interests and within the orbit of power of these actors and tied to a web of associations and meanings. In this sense, on a discursive level, 'folk religion' signifies a site of linguistic struggle, held in place by a range of competing discursive practices and relations.

With the adoption of alternative terms to 'folk religion' scholars consciously, or inadvertently, alter their 'instruments of analysis' in order to highlight certain aspects of the religious field of practice. In this sense, the term 'vernacular religion', for example, opens up new and perfectly valid chains of associations that connect its object with new scholarly concerns such as the creative and generative power of local religion and the significance of indigeneity or innovations such as ecological religions, the globalisation of religious ideas and the emergence of 'open spiritualities'. Therefore, I am not arguing here against innovation in relation to our scholarly lexicon and neither do I wish to undermine the analytical potential of terms such as 'vernacular religion' to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the religious field. Much closer attention, however, needs to be paid to the chains of associations attached to existing terms and their potential significance for our explanatory endeavours as academics. Replacing the term 'folk religion' with an alternative, may inadvertently help to divorce the object of study from issues of national ideology, political and ecclesial power and the concerns of mar-

ginalised social, economic or ethno-linguistic groups. These concerns may have receded into the background for some scholars working in certain contexts, however, as my introductory narrative serves to illustrate, religion lived out at the intersection of this particular set of powerful ideological forces is not confined to Europe's historical past.

The attempt here by scholars to apply a more objective lexicon in one context, in my view, may potentially mask the political nature of the object of study and obscure the power-laden nature of a distinctive dimension of the 'religious field' in other contexts. Where links with national ideology, political and ecclesial power have become attenuated in the religious field this may be both justified and necessary. But when deployed appropriately, this would not mean the replacement of the term 'folk religion' but would instead supply us with an additional and supplementary analytical category. The semantic message of the term 'folk religion' serves the function of orientating us towards a set of signifiers. The agendas and ideological stances are made explicit precisely because of the juxtaposition of competing ideological systems indicated by the words 'folk' and 'religion'.

One of the principal contributions of Michel Foucault (1989) was to draw attention to the very concrete dependence that exists between the production of knowledge through discursive practices of scholars and the institutionalisation of systems of power. Indeed, as "discourses are themselves practices that influence non-discursive elements" (von Stuckrad 2010: 159) the scholar of religion or the folklorist does not stand outside the power relations that define the field. Controlling the discourse means having the power to categorise, label and organise knowledge and therefore the scholar plays as active a role structuring the 'folk religious field' as the theologian, the cleric or the national ideologue. As I have illustrated above, the fieldworker has her or his own lenses that identify and objectify religious practices, behaviours and beliefs. The encounter that takes place in the field of practice, by which I mean the practice of religion and its juncture with the discursive practices of the scholar, is essentially an encounter that is both power-laden and politically charged. The debate that was opened up by Primiano in regard to 'folk religion' highlights the need for scholars to be attentive to all the ideological connotations and semantic trails of the terms they use and ensure that crucial political aspects, such as gender, class and race are picked out and not masked by classificatory systems.

THE FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE

Having discussed some of the issues relating to the discursive construction of the category of 'folk religion', I will now turn my attention to what the term 'folk religion' may usefully signify. This is what I term the 'folk religious field of practice'. It could be argued that what I have described above relates only to the discursive level and that the 'practices of the people' deserve to be considered and handled simply as the natural expression of religious impulses and that it is the role of the scholar to ensure that the people are liberated from hegemonic discourses, thus freeing their practices and beliefs from dichotomising categories. In my view, however, this approach fails to give sufficient attention to the fact that the 'folk religious field of practice' remains a site characterised by the exercise of coercive power, repressive sanctions, punitive regimes, acts of stigmatisation and processes of marginalisation and is witness to systematic acts of violence and resultant acts of resistance and defiance.

My use of the term 'field' is derived from Pierre Bourdieu who defines 'field' as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu, Wacquant 2007: 97). Therefore, "[t]o think in terms of field is to think relationally" (ibid.: 96). Its meaning in a given context comes from the particular system of relations that are at play. The given 'field' imposes certain positions on agents or institutions through the structure and distribution of power. The various forms or 'species' of power, commonly referred to as 'capital' by Bourdieu, determine access to desired 'profit' or gain. In my description of the 'folk religious field' below, I aim to highlight how aspects of this 'power play' operate in relation to the key actors whose interests intersect within the field.

Pierre Bourdieu (1991), building on Max Weber's ideas (Weber 1965: 20–31), characterises the religious field as the site of struggle between the body of priests or religious specialists, who seek to monopolise the means of salvation by maintaining control of secret religious knowledge, and those excluded from such knowledge. The creation of religious institutions gives rise to an uneven distribution of religious knowledge and the accumulation of religious capital in the hands of religious elites. Bourdieu takes Weber's distinction between the priest and the prophet and casts it in relational terms (Engler 2003: 446). According to Bourdieu (1991: 22–23), the priest and prophet compete for religious capital, with Weber's notion of the "routinization of charisma" representing the consolidation by the prophet of religious capital resulting in the transformation of the prophet into the role and function of priest.

This characterisation, however, captures only one mechanism at play in the struggle for monopoly of the religious field. The monopolising tendencies of religious elites are also responsible for defining objects that are to be excluded from the religious system of capital; 'black market goods' that are then forced underground. Where the laity has carved out such an autonomous religious space and initiated innovations or has appropriated and adapted existing practices once controlled by religious elites, sanctions are introduced by clerical elites to prevent their use or application. In this way, charms and suspect forms of prayer (such as the prayers of Aunt Katalin referred to in the opening narrative of this paper) are defined as profane, illegitimate, harmful and sinful, theologically absurd or wishy-washy and those who practice them are condemned, excluded from the community, punished and, or in extreme case scenarios, killed. According to this schema, the power to categorise and apply sanctions aims at preventing the erosion of religious capital in the hands of the priestly elite. The 'mediated' aspects of religious practice controlled by the clerical hierarchy take on the character of legitimate religious action and 'unmediated' relations with the divine or supernatural powers are labelled coercion, magic and superstition. In this understanding, these processes give rise to a field of practice that is constituted primarily through the competition to establish genuine and effective means of communication or relations with the divine and results in the production of 'black market' religious goods or currency.

What I term the 'folk religious field of practice', therefore, is characterised by the laity's attempts to undermine clerical monopoly, not through the production of "new improved spiritual products that devalue the old ones of the traditional Church" (Urban 2003: 262) as Bourdieu (1991: 22–25) suggests is the case with the emergence of new religious leaders and new religious movements, but rather through the strategies of appropriation, sublimation and transference that succeed in 'consecrating' the

religious being and practices of agents (these transactions can of course function in multiple directions). Bourdieu has been critiqued elsewhere for his rigid categorical differentiation between the producers of religion and the passive consumers. Michelle Dillon (2001) has argued persuasively that the laity has the power to produce alternative interpretations, divergent meanings and varied applications of the religious goods produced by the religious elite. What Dillon refers to as the “collective subversion” of Bourdieu’s rather mechanistic notion of religious production, his principle of “collective misrecognition”, allows for “reinterpreted scripts and cognitive schemas” (Dillon 2001: 413–414). In the context of the ‘folk religious field’, these take on the character of ‘hidden transcripts’, to borrow a term from James Scott (1990), of spiritual or religious resistance to domination. The following example aims to illustrate this point.

CASE B. FROM THE ‘FOLK RELIGIOUS FIELD OF PRACTICE’⁴

Varvara bulü is a famous healer from the village of Kopkoy in southern Moldova and a member of the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian minority. After the premature death of her husband she spent many years as a single mother working on the local state farm bringing up her eight children. When she reached pensionable age she started helping neighbours as a midwife and it was then, aged 50, that she had a vision of the Mother of God who instructed her to begin healing people.

Panaiya [the Mother of God] came to me and said that I should heal. “Wherever you place your hand, there should be a sign that that person will be cured, that person will rise up. Maybe they will mock you, they will beat you, but you shouldn’t ever stop.” She said: “God will send you a piece of iron, with that iron you will cure.”

A few days later *Varvara bulü* was visited by a local priest who gave her a broken piece of chandelier from the local church that had been blessed.

And then it came to me in a dream that I should heal people with this piece of chandelier. There is also a piece of cloth with which I also heal. Great things have come from this! And then the children found a horseshoe. I took it to church at Easter and had it blessed, but I hid it in my bag so that no one could see. I also cure people with that. So many have been cured by me, so many!

Varvara bulü heals using the items she described whilst also chanting an *okumak* or charm. Similarly to the way she received both her instruction to heal and the implements she uses, she ascribes the words with which she heals directly to *Panaiya*. “Nobody taught me, I can’t read, not a single letter! And I don’t know any Russian or Romanian, nothing! [...]. The prayer comes from *Allah*, from me myself and from *Allah*.”

Varvara bulü also recounted some instances when her cures had been successful. Amongst her patients had been a nun from a local convent who had been suffering from arthritis; after she had visited her three times and massaged her and ‘read’ for her a charm, she was soon able to walk again. A local priest, having seen how miraculously the nun had recovered enquired how she had been cured. The priest, who had spent twelve years in a concentration camp and had given up searching

for relief from the pain of the injuries which afflicted him, then too visited *Varvara bulü*. In *Varvara bulü*'s words, after having been treated by her, he exclaimed, "Tä, düştän Allahın lafı sana geldi! Brakılmayamız hiç!" – The words of God have come to you in a dream! Don't ever give up [healing]! This same priest, Father Nikolai, according to *Varvara bulü*, was also renowned for his healing activities and healed people in the Church in Bolgrad, "in exactly the same way I do!"

The key point I am making with this illustration is that resistance in the 'folk religious field of practice' rarely seeks to overturn the prevailing religious order or initiate reform, it rather works to recapture a vital, or 'spiritually necessary', share of religious capital and produce or transfer (out of the hands of the priestly class) some 'salvation goods'. *Varvara bulü* does not aim to undermine the clergy but creatively, through the objects she uses and the narrative she weaves, she is able to loosen the monopoly of the local priesthood and capture a share of the capital. *Varvara bulü*'s practices appropriate or transfer sacred capital into her hands. It is because she is able to do this that she also remains subject to the power and injunctions of the local clergy. *Varvara bulü*'s 'hidden economy' is based on the same currency as that of the clergy, each reinforcing the validity of the other whilst also competing for a share of the capital.

The most appropriate means to apprehend the workings of the 'folk religious field' is through a focus on everyday religious practice, such as the case above. In recent decades scholars of religion have advocated just such a methodological priority for practice (Bell 1992; 1997; Riesebrodt 2003; 2008; 2010). By shifting the primary methodological perspective to the sphere of practice and away from belief and experience, Martin Riesebrodt suggests scholars can liberate representations of religious practice from the hegemony of officially sanctioned discourses on textual interpretation and doctrinal debates and from top-down models of ideological production. Riesebrodt (2003: 100) delineates the sphere of religious practice on the basis of three central assumptions:

There exist superhuman, extraordinary, 'amazing', in modern Western terms generally 'supernatural' personal or impersonal powers; (2) these powers control dimensions of human/social life that normal social actors cannot control directly by their own power; and (3) social actors are able to gain access to these powers.

According to this model, there exists no categorical distinction on the basis of official institutional status between social actors; all have the potential to access superhuman powers through a combination of "practical mastery" and "reflexive engagement" with the religious field of practice (Dillon 2001: 421–422). The religious field of practice relies entirely on the assumption that superhuman powers exist and the ability of some or all to gain access to them. Accordingly, practices or actions can be considered religious if they are based on what Riesebrodt (2010: 74) refers to as the "religious premise" that superhuman powers have the ability to influence and control aspects of human existence. What this premise ensures is that the authority of religious institutions is ultimately located in the metaphysical realm not within the institutions themselves. This in turn ensures that communication or intercourse with the metaphysical realm can never be entirely monopolised by religious institutions no matter how they might try to secure such a monopoly. All religious knowledge generated by elites and specialists, through the participation of the laity in the field of practice, has the potential to be contested (Dillon 2001: 422).

Amongst the various types of practices we find in religious systems, Riesebrodt (2003: 30; 2010: 75) identifies a set of practices he refers to as “interventive” (2003) or “interventionist” (2010) practices, principle amongst which are practices such as prayers, spells, sacrifices, chants, vows, amulets and so on. These form the central platform of religious traditions as they represent the logical precondition of the other two categories of practice he identifies: “regulatory practices”, in the form of morals and taboos, and “discursive practices” that speak of superhuman powers, their nature, status and will, such as the practice of theology (Riesebrodt 2010: 75–76). According to Riesebrodt’s model, all other forms of practice have their basis in “interventionist practices”. For those who struggle for religious capital, that is to say the goods of salvation, interventionist practices are the most valuable currency. It is no coincidence that the content of Riesebrodt’s inventory of interventionist practices is also the classic stuff of ‘folk religion’, the practices that the category of ‘folk religion’ has most commonly ‘picked up’ from the religious field. Interventionist practices are the principle site of struggle over the means of salvation as these constitute the most basic and essential ‘goods’ required by the laity or the ‘folk’ for unmediated access to and communication with the metaphysical realm. The practical mastery and deployment of interventionist practices by the laity ensure the contested nature of this type of religious knowledge. It is here, in the struggle to access, produce and maintain a share of interventionist practices, I believe, we can identify the ‘nucleus’ of the ‘folk religious field of practice’. Lay agents do not seek to redefine doctrines or articulate core beliefs, Riesebrodt’s “discursive practices”, nor do they generally attempt to alter ‘regulatory regimes’ or moral codes; the agency and creativity of the laity is engaged in circumventing and subverting attempts to monopolise access to the divine in relation to areas of life (and death) that affect people most immediately.

Aunt Katalin’s prayers in the opening narrative of this article, besides representing an example of Riesebrodt’s “interventive practices”, also neatly illustrate the Bourdieuan assessment of the religious field as a struggle between the clergy and the laity to maintain control over ‘salvation goods’. The ‘spiritual weapon of the weak’ deployed by Aunt Katalin proved a powerful means of resistance to the religious and linguistic monopoly imposed by the local Catholic Church. Her prayers not only acted as a form of spiritual resistance to ecclesiastical monopoly but were also the vehicle for ethnic resistance to linguistic assimilation and national domination. Aunt Katalin’s Hungarian ‘folk prayers’ represent a form of ‘hidden transcript’ of the critique of power that would normally take place ‘offstage’ and which power-holders would normally not be party to. In the case of Aunt Katalin’s funeral, the ‘transcript’ turned public and challenged the relations between the ‘oppressor’ and the ‘dominated’. Characteristically, these processes of religious domination and resistance have aspects that are often not seen or heard in the public domain. Just as is the case with regimes of political domination, in order to study the systems at play in the religious sphere, careful attention needs to be paid to what goes on behind closed doors. In public, those who are oppressed often accept their situation, but offstage they always question their domination. The fact that religious domination and political domination often go hand in hand only strengthens the case when I argue that the ‘folk religious field of practice’ – the meeting place of various agentive forces; clerical and national ideological, secularising and scholarly, and the lay actors, often from amongst the most economically, politically

and socially marginalised – can best be defined by discursive contestation and acts of suppression by religious elites and acts of resistance by the laity. Aunt Katalin’s prayers and *Varvara bulii*’s healings are both poignant examples of this struggle.

CONCLUSION

The above discussions and examples stem from my experience in the field in post-socialist and post-colonial Eastern Europe, which is characterised by a blend of resurgent religion, national re-awakening and new ‘individualising’ practices. ‘Folk religion’ as a category was, and still is, an important component of the national ethnological approach to identity prevalent in Central and Eastern European scholarship (Pusztai 2005: 119) and as such is inherently political. ‘Folk religion’ of course can and should be studied as an ideological category specific to a certain time and place and not as a universal or cross-cultural phenomenon. The particular chains of associations described above, however, demonstrate the ability of the category ‘folk religion’ to point to an objective reality of intersecting agencies and interests within the religious field.

The characterisation of the ‘folk religious field of practice’ given above may, at first glance, appear to duplicate earlier substantive models based on objective distinctions between the practices of the clerical or institutional sphere and the practices of the folk, the old ‘folk’ versus ‘official’ religion dichotomy. However, building on Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’, what I present here is relational rather than an oppositional model. It refers to a site of intersecting interests, relations and agencies and aims to highlight the significance of the ‘power play’ in operation between key actors. No other ‘field’ need implicitly or explicitly stand on opposition to the ‘folk religious field’. ‘Field’ signifies rather a shifting site or intersection where the interests of power holders and diverse agencies find expression in a multiplicity of discursive practices, actions and narratives. As such, the practices of the ‘folk religious field’ cannot simply be defined substantively as they are the product of particular agencies intersecting at particular junctures in time and place.

‘Folk religion’ as a category, I suggest, serves well to signify this ‘site’ of the interplay between national, ecclesial, secularising and scholarly discourses and the micro-episodes of local religious actors. The site of convergence of these forces and agencies gives rise to a struggle over the ‘goods of salvation’ brought about by the will to control and monopolise ‘interventive practices’. It is my view that the deployment of new terminology and analytical categories may, in some cases (and I do not wish to overstate this aspect of my argument), mask the political nature of a field of practice thus defined. There exists no ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ lexicon, there are merely signifiers that succeed to a greater or lesser extent in ‘picking up’ from reality those phenomena intended by the scholar.

In this article, I have explored the usefulness of the term ‘folk religion’ in the light of arguments put forward for an alternative, ‘vernacular religion’. Both terms, I would argue, have analytical potential to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the religious field. However, in certain contexts and in relation to certain phenomena we are justified in championing one term over another. Both the choice to adopt new terminology or to champion existing terms demands attentiveness to their respective

ideological and semantic loading. Both these approaches potentially encourage awareness of the significance of scholarly terms and categories in shaping discursive relations and ideological forces 'on the ground'.

To borrow a thought from Kocku von Stuckrad, it is the *use* of the term 'folk religion' that is the responsibility of scholars to explain. 'Folk religion' and the engagement of scholars with the 'folk religious field of practice' are profoundly political in nature. There are important dimensions to the new discourse on 'vernacular religion' that deserve the attention of scholars. In my mind principal amongst these are the reassessment of the analytical value of studies of belief and its varied expressions in narratives, behaviours and material culture and the questioning of the ideal-typological approach to folklore texts and genres (Bowman, Valk 2012: 5–6). However, as Primiano (2012: 384) has himself pointed out, the birth of 'vernacular religion' as a field of study and an analytical category need not be tied to, nor result in, the death of 'folk religion'.

NOTES

1 Csángó-Hungarians are an ethno-linguistic and religious minority (Catholics in a majority Orthodox region) living in the eastern part of Romania. Their origins and identity are contested by Hungarian and Romanian scholars, who claim the Csángós as an integral part of their respective ethnic nations. From the end of the 19th century, the Catholic Church has played a role in restricting the use of the Hungarian language in Church life in support of the Romanian national discourse on the origins of the Csángós. In 2001, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued a position paper in support of the protection of the cultural traditions of this vulnerable and marginalised minority calling for the provision of education and the liturgy in their native language. Since the early 1990s, Csángó-Hungarian activists have appealed to both the local Church hierarchy and directly to the Vatican for the right to have Church services in the mother tongue; this campaign is on-going. For an account of the campaign for linguistic and religious rights see Pozsony 2006: 225–249.

2 This type of evaluation of the religion of the folk is not confined to some unenlightened past. Christian Churches and missions continue to campaign against "folk religion" using these same lines of argument. For a recent example see Hiebert et al. 2000. Graham W. Monteith too, despite advocating a less judgmental approach through the use of his preferred term 'vernacular religion' maintains that the role of theology remains to "capture the truth" and 'correct' examples of "scantily worked out religious sentiment" (2006: 426).

3 The US context presents a different configuration and understanding of 'folk religion' largely due to the "absence of nationalism as a component of folklore" in North America (Ben-Amos 1998: 259).

4 This is a slightly shortened version of the account previously published in Kapaló 2011: 176–178.

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TREE BEINGS IN TIBET: CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CONCEPTS OF *KLU* AND *GNYAN* AS A RESULT OF ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the perception of trees in Tibet. It focuses on ideas on supernatural beings believed to dwell in trees, particularly *klu* and *gnyan*, which form a part of the popular or so called nameless religion. The study is based on fieldwork undertaken in the Tibetan areas of India and Nepal (the Spiti valley and Dolpo) among people of Dolpo origin living elsewhere and Tibetans in exile from different regions of Tibet. Gathered narratives and reappearing myth patterns are presented and discussed. The findings from the fieldwork are compared with the idea of tree beings found in ritual texts studied by Western scholars. The difference between these two sources are striking: popular traditions associate trees mainly with *klu*, whereas the ritual texts with *gnyan*. To explain the possible cause of this discrepancy, contemporary theories about the ecological history of the Tibetan Plateau are employed.

KEYWORDS: Tibet • religion • popular religion • trees • spirits • *klu* • *gnyan*

INTRODUCTION

The paper is a preliminary study of tree beings, i.e. beings believed to dwell in trees, in the Tibetan cultural area. The study is based on fieldwork conducted in summer 2012 in the Upper Dolpo region of Nepal and the Spiti valley in Himachal Pradesh, India, among Dolpo people living outside Dolpo, as well as exile Tibetans. Although the area selection was partly random, I believe that the concepts examined appear throughout Tibet. I have chosen Dolpo as an example of an archaic and remote region which, also thanks to its Bon heritage, tends to preserve ancient indigenous ideas. On the other hand, Spiti predominantly belongs to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.

The main goal of the paper is to examine the relationship between trees and different non-human beings, or perhaps it is better to say 'spirits', inhabiting the world of the Tibetans. Attention has been especially paid to answering the following questions: What kinds of beings are believed to live in trees? How do people recognise their presence in particular trees, and what are the practical consequences of their presence for the people? The paper maps the actual knowledge of these ideas among people, both laymen and religious specialists, householders and monastics. Thus, the paper is not

based on analysing textual sources but on the comparison of accounts gathered in the field and information found in secondary literature, which mainly derives from textual sources. I employ present studies of the ecological history of the Tibetan Plateau to attempt to explain the differences between these two.

TREE BEINGS

The Tibetan perception that the world is inhabited not only by people, animals and plants, but also by many other usually invisible beings, is three-fold. Thus, it consists of three horizontal spheres or layers, each hosting a certain class of supernatural beings that is either divine or demonic, each layer associated with a particular colour. These layers are:

1. The underground: typically inhabited by aquatic *klu*, the colour of which is blue or white;
2. The surface: inhabited by yellow *gnyan* and red *btsan*;
3. The sky: inhabited by white *lha* (Stein 1972: 203–204; also Karmay 1998: 254).

These beings often appear to be assorted into eight classes, which is, for instance, typical for the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) school of Tibetan Buddhism (Samuel 1993: 161), but has slight variations depending on particular tradition. A list of the most common ten classes, along with brief descriptions, is presented by Geoffrey Samuel (*ibid.*: 162–163). A similar list, accompanied by pictorial depictions, appears in the study by Béla Kelényi (2003: 27–47). René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, analysing also Bon (*bon*) sources, identifies a much greater number of classes and subclasses of these beings (1996: chapters XII for *btsan*, XIV for *gnyan*, XVI for *gnyan, klu, sa bdag*). We can also divide these beings according to their attitude towards human society: positive and welcoming, ambivalent, negative and harmful. The majority of such beings are ambivalent and rather hostile towards people.

According to Philippe Cornu (2002: 248) and Samuel (1996: 162) only the *gnyan*¹ beings, and particularly one subgroups called *shing gnyan* (literally ‘tree *gnyan*’), dwell in trees. Similarly, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 288–290), reading primary texts, states that trees and forests represent the most typical abodes of the *gnyan* beings. Therefore, we would suppose that the main class of beings associated with trees are the *gnyan*. However, popular traditions of the people’s lived daily reality reveal a completely different picture. Generally speaking, the idea of the *gnyan* and their connection with trees is usually known to religious specialists. Nevertheless, the most common statement of ordinary people on *gnyan* is that they “of course sometimes inhabit trees”. Their trees grow in the mountains, which means that the trees are not physically close to the people, and as a consequence, lay people are usually not aware of them. An informant in Spiti (a teacher in a local village school) when questioned on *gnyan*, talked only about the mountain sheep Argali (*Ovis ammon*). In contrast, a well-educated Bonpo geshe from the Menri (*sman ri*) monastery in Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, a native of Upper Dolpo, was able to provide me with much more detailed information.

According to this man, and to all sources known to me and all other informants, there are many kinds of *gnyan* which can be sorted according to their dwelling places:

tree *gnyan* (*shing gnyan*), glacier *gnyan* (*gangs gnyan*) and *gnyan* dwelling in stones and rocks (*rdo gnyan*).² Tree *gnyan* outnumber the other groups. *Gnyan* can appear in different animal forms (for instance, yak, sheep) or as humans, and are associated primarily with the colour yellow, especially in their human-like form. Tree *gnyan* dwell in many species of trees. They prefer coniferous trees, particularly pines and junipers, but deciduous trees will do as well. If their tree is cut down, they move to another one and subsequently take revenge on people causing diseases; ulcers and certain cancers are associated with them.

Furthermore, according to the *geshe* of Menri, apart from the *gnyan*, there are other beings inhabiting trees. These are *klu*, and less frequently even *lha*³ and *btsan*.⁴ I should add that the idea of *lha* and *btsan* dwelling in trees is rather new. The *lha* beings residing in trees do so only rarely and have no characteristic appearance. Most often, they give preference particularly to juniper trees (*Juniperus spp.*). In the case of cutting down their tree, they seek another tree to stay in and very seldom die, i.e. they are reborn. The *btsan* beings are usually associated with rocks, especially with rocks of a red colour, but can dwell in trees as well. Their appearance is a red human-like figure, which goes in accordance with the description of Cornu, Samuel and Nebesky-Wojkowitz. The *btsan* also overwhelmingly prefer junipers and if their abode is cut down they take revenge by causing accidents.

There is also another modality of the relationship between trees and such beings. According to the Menri *geshe*, trees can be regarded as a deity's hair or body hair. A similar example is reported by Ulrike Roesler in her study of the Reting (*rwa sgreng*) monastery in Central Tibet. The surroundings of the monastery are enclosed in a forest, a grove of very old and large juniper trees. The forest is regarded as sacred and has been incorporated into the ritual geography of the monastery. According to the local narrative, the trees originally sprouted out as the hair of the monastery's founding figure, Geshe Tonpa (*dge bshes ston pa*). To cut the trees down would mean the trespass of cutting the hair of the master himself (Roesler 2007: 130). Furthermore, in another version of the story, the trees grew from the hair of the first Tibetan Buddhist king Songtsän Gampo (*srong btsan sgam po*) which he cut off and scattered there (ibid.: 135).

By far the most important category of beings associated with trees is the *klu*, to which I shall turn my attention now. The word *klu* is the Tibetan rendering of the Sanskrit term *nāga*, the well known half-man half-snake beings of Indian mythology. These are without doubt of pre-Buddhist origin and often feature in local religious cults. *Nāgas* are associated with water in general, and also with rain and soil. They dwell in rivers, creeks, springs and lakes. In the context of Buddhism, *nāgas* are well known from the legend of the philosopher Nāgarjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka philosophical school. Nāgarjuna paid a visit to the underworld kingdom of the *nāgas* to receive the texts of the *Prajñāpāramitas*, Madhyamaka's founding scriptures. Some scholars (for example, Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 290) suppose that Tibetan *klu* were originally indigenous beings that were connected to and later merged with the Indian *nāgas* after the advent of Buddhism. Yet, the origin of *nāgas* and *klu* is out of the scope of this paper. The Tibetan *klu* are likewise either of half-snake and half-human appearance, or can appear as human-like figures that sometimes have a hood consisting of snakes.⁵ They are usually of white or blue colour, in rare cases green.⁶ As their counterparts in India, the Tibetan *klu* are also linked to water, especially to wells, streams, lakes and rivers. According to my informants, trees along rivers, near wells and springs usually belong to *klu*.

There are several ways to recognise a particular tree inhabited by a *klu*. The tree is often dotted with tiny green spots on the trunk – we could speculate whether these could be algae. Then, according to some informants, almost all juniper trees growing near a water source belong to a *klu* and as such they feature an extraordinary crown shape and needles of a darker colour than other junipers. However, the most common answer to the question of how to recognise a *klu* dwelling in a tree was: “People simply know which trees belong to *klu* and which not.” Secondly, a common idea is that such trees are recognised by a very advanced master who happens to pass through the place. Moreover, he can also acquire this information in a dream. Thirdly, a very common and reliable method of recognition is by using the symptoms of the so-called *klu* disease (*klu nad*). If someone intentionally or unintentionally harms a *klu* tree, he or she is affected by a disease caused by the particular *klu* as revenge. There are many oral accounts of such cases. Displaying offending or impure objects such as drying washed underwear by hanging it on trees belonging to *klu* can insult them and lead to a revenge (Samuel 2007: 215–216). *Klu* are widely known to cause various kinds of skin disease, infection, often leprosy, and the appearance of scars on skin. A typical symptom is the loss of eyebrows. An informant remembered from his childhood an event that happened to him after breaking a branch of tree belonging to a *klu*; and he added he personally knew many similar cases.

Naturally, people have to cope with these problems and place their relationship with the *klu* into balance again. When someone is affected by a *klu* disease in fact the only way to overcome it is to perform a ritual presentation of offerings to the particular *klu* and appease it. Such a ritual is called *klu gtor* (*'klu + scatter [offerings]*), i.e. sacrificial cakes called *gtor ma* and other offerings presented to *klu*) and is in most cases sufficient for the disease to disappear quickly. The offerings differ according to the kind of *klu* in question, as there are white and black *klu* (*klu dkar po* and *klu nag po*). The former are by far the most common and require only peaceful offerings, typically flowers, curd and, of course, special tormas; in contrast, the latter have to be served with alcohol and meat. The main source containing the manuals for these rituals is – in the Bonpo environment – the Klubum (*klu 'bum*), part of the Bonpo Tānjur (*bstan 'gyur*). The Klubum is a frequently used ritual manual. Marietta Kind⁷ mentions another way of curing diseases caused by *klu*, specifically leprosy: the affected person should meditate on garudas (*Garuda*), the principle enemy of the *klu*.⁸ Nevertheless, the story recorded by her in Dolpo concerned an advanced lama. Thus, we can suppose that this way is restricted to masters, as none of my informants mentioned such a possibility.

My question on the consequences of the fatal damage of a *klu* tree seemed to my informants very weird. Usually, most people agreed that in such case the *klu* would cause disease for the culprits and seek a new tree, although they were unsure of this. It is evident that people are not interested in such speculations, as they prevent these trees being felled.

Klu are often linked to the act of founding a particular establishment, a monastery or a village. There is a repeating pattern of the unity of a *klu*, a spring and a tree. The Lhalung (*lha lung*) monastery of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) school in Spiti valley, Himachal Pradesh provides an example. In front of this small and artistically amazing monastery stands a big old willow tree (*Salix sp.*). The tree is near a spring and lungtas (*rlung rta*), prayer flags inscribed with mantras, are tied to its branches. The tree itself is protected by a

circular stone wall around which leads a short circumambulation path (*kora*, *skor ba*). Needless to say, the tree is evident to be extraordinary at first sight (see Photo 1 and 2). The only local monk residing at the monastery affirmed that both the tree and spring belonged to a *klu* staying there. The origin of the spring can be traced back to master Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*, 995–1055), the great translator and key figure during the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet (*phyi dar*, 11th century). Rinchen Zangpo realised, through his achieved powers, that a *klu* must be dwelling at the place, so he planted a tree for him and, as the propagator of monastic Buddhism, established a monastery at the very spot. The tree plays an important role in the religious life of the nearby village. People often come to perform the circumambulation around it. This can be undertaken at any time, but the most auspicious is the occasion of the yearly ritual dedicated to the *klu* (*klu gtor*). People suffering from skin diseases particularly, come and bring offerings. Together with that, they also bring their own medicine, called *klu sman*.⁹ Thus, we can see that *klu* are not only associated with causing diseases, but also with the process of healing.

A similar story appears at the Samling (*bsam gtan gling*) monastery of Dolpo (see Photo 3). This famous Bonpo monastery also owes its beginnings to a very prominent human figure bestowed with the capacity of seeing supernatural beings in the landscape. Gyaltsän Rinchen (*yang ston rgyal btsan rin chen*, probably 13th century), coming from the important ritual and teachings' patri-descendent Yangal (*ya ngal*) lineage, recognised that in the small valley of the institution a *klu* was staying, and miraculously opened a spring for him. The spring has always been the only water source for the monastery and is known for its extraordinary skill: it flows in times when the teachings of Bon flourish, and dries out in the times of deterioration (Kind 2012: 193). Since Gyaltsän Rinchen's act the *klu* has become the protector and the local lord (*sa bdag*) of the place as well as of the monastery itself. Together with another local deity, the god of the nearby Mukporong (*smug po rong*) mountain, is worshiped every day in the morning with a one-hour ritual. Only peaceful offerings are presented to them. Both of them are depicted in one the main shrines of the monastery. The *klu* is of yellow colour and holding a fish in its hand (see Photo 4). An interesting feature is that a local lama said that the *klu* is a *sa bdag*. The majority of academic studies treat *sa bdag* and *klu* as separate classes of beings.

The pattern is also described by Charles Ramble from the village of Lubra (*klu brag*) in Lower Mustang. As it happens, a hero had to arrive to establish the settlement. In



Photo 1. The *klu* tree in front of Lhalung monastery. Spiti, India. Photograph by Jakob Kocurek, 2012.



Photo 2. The klu tree in detail. Spiti, India. Photograph by Jakub Kocurek.

this case, it was the Bonpo master and again holder of the Yangal lineage Tashi Gyalcän (*bkra shis rgyal mtshan*). His task at the place of what was later Lubra was not easy. He had to defeat an opposing local demon and his wife, both of whom appeared in the form of snakes. Finally, Tashi Gyalcän tamed them by oath to become protectors of the Doctrine. Then, two pine needles were stuck in the ground at the place of the taming and were covered by a basket. A sign was expected to deciding whether the site would be suitable for a village or not. After seven days a walnut tree started to sprout from the needles. This was seen as a good omen and Lubra was established. The walnut tree is still growing at its centre (Ramble 2003: 675). An interesting point is that “the descendants of *bkra shis rgyal mtshan* later went to Dolpo, where one of them founded the above mentioned Samling monastery and other religious centres” (ibid.).

In these three stories we can find the well-known pattern in Tibetan culture of taming ‘the wild’ (*‘dul ba*; see for example Samuel 1993: 217, 222). The wild, anti-structural and chaotic, is tamed and subsequently integrated into the structure and its power based on its previous anti-structural position is later used to fortify the structure. In the cases mentioned above we deal with typical stories of subduing local demonic forces; in these instances *klu* are integrated into the structure and have become protectors of the doctrine, and furthermore become linked to places representing the doctrine itself.¹⁰



Photo 3. Samling monastery, Dolpo, Nepal. Photograph by Jakub Kocurek.

IS THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION A RESULT OF THE PAST DEFORESTATION OF THE TIBETAN PLATEAU?

What is the cause of the discrepancy between Tibetan textual sources (analysed by Cornu, Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Samuel) and people's knowledge on the question of associating trees with particular super-natural beings? The former presents *gnyan* as the most typical tree-dwellers. The latter link trees almost exclusively to *klu*.

One explanation can be sought in Mircea Eliade's phenomenological theories of religion. Eliade would argue that naturally there is a close link between water, vegetation and soil. In the three-fold perception of the Tibetan world, *klu* are placed in the underworld. Thus, they are connected to soil and water, and then there is only a step to become connected to vegetation and agriculture. As such it is not surprising that they play a more important role in people's lives than *gnyan* and *btsan*.

Nevertheless, from the texts it is evident that the connection between *gnyan* and trees was, at least at the time of their composition, stronger. It seems to me that the awareness of *gnyan* has gradually faded and *klu* have partly replaced them and taken their roles. The Klubum is still a popular text and in use, while in contrast the *gnyan 'bum* has become neglected.¹¹ This process can be hardly explained by the presented phenomenological approach.

I believe that the question can be answered by recent studies of ecological changes happening on the Tibetan Plateau. So far, the Plateau has been understood as naturally treeless, covered by steppe, semi-desert or desert biotopes. However, Georg Miede and others using pollen and charcoal analysis have proved that a great part of the area was in



Photo 4. The klu acting as local deity (sa bdag) of Samling monastery. Upper Dolpo, Nepal. Photograph by Jakub Kocurek.

the past forested. Furthermore, they have shown that in Central Tibet the climate is still suitable for forests to grow today and that it is possible to replant the area (Miehe et al. 2003; 2008a: 160). The major part of the anticipated former forest cover consisted of two species of juniper (*Juniperus convallium*, *Juniperus tibetica*) which grew mainly on the southern mountain slopes, whereas birch (*Betula spp.*) covered the northern slopes. River banks in valleys were dominated by sea-buckthorns (*Hippophae spp.*) and willows (*Salix spp.*). The research was mainly undertaken in South Tibet (Miehe et al. 2006; 2008a; Kaiser et al. 2009), and in Amdo (Miehe et al. 2009) and Lower Mustang (Jharkot near Mukhtinath) (Miehe et al. 2008b). According to the findings, the deforestation was caused by human activity. During the mid-Holocene climatic optimum (7000–3000 BCE) Neolithic nomads and farmers undertook the initial clearing of the forests with the help of fire in order to improve grazing opportunities for their cattle and to insure predator-free range-

lands. The data of the clearing vary for different places: Lhasa and surroundings (2700 BCE) (Miehe et al. 2008a: 171), South Tibet (from 3650 BCE) (Kaiser et al. 2009: 1552), and Jharkot in Mustang (4400–3800 BCE) (Miehe et al. 2009: 262). Since this time the forests have been under pressure of being used as pasture land, a source of timber, fire wood and material for fumigation offerings (*bsang*). The gradual destruction of the forests is also reflected in Tibetan historical sources. For instance, Miehe et al. observe: “mural paintings in the Jokhang (*jo khang*) temple in Lhasa show how logs from the neighbouring slopes were carried to the construction site situated on a wetland” (2006: 62). This implies that timber from the original forests was still available at the time of the construction of the Jokhang temple (640 CE). In Central Tibet heavier human impact and the evolution of the present desert pastures started around 1420 CE during the foundation period of the large monasteries around Lhasa (*ibid.*: 66). The process continued until the present time. For instance, in Jharkot, old people can still remember hunting in a birch forest above Mukhtinath in the 1920s – in what is today a treeless alpine environment (Miehe et al. 2009: 257). Similarly, an additional thirteen locations of juniper trees or forests have been recorded by historical documents and oral accounts. These were destroyed in wars or as late as during the Cultural Revolution (Miehe et al. 2008a: 165). However, not all of the forests have disappeared. Miehe et al. have mapped fifty-one remaining juniper groves, residua of the original cover (*ibid.*: 172–176).¹² The biggest, most famous and perceived as the most sacred among them is the forest of Reting. Here

trees up to a height of sixteen, and a diameter of two, metres have survived (ibid.: 170). Similarly, other remnant forest patches are viewed as sacred and monasteries have been situated in their vicinity.

As has been demonstrated, all the beings inhabiting trees either exclusively prefer junipers or show a strong inclination for them. In my opinion, this might be a consequence of the following development: The primary juniper forests on the Tibetan Plateau could have been associated with *gnyan* (maybe also *btsan* or other beings), since they were covering mountain slopes and thus belonged to the sphere of the wild environment forming an opposition to the domesticated space of settlements. On the contrary, the domesticated space hosted trees of *klu*, although these could grow outside of it, although in their vicinity. As forests were being cut down and Tibet was becoming a dry territory, trees (usually willows or sea-buckthorns) tended to remain only near water sources. Human settlements naturally developed near these water sources. These trees became associated with *klu*. The argument is also supported by contemporary popular traditions, which place the *gnyan* further apart from the sphere of humans, into mountains and into trees in mountains. Forests have represented the wild element, the abode of dangerous elements and wild animals, predators threatening people as well as their domestic animals. Similarly, *gnyan* were believed to be always badly intentioned towards people. The *gnyan* have come to represent the wild, hostile, chaotic, powerful natural forces standing in contrast to the cultural domain. The wild and malevolent character of *gnyan* is evident from the etymology of the term, given above, and also from the forms ascribed to them. These characteristics and connotations of the *gnyan* might also be followed in a Bonpo myth translated by Samten Karmay taken from the Nyänbum (*gnyan 'bum*) a collection of ritual texts dealing with *gnyan* and incorporated into the Bonpo canon (Karmay 2010). Here the primordial conflict between Man and nature epitomised mainly by *gnyan* spirits appears. The quarrel leads to the dichotomy between Man and the supernatural forces inhabiting nature. The story can be read as a metaphor for domesticating and taming the natural world. A similar picture is presented by the fundamental work of Tibetan medicine, the Gyüdzhi (*rgyud bzhi*):

In the time of the last five hundred degenerate years, when the degenerate *kalpa* arises, human beings are in poverty as their provisions decline. Having ploughed arid grassland for farming, *sa gnyan* are turned up. *Chu gnyan* are disturbed by the transformation of natural water bodies into artificial garden lakes and ponds. *Shing gnyan* are deforested and *rdo gnyan* are uprooted or overturned. (Vargas 2010: 379)

Therefore, apart from practical reasons, clearing original vegetation could also have had a cosmological character. Thus, the texts locating *gnyan* primarily in trees and forests might be preserving these old ideas. A striking fact is that these traditions are much more widespread in Upper Dolpo, where the Nyingma and Bon traditions are prevalent, than in the Gelug dominated valley of Spiti. This fact could also point to the antiquity of these concepts. The remnants of the forests represent the original chaotic anti-structure, now tamed, or rather, destroyed. This development could also be the reason for their sacredness and common placement near monasteries which function as the *pillars* of the structure. Thus, monasteries subdue the anti-structure, incorporate it into the structure and by this generate energy, which is then passed on. A similar explanation could be used for the fumigation offerings (*bsang*) which, as part of the original wild and undomesticated sphere, are perceived as endowed with power.

At this point an interesting parallel from Mongolia can be mentioned. Alena Oberfalzerová, describing Mongolian nomads' perception of landscape, writes: "The negative forces reside in solitary or dry trees or bushes, usually in a closed isolated ravine with several trees, in solitary groves, around springs, in small mountain passes, or in rocks of peculiar forms or colours" (2007: 242). Parallels with the Tibetan environment, particularly with the *gnyan*, are clear, as is the possibility that we are dealing with an ancient cultural substrate shared by both areas.

CONCLUSION

As has been shown in Dolpo, trees are in the overwhelming majority associated with *klu*. The *klu* were the only group of 'supernatural tree dwellers' about which I was able to receive detailed information. It is evident that *klu* have the greatest practical impact on the daily lives of common people. In fact, *klu* represent the single group of supernatural beings whose link to trees is generally known. The reason is obvious, as people's dealings with the *klu* have practical consequences for them, at least in the Dolpo region and in Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. Klumbum is a widely used text. In contrast, awareness of other kinds of beings and their connection with trees is in my opinion restricted to religious specialists.

These findings stand in opposition to traditional textual sources that associate forests and trees particularly with *gnyan*. I suggest the explanation for this difference must involve taking into account the changes the natural environment in Tibet has undergone. The loss of forests in Tibet has led to a gradual forgetting of the *gnyan*. On the other hand, the *klu* have become prevalent as tree-dwelling beings, since the surviving trees were mostly located near rivers and other water sources. I have argued that felling of the original woodland might have had a cosmological dimension over and above any practical considerations: the forests represented the wild and hostile but powerful sphere opposed to domestication and tamed space. The *gnyan* and *btsan* would fall into the wild sphere, which is also reflected by the etymology of their names. Cross-culturally, anti-structural entities endowed with power often become sacred (cf. Douglas 2002). This was also the case for Tibetan sacred groves. Among the trees in Tibet, juniper has by far the most important position in hosting different classes of super-natural beings. This might be due to the special role of juniper in Tibetan culture (*bsang* offerings) and also to its high proportion in the original forest cover.

For further research I suggest similar fieldwork in wooded areas of Tibet, especially where logging has recently occurred (Kham, Bhutan and Sikkim) in order to clarify the strength of the link between the beings and particular trees, i.e. to answer the question of what happens if an inhabited tree is cut down. Then, an analysis of the textual sources, particularly of Klumbum and the most important source Nyänbum, which has so far been under investigated by Western scholars, would reveal many interesting points relevant to the topic. The data from wooded areas should be compared with those from areas formerly forested and at the present almost treeless. In addition, detailed research on the remaining groves and their role in popular religion, how they are worshipped, and local legends explaining their link to particular monasteries, is necessary.

Let me conclude with a rather provocative prediction: If reforestation of the original juniper trees takes place in Tibet in the future, might *gnyan* and *btsan* beings be back again in people's knowledge and worship practice?

Acknowledgements

The article is based on research carried out thanks to the financial support of the Internal Grant (number VG047), Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic. For assistance in the field and help throughout the work I am grateful to Anna Sehnalová.

NOTES

1 For the legendary background see Karmay 1998: 253–254. The word *gnyan* has several different connotations and meanings, all of them with wrathful and wild aspects: 1. wild mountain sheep Argali (*Ovis ammon*); 2. cruel, fierce, severe, “very powerful and at the same time fearful”; 3. epidemic, infectious sickness, plague (Das 1998; Jäschke 2007). The syllable features as a component of names of local deities as well as Tibetan kings. See note 4.

2 Nebesky-Wojkowitz adds that *gnyan* are often associated with meteorological conditions (rain, wind, rainbows, etc.) and celestial bodies (1996: 289).

3 A general Tibetan appellation of deities of higher status.

4 The word *bstan* (and its derived form *bstan po*) has the following meanings: 1. strong, powerful, mighty; 2. violent, forcible; 3. strict, secure (Das 1998; Jäschke 2007). As *gnyan*, *bstan* also forms a part of names of certain quasi-historical and early Tibetan kings, as the first mythical ruler Nyathri Tsänpo (*gnya' khri tsan po*), then, for instance, Lhatho Thori Nyäntsän (*lha tho tho ri gnyan btsan*). In the latter example both words appear in one name.

5 Texts also describe other forms. In this study, I work only with my findings in the field. Further see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 290–291.

6 In texts translated and quoted by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996) the depicted *klu* have different colours, but these three colours were mentioned by my informants.

7 Kind 2012: 264–267.

8 They have the same role as in Indian mythology, in which they are usually depicted holding snakes in their claws.

9 This is usually bought from the Tibetan Medical Centre in Dharamsala.

10 An archetypal example is the story of Padmasambhava taming local deities opposed to the introduction of the new Buddhist religion.

11 On *gnyan 'bum* see Karmay 2010: 53–68.

12 Also contains a list of the remaining groves and trees along with a brief description, including their coordinates.

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SOWING THE SEEDS OF FAITH: A CASE STUDY OF AN AMERICAN MISSIONARY IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s foreign missionaries have eagerly visited the Russian Federation to disseminate God's word among the subjects of the formerly atheist state. Different Protestant denominations have been among the most successful in gathering followers. However, the Russian Orthodox Church and its supporters have not welcomed the evangelising work of Protestant missionaries. The present article aims to examine some aspects of the development of this relatively new religious diversity at the grass-roots level by analysing the role of an American missionary in forming an evangelical congregation in a small rural community in the Republic of Komi. Drawing on fieldwork materials, I intend to discuss both the missionary's perspective and the local response to his presence.

KEYWORDS: Evangelical missionaries in Russia • Republic of Komi • Orthodox • community • place

In the focus of this article* is a case study of an American evangelical missionary in the post-Soviet setting of the Russian North. I will begin the paper with a brief overview of the religious situation in the Russian Federation and in the Republic of Komi to outline the wider framework in which evangelicals operate and to which they react. In the subsequent section I will turn my attention to the missionary's personal account of starting a congregation in a small Komi village and how the surrounding rural environment is experienced and represented in his narratives. I will then tackle the non-evangelical (tentatively Orthodox) response to the evangelical enterprise on the one hand, and look at how the American is depicted in the narratives of local evangelicals and what kind of role he is seen to have within the community he initiated, on the other.

* This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT) and the Estonian Science Foundation (grant no. 8335).

The ethnographic material presented in this paper has been collected over the course of recurring short-term fieldwork trips to villages of the Kulömdin Rayon (district)² in the Republic of Komi. The Republic of Komi, with a population of about 900,000 and scattered over the territory of 416,800 km² is situated in the north-eastern part of European Russia. Nearly a third of the republic's population lives in the capital, Syktyvkar. With large forest areas and industrial towns developed near former Soviet prison camps, Komiland is considered the periphery in the wider Russian context.

For centuries both the Russian Orthodox Church and most of its inhabitants have considered Komiland to be Orthodox terrain. During the years of Soviet rule, official religious structures were almost completely abolished. However, according to Sergey Filatov's (2005: 171) estimation Orthodox tradition among lay people was actually preserved better here than in many other parts of Russia as there was a characteristic tradition of gathering at prayer meetings without ordained clerics (cf. Koosa, Leete 2011). This has to do with the fact that often enough there were simply no priests regularly available in the remote villages even before the Soviet period. Today, although individually people can be hesitant in calling themselves Orthodox believers because they feel they lack the necessary knowledge and practice assumed by the Church, an average villager would readily consider the Komi in general to be Orthodox (cf. Leete 2010; Leete, Koosa 2012). Even non-believers tend to think that there is a certain 'correct' way of believing that is acceptable in the Komi context. At the same time people can be very critical towards what they see as public exploitation of faith by, for example, politicians.

While Orthodoxy is considered to be traditional among the Komi, small Protestant groups have also existed here since the early 20th century. The first indigenous Protestant groups in Komi appeared in the 1920s and 1930s. These were formed under the influence of those locals who had converted to some Protestant denomination while away from the home region during their studies or army service. Soon, the Soviet prison camps established in Komi territory proved to provide another source for instigating new Protestant groups. Former prisoners and deportees predominantly from the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine were the initiators of such communities³ (Gagarin 1978: 259–260; Rogachev 1997: 200; also cf. Leete 2013). Today, less than one per cent of the Republic's subjects say that they belong to some kind of Protestant denomination (Arena 2012: 182).

With the demise of the Soviet Union and of the officially atheist ideology, an unprecedented number of foreign missionaries from various churches and denominations started to arrive in Russia to preach God's message according to their understanding. This quickly developed 'religious marketplace' with a diverse assortment of goods was indeed enthusiastically welcomed by many, while many were also confused by this sudden diversity. At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) felt increasingly uncomfortable with the new and active competitors. While the ROC had at its disposal the arguments of tradition and continuity in claiming a special position in the Russian Federation, the more critical voices in society raised the question of the ROC's overly close cooperation with the Soviet authorities – a charge from which the newcomers were free. The very different style of mission work employed by the Western churches also caused discontent among the Orthodox who often simply have not been able to compete with it, mainly lacking the necessary experience. Moreover, the ROC

tends to think of the mission activities of other Christian denominations in the Russian Federation as unlawful, as it considers the people already Orthodox (see, for example, Kirill 1999: 72–75).

As soon as the first half of the 1990s, one of the ROC's main strategies to cope with unwanted competitors was to label them 'sectarian' (see Baran 2006). Even Christian denominations well established in the USA and Europe have been depicted as dangerous and totalitarian in the anti-sectarian discourse which has borrowed a lot from the western anti-cult discourse of 1970s–1980s (Golovushkin 2004: 105; Filatov 2009a: 22–23; Lunkin 2009: 111, 122–123; Egilskiy, Matetskaya, Samygin 2011: 73–84).

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations adopted in 1997 took into account the concerns voiced by the ROC and its supporters when differentiating traditional and non-traditional religious institutions and acknowledging Orthodoxy's special role in Russian history and culture in its preamble; it also limits the possibilities of registration of new religious communities. In 2000 this was followed by a national security policy document that clearly drew a connection between foreign espionage and foreign religions, warning of "the negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missionaries" (Elliott 2003: 42; Golovushkin 2004: 107). Connecting 'sectarians' with the hidden undermining work of foreign countries is not a new idea. Catherine Wanner (2004: 742) has pointed out that in the Soviet era one of the main reasons for especially hard repressions of evangelicals was their perceived 'foreignness'; in addition, the fundamentalist Protestant churches in the West and especially in the USA were extremely anti-communist. Recent sociological surveys continue to indicate that America is regarded as an aggressor, unfriendly towards Russia and with the aim of controlling the world (Zorkaya 2012: 200, 207–208). Ethnographical data from Komi largely seems to confirm these kinds of data as people indeed tend to see America as Russia's rival if not opponent. Thus concern about unwanted cultural influences and anxieties about unfamiliar religious practices are the two main sources of scepticism with regard to religious groups that are perceived as foreign.

WILLIAM AND HIS MISSION IN THE VILLAGE OF DON

During initial fieldwork trips to the Kulömdin Rayon I was mainly interested in the role and importance of Orthodox tradition in the lives of contemporary villagers. Talking to people about religious matters, most of them sooner or later mentioned the American(s) living in the village of Don and spreading their faith in the rayon. This is how I first learned about the mission and became curious to check for myself whether there really was such a massive conversion to Protestantism going on in the area as some of the informants implied.

Don, with about 500 inhabitants, is situated 15 km from the rayon centre Kulömdin.⁴ The village has a kindergarten, primary school, medical office, sawmill and two small shops providing foodstuffs and other necessities. While some people go to work in the rayon centre, many more are unemployed. Some live off tiny pensions, while growing vegetables and fishing and hunting to supplement provisions or to sell for additional income is common. In the summer, picking berries and mushrooms in the surrounding woods and selling them to wholesalers offers villagers the possibility to earn significant extras.



Photo 1. William has just helped to repair a neighbour's truck. Photography by Art Leete, 2008.

During our first visit to the village to meet William⁵ in person we found him busy helping to repair his neighbour's truck. While some of the people who had first told me about William had depicted him as a rather assertive person, to me he appeared to be quite modest in both looks and behaviour. Later I met William several times when visiting the services and he always seemed to keep rather to the background.

In the following I will briefly summarise his biography as he told it during our interview. William was born and brought up in a farmer's family. He left school at an early age and soon got married. The marriage ended with divorce, and William was drafted to go to the Vietnam War. As for many others, the war experience had a traumatic impact on him and when he returned, he started drinking. His alcoholism escalated, and he became addicted to drugs as well. He caused several car accidents because of drunk driving and once a child was nearly killed. As a result he developed an acute fear of actually killing someone and after unsuccessfully seeking help from doctors to break from drugs and drinking, his anxieties led him to the local Methodist church. In late 1991 at the age of 43 he became an evangelical Christian or, as he says, accepted Jesus. With the help of his conversion, William was able to quit his addictions within what he terms a "miraculously short period of time".

In 1992 William already took part in his first mission trip to Russia. In 1991, Operation Carelift had been founded under the Josh McDowell Ministry to "meet the physical and spiritual needs in orphanages, hospitals, schools, and prisons in the countries of the former Soviet Union" (Josh's Bio). Hearing about the programme over a Christian radio, William felt this was something he wanted to take part in and gathered up the money needed to participate on the trip. Until 1997 he repeatedly (altogether nine times)

travelled to Russia for short-term periods with the Josh McDowell Ministry, delivering humanitarian aid and handing out Christian leaflets on the streets of Moscow.

In 1997 William retired from working as welder in a factory in his home state Illinois, sold his house and other possessions and moved to Russia. He then worked in Moscow with the Christian medical organisation Agape, which combines missionising with providing medical care in various areas of Russia, concentrating on “most remote and isolated people groups in the Arctic and Siberia as well as the poor and overlooked in rural and urban areas” (Agape Unlimited). As part of this project, William first arrived in the Republic of Komi at the town of Yemva,⁶ accompanying Dr Bill Becknell, founder of the Agape mission. This is how William describes what he perceived the region to be like⁷:

And when I went there, I saw more needs in the North than I did in Moscow. Yes, there’s needs in Moscow as well. But there’s more needs here in the North. And I think it’s kind of like America, whenever you get away from the big cities that has the money, it tends to get... the amounts of funds are not available for people and they’re more backwards, the roads are not as good, the job situation is not as good.⁸

Being engaged with social charity projects like acquiring and chopping firewood for the elderly, fixing up roofs, etc., William decided that this kind of very practical work was his true calling and the best way for him to serve God as he felt he was not skilful with words. Since the Agape project did not have the means to support the kind of undertaking William had in mind, he went back to the USA and was able to gather enough funds to return to the Republic of Komi to start his own mission.⁹ In Moscow he was introduced to a young Russian, Andrey, who was willing to accompany the monolingual William as interpreter and fellow missionary. Already in the Republic of Komi, a local young Baptist, Semyon, joined the small team. Below is an excerpt from an interview where William describes how the three of them ended up in the Don village:

And we went to Yemva first of all. They had a drug rehab centre there. So we went there to help this drug rehab centre. And we stayed there couple of months. And then we kept hearing about this Kulömdin Rayon, Kulömdin Rayon and so... one day we took a drive and we came here. And it was basically what I’m looking for, I’m looking for something where people didn’t live in a big cities where they had jobs, I’m looking for a place where people were more needy. Where there’s more help needed. And ... that’s because that’s where our heart is, helping the most needy. And you find it more in the rural villages than you will [when] going to Syktyvkar, of course, or Moscow. So when we came to Kulömdin Rayon we felt basically that this is the place God wanted us to come.

William therefore understands his coming to the Kulömdin Rayon in terms of following God’s plan for him. This kind of understanding coincides with the local evangelicals’ interpretations of why William ended up specifically in Don (see below). Even though William explains his choice of the site of his mission work in terms of its peripheral location and overall deprivation, at the same time he is adamant that people themselves are the same everywhere. This emphasis on the basic similarity of human nature serves the purpose of minimising the perceived otherness of Americans as compared to (rural) Komis or Russians, largely associated with different background and living environment and standard and thus, in a way, to advocate William’s right to missionise in a

foreign land. The aim is to downplay the denominational discrepancy from what is locally customary and thus to emphasise the possibility of dialogue and mutual understanding. That is, regardless of national, cultural or denominational belonging, peoples' inner need for gospel and way to salvation is declared to be universally the same. Discussing Orthodox-Protestant relations in post-Soviet Russia, evangelical scholar Mark R. Elliott (2003: 37–38) points out that just as Orthodox believers have been negative towards evangelical missionaries, so have the latter been at least occasionally highly critical in their assessments of Orthodoxy. Laur Vallikivi (2011: 16, 89) reports that the Baptist missionaries active in the area close to the region of my case study consider the Orthodox as mistaken idolaters or even devil worshipers. In contrast to this kind of positioning William and his fellow missionaries mainly express a positive attitude towards the Orthodox, saying that there are “true believers” in every Church (denomination). Of course, vernacular religious practices can earn sternly critical evaluations; for example, when William conveyed how he is not afraid to die and that he has told his friends to rejoice on the occasion as it means he will be living with Jesus, he comparatively judged the local funerary customs:

Most people here... they're crying [when somebody dies]... they're putting even money into the grave... they're... even sometimes I've seen them putting vodka into the grave, pack of cigarettes into the grave. Have a good journey on your way [imitating a considerate tone of voice], where ever you're going, heh. Yeah... they have no idea.¹⁰

The evangelicals also criticise overly keen attention to icons (the idea of icons having agency) and are disapproving of people who call themselves Orthodox but smoke and consume alcohol. Even so, in general the Don evangelicals rather avoid directly condemning Orthodox believers, emphasising the importance of ecumenical principle. William stresses that his agenda is not to compete with the ROC but simply to bring people to God:

See, I never had a plan to start churches. This is not my plan. I mean, Russia has a lot of churches; you've got them almost everywhere, the Orthodox Church. I, all I'm gonna do, is show them the way... to Jesus Christ. Where they go to worship, is, you know... that's... that's up to them. [If] they wanna go to the Orthodox church to worship, that's fine, I don't care. You can worship [where ever]... that doesn't make any difference.

However, the ecumenical approach is not greatly appreciated by the ROC (see, for example, Filatov 2009a: 20–21). The ROC priest Alexander who is serving in the Kulömdin Rayon centre and conducting home services in Don, is correspondingly critical of the evangelicals for emphasising only the role of Jesus Christ in acquiring salvation:

He [William] has an ecumenical mindset. [...] Ecumenical means, that everyone who believes in Christ will reach God. But it is not so that one should only believe in Christ. One must also revere the saints, the mother of God, the tradition.

Thus the priest has taken the position that even though the evangelical missionaries are seemingly doing good when helping people, they nevertheless have a negative impact on local life by creating discords and schism in the community and confusing people with, according to him, erroneous teaching.¹¹

Although William insists that he never had any plan to start a church as such, with the missionaries settling in the village, in a short time a small congregation formed. As William does not consider himself to be a skilful preacher, and furthermore, he speaks neither Komi nor much Russian, the translator Andrey became the pastor of the congregation.¹² Initially, the American's house attracted quite a number of intrigued and curious locals, many children and young teenagers found the newcomers and youth events organised by them entertaining. The missionaries even had to build an extension to the house to accommodate participants in Sunday services. Now it seems that the initial interest has somewhat simmered down and some 15–20 people, including children but predominantly middle-aged and elderly women, usually show up for the weekly service.¹³

The character of the Don congregation is similar to the so-called new paradigm or free churches increasingly common in America (see Miller 1998). This kind of nondenominational approach¹⁴ is quite untypical in Komi and in Russia more broadly. Although William's background and ideological stance are substantial in this regard, the 'American' style is not promoted because of his guidance alone. Pastor Andrey, who leads the church, very strongly pursues the nondenominational and casual approach in the congregational life. It is important to say that Andrey is not simply copying the easily available or pre-given model but very consciously and for reasons well thought through prefers the nondenominational approach. Unregistered¹⁵ and called simply the Christian Community of Don (Донская христианская община), the group welcomes Christians of all denominations. Encouraging interactivity and free conduct, and praising God with pop-style music, their services differ considerably from Orthodox ones. In fact, not only the Orthodox are suspicious of the Don evangelicals. Some others, representatives of the more established and conservative Protestant groups, can be somewhat doubtful of what they consider to be a too liberal approach as well. Indeed, some of the members of the Don congregation with a background in Baptist churches specifically emphasise that they like the community's openness and readiness to socialise with Christians of all denominations – an attitude which they missed in their former churches.

In the summer of 2011, after planning to do so for a while already, William left Don to set up a mission in the neighbouring rayon.

Immediate verbatim communication between William and congregants or any other local people has been minimal because of the language barrier.¹⁶ Although William has thus not been directly active in establishing the Don congregation, the group's present profile and form is nevertheless in a certain virtual and yet practical manner inseparably connected with him. In the next sections I will look at how William's person and his role have been reflected by different local views.

OUTSIDERS' REFLECTIONS ON WILLIAM'S PRESENCE

Missionaries settling in Don quite expectedly caused excitement and stirred up multiple rumours not only in the village itself but across the whole of Kulömdin Rayon. As the missionaries actively engaged themselves in evangelising in different villages, mainly in the form of charity work (renovating schools, kindergartens, orphanages, etc.), but also otherwise (such as arranging Christian concerts or film nights at local clubhouses), awareness of their presence quickly spread by word of mouth as well as through the media.

The dominant discourse that accompanied William's residence in Don from the start depicted him as a foreigner with more than questionable intentions. William (and in fact his associates who were also categorised as 'Americans') was deemed to be a spy by Komi villagers in discussions of his person and his reasons to come to live in Don. This labelling did not include elaboration on the charge, or ideas of what exactly there would be to spy on in a village in the Komi hinterland. Certainly not everyone who refers to William as a spy does so in full seriousness; occasionally this is done jokingly and quite casually. Nevertheless, the tone and vocabulary adopted clearly signify the mistrust common people feel about the American's motives for being in their rayon. People voice the otherness of William and Don evangelicals predominantly by addressing them as 'sectarians', thus following the public discourse previously mentioned. The commentators do not generally formulate their suspicions specifically and William's supposedly dubious agenda is only hinted at:

Now he [William] is renovating the kindergarten for example, yes. And Maria Yevgenyevna asked how to pay him, with money or what. And he said that I don't need anything but [to help] your children and that's it. Well, isn't that interesting! He helps, helps the children... Why does he intrude here? (Yelizaveta)

Probably those who don't really think why this [missionary activity] is so widely sponsored, leave [Orthodoxy to join the evangelicals]. (Zhanna)

When commenting on outsiders' attitudes, several members of the evangelical congregation attest that before joining the group they used the prevailing disparaging discourse as well. Nadya, a former alcoholic, reminisces:

When they [missionaries] first came here we were of course all unbelievers and we didn't acknowledge anything but the Orthodox Church. And that's what we called them – sectarians. The spies arrived, that's what we said.

Such recollections serve the purpose of explicating the unjust and groundless nature of the accusations or hostile comments about William (and evangelicals generally) made by the villagers.

According to evangelicals, some of the most outrageous local indictments of sectarianism included allegations that they actually worship William not God; some of the villagers supposedly suspected the missionaries were really terrorists with plans to blow up the village council (see Ovchinnikov 2004). In general, however, the opposing feelings are not founded on such extreme grounds. Rather, the evangelicals are blamed for spreading teachings alien and misconceived from the Orthodox perspective. Some of the Orthodox worshippers see predominantly selfish motivations in William's undertakings, commenting that he wants to "earn himself a good life after death".

Despite numerous negative or doubtful commentaries, various villagers in the area have welcomed the practical help William and other missionaries provide. The situation has also prompted people to critically address the Orthodox Church, asking why the traditional religious institution is not paying attention to the many social problems in such an active form.

As mentioned, the media too has played a role in spreading knowledge about William's presence and, at times, helped to provoke the feelings of mistrust. On the one hand, simply the idea of an American coming to live in a Komi (Russian) village is presented as

something highly extraordinary and as such, newsworthy and entertaining. These sorts of accounts describe the Westerner managing in the rural setting, especially underscoring the remoteness of Don to magnify the bizarreness of American's choice.¹⁷ On the other hand, descriptions of the social work William and other missionaries carry out can be a more or less obvious way to criticise the local authorities for inactiveness in this regard (see Ovchinnikov 2004). However, some media reports have opted to promote the scandalous vernacular ideas and interpretations, following the more general trend in Russian society and hinting that there is covert danger in the American's motivations. This is how William describes the negative experience with representatives of the media:

Many television reporters coming here, next time we know, we read about it or hear about it on television... and it's a lie. [...] They never tell the whole truth. They will say some things that you said but then they add some other things that are just not true. Like they say, well, you're from some big organisation in America, from the government. I'm a pensioner! This [what the media says] is not true, it's a lie! [...] And this is the part... It hurts God and it hurts m... our reputation too.

A good example of media accounts with a specific anti-evangelical agenda and potential of generating agitating rumours is an article published in an Orthodox newspaper in which the reader is informed that the "followers of Americans" go by schools giving each pupil 10 roubles so that the children would come to them (Suvorov 2007).

Somewhat surprisingly, an alternative vernacular interpretation of William's person identifies him as a kind of healer or even a witch. Although the missionary has tried to emphasise that he only has an instrumental role in mediating God's word, some people have come to conclusion that the curious stranger himself possesses some sort of special powers or (secret) knowledge. Allegedly someone travelled to William even from the neighbouring region to have a curse taken off (Karmanova 2007). Interestingly, Aleksey Sidorov (1997 [1928]: 26) has recorded that in the Kulömdin villages the Germans who ended up in the area as a result of World War I were thought by the locals to be powerful witches. This suggests the existence of a specific folklore tradition that credits the uncommon foreigners with certain supernatural expertise in matters not possible to solve with normally attainable methods. It is possible to speculate that in a way the evangelicals (unintentionally) encouraged this sort of interpretations by buying a house in which a man had hung himself. Being aware of the local vernacular ideas of the pollution of this kind of place (which are thus to be avoided), the evangelicals assert that being a place of worship and being filled with believers has consecrated the house.

Just as William's arrival in Don gave rise to rumours, so did his departure. This is how a young woman from the group summarises the changing attitude of Don villagers towards William:

At first, they were afraid that some kind of spy arrived from America. They thought he would be spying on something. Afterwards they somehow calmed that he somehow started to aid everybody, to put his money in this aid. And he didn't take money [for helping]. Afterwards everybody started to like William very much of course. Now they ask why did he leave. [...] Now they said it was us who drove William away. [...] They thought that we had fallen out with him for some reason. (Galina)

However, people not living in Don, that is, not in immediate proximity to William, have had less interest and possibilities to reconsider his person and motives. Generally in the rayon the Don evangelicals are still strongly associated with William's presence. During our fieldwork trip in August 2012 conversations with Kulömdin residents revealed that more than a year after William's leaving they still had not heard about it.

WILLIAM'S ROLE AND IMAGE IN EVANGELICAL NARRATIVES

One of the core members of the Don congregation is Lidia. She became a believer in the mid-1990s, when she repented in a Baptist church in Syktyvkar. Although her sister had become a Baptist some years earlier, she lived in the capital and thus Lidia remained the only evangelical Christian in her immediate social environment. From the start she felt under pressure from both her relatives and the wider community because of her choice, and in constant need to justify it. This is how Lidia describes her thoughts prior to missionaries' appearance and how William's arrival was God's answer to her prayers for help in her struggles:

I started to pray to God – please, Lord, I cannot do anything alone, I need a helper. I need someone to support me, someone with transport, let's say, not only one person. As Jesus went to villages and talked about the truth. And I think that William is the answer to my prayers. [...] And also Anna Viktorovna's [...], she also said that when she was not yet a believer in living God, she nevertheless felt that some kind of enlightener is needed. As Stephen of Perm¹⁸ arrived in Komiland and disseminated Christianity here, so this William arrived too. [...] And I think – thank God, it is a blessing to our rayon, to our Don village, because Arkadiy's family was also in addiction [...], and God made this miracle and they are free from it now. [---] They started to go to William and William told them the word of God and it really touches people through the Holy Spirit. [---] Because of that, not only is William a blessing but also the fact that we have a church now in Don. I consider it a great blessing. So, thank God that there is William, that there are believers!

What is not explicit in this abbreviated excerpt is that Lidia played a very specific and active role in William's decision to move to Kulömdin Rayon in more than the form of prayer. When William was still in search of a place to settle in Komi, he became acquainted with Lidia in the Baptist church in Syktyvkar. When Lidia heard what kind of social programs William wanted to carry out, she assured the missionary that with the highest unemployment and crime rate in the republic, Kulömdin Rayon epitomised the kind of deprived location he was looking for. After taking some time to consider her proposition, William arrived at the conclusion that this rayon was indeed the place God wanted him to be in.

William's exemplary conversion story of an alcoholic and a drug-addict turning into a deeply religious man dedicated to helping needy people serves as a primary example in communicating the evangelical message to non-believers:

And he tells everyone that he does this because he believes in God, Jesus Christ. Because he was, how to say, heavily addicted to tobacco and drugs. And only God could release him from that not friends, not coding, not hypnosis.¹⁹ (Lidia)

As alcohol addiction is indeed a very sore and serious problem in the villages, William's promise of the possibility to break free from heavy addiction touches on a very real topic for many. So it is that some of the bystanders although not necessarily endorsing the evangelical faith as such, nevertheless support the missionaries' activities as they target the problem of alcoholism. Even some people attending the evangelical services are not so much motivated by religion (at least initially) but rather attend to support the real change in family members' lives that has brought about with the help and influence of the evangelicals.

Different aspects of William's conduct and appearance are perceived by the evangelicals as conveying his sincerity and devout belief in God. For example, simply the fact that he has not experienced any difficulties with extending his residence permit, a problem for many foreign missionaries (see Filatov 2009b: 17), is seen as a sign of God's special blessing on his pursuits. Furthermore, William is characterised as leading a very simple way of life, being unpretentious in his looks and needs and paying extremely little attention to himself. Even simple working clothes, worn by most villagers to carry out daily chores, seem to acquire a specific meaning when worn by William. From such depictions the perception is almost that the mere fact that this American lives in the scarce conditions of a Komi village somehow demonstrates his rarity, if not holiness.

And you see what he himself looks like – he goes about in simple clothes, even in so-to-say working clothes. This means he doesn't spend anything on himself. He eats very modestly. You see. And people say let him be American, let it be the American faith, but he is a man of God. Because indeed you know them by [their] works and fruits.²⁰ (Lidia)

The references to the Bible in the excerpt above are often made by the evangelicals to underscore the notion that one's belief should show in one's daily conduct, while only the expression of one's belief in words is empty or dead if one's actions do not support such a claim.

Both the opponents and supporters of William's activities share the general idea that in America most people are if not rich then at least well off and life there is easy. When in the media and in the pro-Orthodox vernacular discourse the fact that William left the 'good life' in America to move to Komi village to "help the needy people" is presented as something bizarre if not suspicious, the evangelicals see this as a prime manifestation of God's work in his servant's heart on the one hand, and God's care for the people of Komi on the other. The evangelicals like to emphasise the material wealth and high living standard that William willingly gave up to come to evangelise in Komi. This is not only to 'prove' that he is indeed a godly man, but I suggest that it is also an attempt to 'translate' to non-believers (non-evangelicals) how much more valuable is life with Jesus in one's heart as compared to any of the material commodities that people in the villages feel they are deprived of. In the following excerpt the pastor and one of the congregants discuss the radical change of living environments that William went through as prime evidence of transcendent guidance in an individual's life:

Andrey: William would never have arrived from welfare-America, where there's real welfare. He sold his house there, he had a house and a garage for two cars, a two-storey house, everything in the house, all the home appliances were new, a boat, a truck, a car, all thinkable and unthinkable tools. He was retired, the mort-

gage was paid [...] he had a good pension even according to American standards²¹ [...]. What would be the reason to come to a country, where he doesn't understand the language, to live in a village, to help people [...] – it doesn't make sense! [laughing to underline the incredibility of this kind of conduct] It doesn't make sense.

Anna: He went about in torn trousers.

Andrey: [To come here and] To heat the oven. This is the Lord. The Lord indeed changes peoples' lives, he changes people internally.

Andrey empathises with William on the matter of village life all the more as he had previously lived in big cities and admits that living in a log house without central heating or plumbing and having only a sauna to wash himself in was challenging at first.

Some members connected with the Don community express a certain discontent over the fact that even though they were evangelical Christians before meeting William, the local people still label them as fools deluded by the American or as opportunists hoping to gain some kind of personal benefit. As outsiders tend to associate all evangelicals in the rayon with the American, some additional difficulties can be caused to other missionaries' work as well. After settling in Don, the missionaries quickly established a friendly relationship with a Pentecostal missionary, Aleksey, based in the rayon centre. While Aleksey values and strongly supports the cooperation, he does note that the popular assumption that links his activity with foreign missionaries adds to the mistrust he encounters from the locals:

This evangelical faith is like an American faith, even though in this case [the Pentecostals in the Kulömdin Rayon] Americans have nothing to do with it. We were not sent here by the Americans. William, the one who is in Don [...], we did not know him at all. They only came here after us. [But] For them [sceptical bystanders, the Orthodox] it is an American faith anyway. All this is American for them, [like] some kind of chewing gum, it's all detrimental, it's all one and the same for them.

William is well aware that his endeavours to spread the gospel are often met with sceptical if not directly hostile feelings by the locals specifically because of his nationality. In fact, he even relates to such reactions by recalling that he too used to think of Russia as an enemy to America, that is, he recognises that much of the ordinary people's distrust is generated by public (political) discourse. Despite all the rumours, William concludes that most of the villagers take a very practical stand in regard to his and other missionaries' activities:

Lot of people will call you all kinds of names and it hurts being an American because – hah, American, he's a spy or he's here because he wants something, you know that kind of, of... persecution. Basically, just word of mouth, no one has threatened to kill me per se so far or anything like that. Most of the people, because we do help them, tend to... they accept us and they tend to like us. Yeah, they don't believe in what we believe, yeah, they won't come to Bible study or pray or anything. But they like us. Because we help them.

William's moving to another rayon has caused various reactions and interpretations in the small evangelical community as well. Apparently, for some members of the community William had a considerable entertainment value in a sense. One of the ladies bluntly announced that "it is very boring without William, we were already used to

him, [now] it's boring", although she still continues to visit the services quite regularly. Then again, some ladies seem to come to the meetings very rarely now that William is gone – a tendency that is commented upon by more zealous churchgoers. There are also some evangelicals who claim that William's leaving has not affected church life at all but only caused outsiders to gossip and say that there would be no more services. According to one interesting insider interpretation, William left because he felt that the local people were only taking advantage of him and he was disappointed in how few people actually came to God. During our interview William indeed made some remarks showing regret that "only very few" people are willing to believe and accept Jesus and that people who come to seek help to quit drinking for example are rather hoping to find "a tablet or a hypnotiser", that is, some sort of external and material remedies for their problems. Pastor Andrey, however, was much more enthusiastic in evaluating the success of their mission work. Considering their accomplishments over 9 years, he not only counted some 20 people "truly touched by God"²² but said they were only "the tip of the iceberg" as

Very many have had the opportunity to hear the alternative possibilities, to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in a language comprehensible²³ to them. [...] Seeds were sown in their hearts and when these will grow, perhaps in five years...²⁴

That is, according to the pastor's understanding, all those people who have somehow been in contact with the missionaries are possible converts as God might already be working in their hearts, even if the people do not show special interest in the gospel, or even flatly reject it.

Following the group members' somewhat varied levels of commitment to the congregation, the elaboration with which they discuss William's role somewhat differs too. Nevertheless, although not having been directly active in the quotidian life of the congregation, William is unanimously ascribed with the credit of starting the church. In contrast to outsiders, who typically only mention the American(s) as initiator of the congregation, the members do refer to Andrey's and Semyon's roles as well. Nevertheless, William is certainly attributed a particular position as specially sent by God to spread the gospel among the people of Komi.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is possible to detect two distinct, though in some respects interweaved ways in which the Komi village as environment is depicted in William's narratives. On the one hand, Komiland is pictured in terms of an 'at the end of the earth' discourse – a hardly accessible northern periphery with many needs and deprivations. Being such a remote and 'primitive' place, it is perceived as an almost ideal field for mission work. The idea of missionising 'at the end of the earth' is cosmologically significant in evangelical understanding because the necessary precondition for the Second Coming of Christ is that the Word of God has been heard in every corner of the world²⁵ (see Vallikivi 2011: 99ff.). Laur Vallikivi has observed that a considerable part of the Ukrainian missionaries' narratives about their mission trips in the North consists of accounts of overcoming difficulties and dangers in conquering the 'world's edge', rather than descriptions of witnessing

and conversion (2011: 103–105). A similar tendency to emphasise encountered hardships in a sort of uncivilised environment is also present in William's and his fellow-missionaries' narratives. Over the years, several American evangelicals have visited William to observe the progress of his mission work. For them too, coming to Komi and visiting the remote villages to hand out Bibles or other religious literature and overcoming certain (mainly physical) inconveniences in the course thereof seems to offer an opportunity to strengthen their own evangelical identity and to experience it in a more intense way than is usual in daily life. On the other hand, this 'wilderness' of Komi villages is seen by William as somehow more authentic or genuine as compared to the more developed West or bigger towns in the same region. According to this view, village people, even if unwilling to accept the gospel, are still more open-hearted and kind when compared to hard-boiled urban-dwellers. From this perspective William's reflections have a more personal character as he draws many parallels with the 1950s American milieu in which he grew up. For William the remote village environment thus offers an opportunity to actualise and strengthen his own evangelical faith and identity.

The missionaries in Don have had moderate direct success in evangelising. Yet the group has received a disproportional amount of attention²⁶ in the traditionally Orthodox environment primarily because of the American missionary, who has determined the group's image for the wider public. There are specific local discourses of which William became an object regardless of his particular person.

Non-Orthodox believers are commonly regarded as unwanted in Komi villages. Because people can hardly distinguish between different denominations and mainly just characterise them as new and alien, the presence of an American missionary epitomises this perceived foreignness. William is apprehended as a threat to the (imagined) consistent collective identity. As such, William's presence functions to activate the Orthodox identity – an aspect of the overall self-perception that might not be salient for most villagers in the course of the everyday, but emerges as a reaction to the critical Other. Then again there are voices that point out that the social welfare work William carries out is much needed in the villages and thus his presence is seen as acceptable. The source of conflict there is a certain ideological-spiritual clash as William has a very specific agenda to change something, not only materially as according to his evaluation the locals do not have real faith.

The evangelicals themselves, too, emphasise William's role in starting their church and initiating the active sharing of the gospel in the rayon. William's arrival in their home district is seen as a sign of God's care for the people there. Through the human actor, William, God is working to show the way to salvation. Although any elaborated communication between William and the villagers can only occur through a translator, according to the evangelicals observing his looks and behaviour should suffice to demonstrate his message. William is taken to be a moral role model not only for the congregation members but to all others too.

As I have tried to show, there is heterogeneity within both, Orthodox and evangelical, parties. Yet certain dominating discourses concerning William tend to come forth. It seems to me that William as a person has lost any real individuality or personality, and carries a certain symbolic meaning for different 'interest groups'; competing discourses have assigned him specific roles to support their particular claims. While the evangelicals interpret William's dramatic (and yet, typical in the evangelical tradition)

conversion story and his arrival in Komiland as evidence of the Holy Spirit working in his heart and God's care for the Komi people, for sceptical outsiders the American signifies the alien nature of the evangelical faith and its connections with foreign agents.

NOTES

1 This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT) and the Estonian Research Council (grant no. 8335).

2 Both the rayon and its centre are called Kulömdin. The rayon's territory is 26,200 km² and there are about 27,000 inhabitants.

3 As a result of the Stalinist repressions in the 1940s a considerable number of German Lutherans were deported to Komi territory. However, their (underground) congregations were rather exclusively for ethnic Germans, services and prayer meetings were held in German and as a rule, and they did not engage in proselytising. (FM; also cf. Filatov 2005: 189)

4 While the indigenous Komis constitute about 25 per cent of the republic's overall population, they are a majority in both the Kulömdin Rayon and in the village of Don. However, the missionaries have not paid any specific attention to the ethnic background of the local people.

5 William and other missionaries, publicly known, are identified in the article by real names; all others have been given pseudonyms. The pseudonyms given will indicate the informants' sex, but I will not give their respective age as due to the smallness of the Don congregation it would make the identification of specific people very easy.

6 Yemva is a town of about 14,000, located some 300 km from Kulömdin.

7 All quotations here and below are from interviews conducted during fieldwork in the Kulömdin Rayon between 2006 and 2012 (see FM).

8 Here and elsewhere William's speech with colloquialisms etc. is left unchanged. All other quotations are translated from Russian.

9 William receives donations made under the name of William Wood Missions to Russia to support his work in Komi; see the mission's web page (William Wood Missions to Russia).

10 Certainly neither the ROC generally nor local priests approve of such practices. Nevertheless, the ROC tends to be more accommodating of vernacular ideas and rituals.

11 Supposedly, the priest was quite willing to cooperate with the evangelicals until Bishop Pitirim, well known for his anti-Protestant attitude, interdicted against this kind of relationship. This seems to be in accord with Mark R. Elliott's (2003: 36, 45, 48) estimation that friendly relations between the Orthodox and evangelical churches are most likely to occur at a local level, as long as the higher Orthodox clerics do not ban such affiliations.

12 The sermons are held in Russian but Andrey has also shown interest in learning the Komi language. Most of the congregation members are Komi and use their native language in daily interactions, but all of them are bilingual.

13 Nevertheless, the number is not so small when considered that during our occasional visits to the regular Sunday services at the Orthodox church in Kulömdin about 40–80 church-goers attended.

14 Nondenominational Christian churches and congregations are historically Protestant but officially do not belong to any specific denomination (see Prothero 2007 for the historical developing of nondenominationalism in the United States). The Don congregation members usually refer to themselves as simply Christians or evangelical Christians and while they agree that there are different possible forms of worship, emphasis of the importance of individual conversion and mission activities places them in the evangelical tradition.

15 This is not a conceptual decision as in the case of the so-called Unregistered Baptists. Here the pastor simply found that going through the registration process would be too complicated,

while there would be no specific benefits to gain. Another important aspect is that it would only be possible to register under some already officially acknowledged Church and this does not fit with the nondenominational approach the Don evangelicals advocate.

16 Supposedly William has made some effort to learn Russian, but his knowledge of it is far too scarce to manage conversations. He has commented that he is too old to be able to learn a new language.

17 For example, the village is said to locate more than a half-day journey from the capital (see Kolobayev 2009) when in fact it is three hours by bus.

18 Stephen of Perm converted the Komi to Russian Orthodoxy at the end of the 14th century and became the first Bishop of Komi. Today, both the local ROC and indigenous evangelical Komi Church (see Leete, Koosa 2012: 181; Leete 2013) consider themselves to be descendants of St Stephen. The comparison made by Lidia seems perhaps somewhat ironic to a bystander as St Stephen missionised in the native language of the Komi while William speaks neither Komi nor Russian. However, Lidia's main point here is that like St Stephen, William promulgates the gospel in its genuine form.

19 In Russia, coding (a controversial technique in which the therapist convinces the patient that a code is inserted in the patient's brain after which consuming alcohol has serious physical effect and might even cause death) and hypnosis are popularly advertised as methods that help to quit drinking.

20 "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matthew 7:16)

21 Supposedly William's pension is above the average due to being a war veteran. It is hard for me to evaluate how well-to-do he was in the American context, but compared to the average Russian pensions William's income is certainly much more substantial. In addition to the donations from the believers in the United States, William has used his personal funds for the mission programs to a considerable extent.

22 Andrey regarded not only the community members who had explicitly repented, but also those who were going (or had previously been going) to services with a certain regularity to be "truly touched by God".

23 Here is an implicit criticism of the ROC, which the evangelicals reproach for conducting services in Old Church Slavonic, incomprehensible to most church-goers, and not making an effort to explain God's word in a way that is understandable to common people.

24 Here Andrey is probably referencing the parable of the sower in Mt. 13:1-9.

25 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts of the Apostles 1:8)

26 For example, when asked about non-Orthodox religious groups in the district, people who identified themselves as Orthodox or non-believers not once referred to the Pentecostal missionary Aleksey mentioned in the previous section, even though he was based in the district centre and had arrived there three years earlier than William. Then again, the district centre might be seen as providing certain anonymity and the possibility to remain unnoticed specifically because it is a much bigger settlement than the Don village; in addition, although he had been away for some years, Aleksey was actually of local origin.

SOURCES

FM = Fieldwork notes and recordings from 2006 to 2013. The material has been collected in the Kulömdin Rayon of the Republic of Komi by Art Leete and me; in 2006 Jaanika Jaanits and Kristi Tinkus also participated in the fieldwork.

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THE BODY IN NEW AGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUBTLE BODY: THE EXAMPLE OF THE SOURCE BREATHWORK COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the perception of the body among Source Breathwork practitioners. Source Process and Breathwork can be classified as a New Age healing practice that aims to heal the person as a whole. There is also a specific emphasis on healing birth trauma, which is understood as healing the fundamental experience of an individual's life. The body in New Age can be described with the notion of the 'subtle body', a non-dualistic approach to the body that blurs the boundaries between 'matter' and 'spirit'. Subtle bodies, the 'places' where healing occurs, are considered energetic, invisible and nebulous. The concept of the subtle body as a scholarly tool is applied in the analysis of fieldwork data collected between 2011 and 2013 in Estonia. In a Source community, the body is considered to be energetic and to include chakras. Members of the community claim that the functioning of the body and well-being in life bear upon negative and positive thoughts or decisions that are held in the subconscious and embedded at a cellular level in the body. Moreover, the breathwork practitioners believe that an individual already makes fundamental decisions about life in the womb or during birth. Since the perception of the body and birth are closely interrelated in the Source community, the meaning of birth is viewed from the perspective of the subtle body.

KEYWORDS: subtle body • energy • breathing • birth • healing

INTRODUCTION

One of the first anthropologists to describe techniques of the body was Marcel Mauss (1973 [1935]). He defined these techniques as "the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies" (ibid.: 70). Although in the contemporary study of the humanities and social sciences considering the body and bodily practices as more than just biological or physiological is as common as the understanding of the body's naturalness, the significance of Mauss' work lies in its emphasis on the process of learning and the role of socio-cultural context in acquiring techniques of the body. Giving the examples of Taoist and Yogic breathing techniques and affirming that similar techniques are more widespread than in China and India alone, Mauss encouraged researchers to

study breathing techniques as bodily techniques from the socio-cultural perspective (*ibid.*: 86–87). Indeed, practicing a breathing technique also means adopting an ideology, adopting beliefs and understandings relating to the body and its interaction with the world. Because they have been part of different religious/spiritual practices and have been relatively easily accessed, breathing techniques have gained wider popularity among people in Europe and the US since the 1960s and 1970s. Strongly intertwined with the body, embodiment, and bodily experiences, one of these breathing techniques is Source Process and Breathwork, which is the focus of this paper.

Source Process and Breathwork (hereafter Source Breathwork) can be classified as a New Age¹ healing practice that pays equal attention to the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects of the human experience. Source Breathwork has been developed from a similar practice called Rebirthing, which was ‘invented’ by an American, Leonard Orr, in the 1960s and 1970s, since when a network of Source Breathwork practitioners has gathered around the founder of the practice, Binnie A. Dansby.² Born in 1939 in the US, Dansby began to focus on spiritual self-development and healing practices during the 1970s. For more than 30 years Dansby has been engaged in breathwork and healing birth trauma, and has developed the philosophy and methodology of Source Breathwork. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Source Breathwork training and seminars have regularly taken place in Estonia. As a result, a local Source community³ has emerged. During the breathwork sessions, a practitioner breathes rhythmically connecting inhalation and exhalation. Practitioners claim to have bodily, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experiences, which have a central role in self-development and personal healing, i.e. bringing transformation and well-being to the practitioners’ lives.

The New Age milieu is characterised by a rich array of healing practices that often come and go. However, what makes Source Breathwork remarkable and a fascinating phenomenon to study is its emphasis on birth and healing birth trauma. According to Source Breathwork teachings, birth is seen as one of the most fundamental experiences, the ‘source experience’ and has an immense influence on a person’s consequent life. Practitioners frequently claim they re-experience, and, hence, remember, their physical birth, as well as post- and prenatal periods, during a breathing session. Members of the community think that birth can be a traumatic experience for both mother and new-born and so it needs to be healed. Moreover, to change the world, improve the well-being of subsequent generations and offer women an opportunity to giving birth in an ‘alternative’, ‘ecstatic’ and ‘gentle way’, Dansby also pays much attention to childbirth practices and to the environment in which a baby is born. Thus, the practice of Source Breathwork is not just a breathing technique and it is not just about personal healing and self-development. I believe it can also have a significant social influence. As the women at Source community emphasise, by following their intuition and listening to their bodies during pregnancy they might, for example, refuse generally accepted medical procedures if they feel no need for them. They might prefer home births to hospitals, in a situation where the former is still not clearly regulated by law in Estonia. The expectations, needs and views on birth can be remarkably different from those which medical discourse advocates. Hence, contradictions and misunderstandings between Source Breathwork practitioners and medical workers may occur.

One of the factors that generate contradictions between the two discourses – the religious/spiritual and medical – is perception of the human body. Representing the scien-

tific-rationalist understanding of the world, contemporary medicine considers the body biological and physiological, and a locus of chemical processes. However, the body in New Age can be described with the notion of the 'subtle body', a non-dualistic approach to the body that blurs the boundaries between 'matter' and 'spirit'. The concept of subtle body is particularly useful in order to understand the functioning of the world and the self in terms of holism, which is one of the main characteristics of New Age thought. Subtle bodies, also known for example in Hindu and Buddhist religious practice, Western esoteric philosophical and religious traditions as well as in shamanism, are seen as nebulous, energetic and invisible (Barcan, Johnston 2005; Johnston 2010). It is believed that healing primarily takes place in the subtle body, not in the physical one. Using the term 'subtle body' as a scholarly term, the aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the concept of body in the Source Breathwork community. My analysis is mainly based on the work of Jay Johnston and Ruth Barcan – researchers from the discipline of Cultural Studies. As alternative healing practices have gained more attention in the study of medical and social sciences as sociological, ethical, legal and medical phenomena, Johnston and Barcan encourage study of these health therapies from the cultural as well as historical point of view. Setting their study in a philosophical and discursive framework, they have analysed alternative health therapies and New Age thought from the perspective of the subtle body model (Barcan, Johnston 2005; Johnston, Barcan 2006; Johnston 2010; see also Johnston 2008).

Motivated by Johnston and Barcan and drawing on fieldwork materials collected between 2011 and 2013, the main research questions of this article are: how is the body constructed in the Source community; and how can the importance of birth be explained with the help of the subtle body concept? During the 2011–2013 period, I conducted participant observation in breathing groups, seminars, and Source community training. I have also interviewed members of the community and regular practitioners of breathwork. The article relies on 20 semi- and less structured interviews, as well as fieldwork notes.

My aim in the first section is to introduce the term 'subtle body' as a scholarly tool and a non-dualistic conception of the body. Examples of subtle bodies will give insight to the richness of this particular type of body and also provide more extended context for the next section. The second section deals with analysis of the fieldwork data. Relying on the concept of the subtle body and focusing on narratives of birth and breathing experiences, I will outline the main aspects of the construction of the body in the Source Breathwork community. In the conclusion, I will explain with the help of the subtle body model, why Source practitioners consider birth so important.

BODY VERSUS MIND?

In Western thought, the body is often considered something natural, unchangeable and passive that belongs to the realm of biological and medical study. However, it would be inadequate to ignore the cultural, social and historical contexts when analysing the body (Grosz 1994: x), since the boundaries of the 'Western self' have been historically constructed, including philosophical and religious assumptions (von Stuckrad 2005: 136). Western philosophy has been much influenced by dualism, a belief that the world

is composed of two exclusive substances – the physical and the spiritual. Dualism separates mind from body and thus divides man into two opposite parts. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz claims that the body-mind dichotomy produces two hierarchical terms, with the mind the privileged and the body the subordinate term. To establish its borders and identity, the privileged term marginalises the subordinated term making it negative or invisible. Hence, the body becomes clearly distinct from, as well as the underling to, the mind. (Grosz 1994: 3)

Plato (427–347 BC) wrote about the body-mind duality early on in Western philosophical history. Plato was convinced that the soul is the ‘true’ and ‘real’ part of Man, which is imprisoned by the body (Stuckrad 2005: 14). Christian tradition continues the principle of duality, saying that the immortal soul is given by God, while the mortal body belongs to the human world (Grosz 1994: 5). René Descartes (1596–1650), who sharply separated the soul from nature, believed that the body alone could be considered a part of nature, whereas the mind or the soul has no place in the natural world. Body, an ‘extended substance’, is seen as a mechanical device that functions according to the laws of nature and is subordinate to the mind, the ‘thinking substance’ (ibid.: 6). As man is first and foremost a thinking being, Descartes concluded that what we intimately know is *not our bodies* but the structure of our minds (for example, the nature of our rationality) (Johnson 1987: xxvi). This means the higher truth can be found when studying the mind. The body becomes secondary, is naturalised and left to the scrutiny of the natural sciences.

Cartesian dualism has had immense influence on the scientific-rationalist conception of the world. The body is understood as profoundly secular, physical and physiological; it is the place of biological-chemical processes. New Age healing practices that have gained popularity during the 20th century, however, see the body differently: it is dynamic and crosses the borders of matter and mind, physical and metaphysical, sacral and secular. Healing practices give attention to the interaction between the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of human experience, as well as to social factors that influence the living environment (Hanegraaff 1996: 43). This particular emphasis on the interaction between the different spheres of life is based on the concept of holism, which sees the body-mind and the man-universe as a whole. It is difficult to combine holistic New Age thought with dualism, as New Age believers do not consider the physical body as a ‘prison’ of the soul nor a ‘substance’ that is radically distinguished by the mind (ibid.: 222). Although, New Age has its roots in the Western counter-culture of the 1960s, and at the same time represents a phenomenon of the postmodern consumer society, Wouter Hanegraaff has emphasised that its fundamental ideas can be traced back to distant history. New Age can be seen as the contemporary manifestation of what is called Western esotericism. (Hanegraaff 2009 [2002]: 340) Furthermore, the perceptions of the body in New Age can also be understood as manifestations and complex combinations of esoteric traditions.

In addition to the physical body, there is another ‘body’ – the subtle body – which gains focus among New Age practitioners. Drawing on Jay Johnston (2010), subtle bodies have been variously conceptualised in Eastern, Western and esoteric philosophical and religious traditions as well as different indigenous⁴ and shamanic cultures. However, all these ‘bodies’ are seen as ontologically energetic, nebulous and invisible. Moreover, it is believed that instead of the physical body, the subtle body is the place where true

healing comes about. In contrast to dualism, subtle bodies represent blurred boundaries between 'matter' and 'spirit', so that it is impossible to separate pure spirit and pure matter. In this sense, as Johnston says, subtle bodies disrupt the type of binary logic that sharply distinguishes the physical from the metaphysical, matter from consciousness, the self from the divine or I from Other. Subtle bodies are believed to be comprised of energetic 'substance', in which the physical body and the spirit (or metaphysical agency) interpenetrate one another. Johnston (2010: 69–73) concludes that, from this perspective, the subtle body can be understood as an embodied interface between the religious/spiritual and biological. In other words, the subtle body is the bridge between the physical and the metaphysical worlds (Hanegraaff 1996: 222). So, the concept of the body and the way it is perceived in New Age originates from a philosophical system that is different to dualism.

It is necessary to clarify that, on the one hand, the concrete term 'subtle body' is a vernacular category which one finds in different New Age or esoteric books and encounters in terminology used by the practitioners; but on the other hand, the subtle body may be seen as a model of a particular type of body and used as a scholarly tool (for example, Barcan, Johnston 2005; Johnston, Barcan 2006; Barcan 2010; Johnston 2010). So the term has both emic and etic usages. Considering the subtle body a scholarly tool, it is firstly possible to distinguish a descriptive category that answers to the question of how the subtle body is conceptualised in different religious and philosophical traditions. Secondly, the model of the subtle body can be used as an analytical category, which helps us to understand different discourses of the body and the ways people perceive themselves and are related to others. Moreover, this helps us to find the meanings of, and reasons for, socio-cultural changes that are in interaction with the perceptions of human body.

As for the descriptive category in general, according to Johnston, one can divide the model of subtle body into two types. These two types can exist separately as well as together, in combination with each other. The first type comprises different energetic sheaths or 'bodies' that extend beyond the physical body. These 'bodies' interpenetrate and exceed each other and the physical body. (Johnston 2010: 70) The example of this type of subtle body can be found in the works introduced by the Swiss physician, alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim) in the 15th and 16th centuries, and it still is found in the contemporary New Age milieu (ibid.). Paracelsus claimed that everything visible – minerals, plants, animals and men – have "their invisible counterparts in the macrocosm, where they exist as 'astra', which represent their essence" (Benzenhöfer, Gantenbein 2006: 927). As a consequence, he was convinced that a man consists of the visible and the invisible body, and the latter is closely related with stars which influence the physical body and its condition (ibid.: 923; also see Christie 1998). In addition, the Modern Theosophical Society founded in 19th century by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and her companions, has carried the ideas of subtle bodies to New Age belief and practices (Johnston 2010: 70). Similarly to Paracelsus' ideas, theosophical teachings claim that the microcosm of a man corresponds to the macrocosm of universe. Man and earth have seven bodies,⁵ of which the only visible body is the physical one that has the highest consistency of matter (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 15). The rest of the energetic 'bodies' are comprised of both matter and consciousness (or spirit) to various degrees (Johnston 2010: 70). Accord-

ing to Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, in her *Secret Doctrine* (1888) Blavatsky found that the higher purpose of a man is to reach the three last levels – *Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Atma* – of embodiment with the help of reincarnation. Once people succeed, mankind will be like gods. (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 15–17; see also Goodrick-Clarke 2008)

The second type of subtle body is called esoteric anatomy. It is believed that organs in the physical body have energetic subtle matter counterparts and/or the body has internal pathways of subtle energy (Johnston 2010: 70). For example, belief in the existence of chakras, the centres of energy that are located in the human body on the subtle level, represent the attributes of the second type of subtle body. Having an Indian background, the term ‘chakra’ and its interpretations have been successfully adapted by New Age believers with the help of so-called esoteric spokespersons of the 19th and 20th centuries (see also Hammer 2001: 91–97, 181–197). Although the number can vary, often seven charkas are depicted aligning up the spine to the top of the head. Every chakra corresponds to and influences the functioning of certain organs in the physical body. Furthermore, blockages of energy flow in the chakras are considered to influence all spheres of life: the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, etc. Another example of the second type of subtle body can be found in the teachings of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) that have entered the New Age milieu. As Johnston has noted, *qi* (or *chi*) – a life force or vital energy – flows along the internal pathways of the body and connects the individual self with the cosmos. Since the organs of the body are considered to be energetic and not anatomic, the aim of TCM practitioners is to regulate, or redirect *qi* through the physical body and simultaneously use it to heal. (Johnston 2010: 75–76)

As mentioned above, the model of the subtle body can also be applied as an analytical category. The contemporary world is characterised by different co-existent discourses on the body in which the subtle body can be seen as one among others. Being the bridge between the physical and the metaphysical world, the subtle body enables us to understand the concept of the self from the perspective of holism, leading to the New Age belief that ‘we are all one’ or ‘we are all connected’. When considering an individual as comprised of a subtle body, the perception of the self becomes inherently extensive, open and multiple, i.e. being “a stark contrast to the bounded singular subject of modernity” (Barcan, Johnston 2005: 73). The individual is intimately interrelated with the environment and other people as the boundaries of the self extend beyond the corporeal boundaries (Johnston, Barcan 2006: 34). This type of body has also been described with the theoretical concept of the ‘open body’, which represents in contrast to the ‘closed body’ magical and pre- and early modern perceptions of the body. As boundaries between the self and the outside world are less distinct, the open body is “considered more vulnerable to intrusion from the outside” (Stark 2006: 154). The latter is also characteristic to the subtle body. In the New Age worldview the individual becomes extremely sensitive to the environment so that every minor change in the macrocosm can have an influence on the body and mind. At the same time an individual is perceived as profoundly independent with the power to transform the environment. Thus, New Age belief is that one’s thoughts can have an impact on personal relationships, change society and the condition of planet Earth and so on. From the perspective of the subtle body the self is open to the environment and is able to draw forth changes in the world.

As Ruth Barcan and Jay Johnston have noted, New Age practitioners are often sceptical about modern medicine and scientific-rationalist conceptions of the body. Instead, as mentioned above, the spiritual and/or magical understandings are being revived and refashioned (Barcan, Johnston 2005: 73). When challenging scientific-rationalist models of the body (*ibid.*), the subtle body helps to explain the contradictions between orthodox medicine and alternative (or vernacular) medicine. The concept of subtle body gives a more exhaustive meaning to emic terms like ‘illness’ and ‘health’. Taking the model of the subtle body and the extensiveness, openness and multiplicity of the self into consideration, it becomes explicit why New Age practitioners, in contrast to practitioners of orthodox medicine, view illness, according to Hanegraaff, as a disruption of balance that causes dissonances in all realms of life; or why good health, in addition to physical condition, also means general harmony and well-being (1996: 42–47).

New Age believers can be familiar with various models of the subtle body as they are frequently engaged in several practices. When talking about different practices, practitioners express themselves diversely using compatible vocabulary. The term ‘subtle body’ does not belong to the basic terminology of Source Breathwork teachings, and neither do practitioners usually use the term when talking about breathwork. However, the way the body is perceived emanates from the concept of the subtle body. Generally in the teachings of Source Breathwork, the body is understood according to the second type of subtle body. Although, as already mentioned, two types of subtle body can be combined. The same may occur in the Source community at the individual level. Giving an outline of core beliefs of Source Breathwork, I aim to introduce and analyse the perception of the body in the community. In Source community, the body is considered energetic and comprised of chakras. Members of the community claim that the functioning of the body and well-being in life (i.e. a person’s health) are interrelated with negative and positive thoughts or decisions that are “held as unconscious beliefs” (Dansby 2012c) and are embedded on a cellular level in the body. Healing particularly takes place in the subconscious and/or in the cells. As the body is seen as energetic, I argue that terms like ‘cellular memory’ (or ‘body memory’) and ‘the subconscious’, used by Source practitioners, should be primarily looked at from the perspective of the subtle body.

THOUGHTS, ENERGY AND THE BODY

New Age beliefs and practices have been characterised as eclectic, heterogeneous and flexible, easily integrating various ideas. Practitioners are encouraged to interpret and combine religious and philosophical teachings from different cultures and periods. Moreover, although conventional science can be viewed negatively, selected pieces of scientific discourse have found their way to New Age doctrines (Hammer 2001: 204). Scientific concepts are often adjusted to religious symbols (Lewis 2007: 210). As science develops, the vocabulary of New Age teachings and modes of expression are also constantly being renewed, complemented and reinterpreted.⁶ Thus, New Age teachings as a whole are relatively dynamic and rich in different concepts and interpretations. Although Binnie A. Dansby has written the teachings of Source Breathwork, practitioners interpret them according to their own experiences, as personal experience is valued highly. Despite the fact that birth and healing birth trauma comprise the core of Dans-

by's teachings, this does not mean that all Source practitioners consider birth equally important. Instead of birth as the 'source experience', the experience that is believed to have fundamental influence on a person's life can lie, for example, in childhood.

As the focus of this article is also on birth, I will present part of a longer birth narrative told by a Source Breathwork practitioner, Silje,⁷ to provide a more delineated background for the analysis. Silje has been engaged in breathwork since 2001 and claims to have been healing birth trauma ever since. I have chosen this narrative as it points out fundamental aspects of the practice and philosophy. Furthermore, the narrative is characteristic of the way Source practitioners describe their birth experience and relate it to their lives. Silje, similarly to the other practitioners, claims that her birth experience has been reconstructed with the help of breathwork sessions that have made her remember her birth. She has also gathered information from her mother about the birth.

OK, finally I am born. I am content with myself. I have a perfect body, I am perfect. But the first breath that I take in that cold room – I have a feeling like my body explodes. It seemed I lost everything as they immediately cut my umbilical cord. The doctors and the midwife are anxious and in panic. They look after my body. They pull me straight [on the table] covered with oilcloth. I felt it, I have the memory of the oilcloth that I could feel with my back. They put a [name]tag around my leg, I have that memory. Then they clean my mouth and everything else, at the same time they're frightened and anxious. But what about me? It's distasteful, painful and so inconvenient. You know, if you have a terrible headache, the headache is just a slight sensation that reminds me of the explosiveness of the first breath. Literally I had oxygen poisoning: this is again my memory and I have released that memory. The first inhale provided me with oxygen of three to five times more than I actually needed. [...] What then happened? My mother, whom I loved and love so much, I came here only for her, to make her and my father happy. Although, entering the body is like a thunderclap or lightning. Actually, the Light, in other words God or the Spirit, came into the body – that is the way I experience the birth. But it all happened so quickly. Basically in a second my body had to adjust to all these changes. As everything was so intense, I wasn't encouraged to take the next breath. But I had to do it... well OK, I chose to do it. [...] And then I was swaddled. But the body, or to be exact, the mind and the consciousness is used to feeling mother's body, which is alive, and receiving information and sensing Life through her body. This gives me the signal that I'm alive and my mother is alive. But now I'm under the plastic dome and when my consciousness perceives it, then I get feedback that the dome is not alive and it means I'm also not alive. My body is not alive because my mother is gone, the one who represents Life. And my mother is dead [...], and I had the thought that I had killed my mother. But OK. I have the memory that till the moment when I was in the same room with my mother, then it was OK. Then it was like an adventure, the adventure of birth, the adventure of entering the body. But when I was taken away from that room, then the trauma began. Then all this turned into [birth] trauma because it seemed so final. When I took my first breath, the only thought, the only verbal thought that I had was that my father has abandoned me. I think it was God the Father that I experienced. I experienced that my creator had abandoned me, as well as my real father in the physical sense. They both are actually the same for a child. The immense grief and

despair [that I felt]... and then [in this situation] the thoughts that come to your mind and the decisions that you make. Firstly, "I am dead", "I am in the body, and I am dead", "my mother is dead". And [secondly,] "if I express my love and passion, then it is deadly". It is fatal, isn't it? [Another thought was] "My body hurts" and for me the fundamental thought was: "I have no influence", the experience of being pointless. In one word, you can even say, the body comes to be comprised of a kind of lethargic layer. These were the decisions that I made according to the condition of the environment. From this perspective I didn't have any opportunity to make different decisions, but still these were my decisions [which affected my life]. Now I can say that even if I knew how it is going to work out, I never considered that these decisions could have such a distractive influence on my life. I was distracted by these birth experiences for 37 or 38 years, but some people are distracted even for their whole life. [...] Everything that happened after the birth, the following three days, and everything that happened during the birth creates my life pattern. (Silje, 48 years old, interview 2013)⁸

The understanding that a person can remember his/her birth relies on the principle that a baby is already 'conscious' in the womb and during birth. This means a new-born, and even an embryo, is an intellectual being that is able to make, according to the surrounding environment, decisions that have an impact on a person's future life. Decisions can be positive, for example, "I am loved and connected with everything", or similarly to the extract above, negative, for example, "I am dangerous", "I do not deserve love". These negative decisions are called 'self-limiting' decisions and are believed to be the "foundation for our negative patterns and form the core of all human conflict" (Dansby 2012c). According to Source Breathwork teachings due to self-limiting decisions a person stops breathing deeply and expansively, which causes tensions and blockages in the flow of energy. Blockages of energy eventually result in illnesses, in the sense that the balance of different realms of life, i.e. physical, mental, social etc., is disrupted. In short, negative patterns of thought are believed to hinder the flow of energy.

Although I had done so many different things and lived such an interesting life, from time to time I suffered from very deep and long periods of depression. Now I have understood and seen where it all came from. Already before my birth I made a decision that I had done something wrong. Altogether, I even didn't want to born and that was the source of all of my problems: I thought I had chosen the wrong profession, you see, I don't work as a doctor, but why then did I study at university for seven years to become a doctor? Then I thought I am married to the wrong man: he's a politician and he's not on the same wavelength as I am. There were so many things that were wrong in my life. But this pattern repeats itself over and over again in your life until you get rid of the pattern in your subconscious, and my negative pattern of thought was that I had done something wrong. There was a thought in my subconscious that I repeated: you are doing wrong, you are doing wrong, you are doing wrong; you should do something else. These negative thoughts block the energy. The moment after I had worked with the topic related to my father and my birth, the energy was unblocked, on that Monday [after the breathwork training]. Then I understood what it means to live without the blockages, you'll have so much energy. Actually I have inherited an enormous amount of energy from birth. (Linda, 63 years old, 2012 interview)

Practitioners say that these blockages in the flow of energy occur in the chakras, the centres of energy. Chakra systems vary in different religious and philosophical traditions, even in the New Age milieu.⁹ Members of the Source Breathwork community rely on a system that is comprised of seven or eight chakras¹⁰ aligning from the bottom of spine to the top of the head. Every chakra is related to a colour, theme, decision, thought and a body organ or part of the body that is regulated by the functioning of that chakra (see also Dansby 2012b).

[E]very chakra has its own theme and its [energetic] blockages that are embedded in the chakras. The throat is connected with communication. Thoughts like “my self-expression is not welcomed, I cannot express myself” [are connected with the throat chakra]. It is interesting to see, how people share [their thoughts] on Binnie’s training in big groups. Some people stand up when their third training session is ending and say: “It is first time for me to stand up and say something as now I have found enough courage.” The more you do it [share in a group], the more safe it becomes. But at first when you stand up, your face becomes red, you want to sit down at once. Actually this is caused by the patterns in the throat chakra that need to be released, [...] they aren’t serving us anymore. (Kairi, 23 years old, interview 2011)

As it is believed that a person can make his/her first decision about life in the womb or during birth, the proper functioning of the chakras, i.e. the free flow of energy, can already be interfered during the process of birth. A traumatic birth blocks the energy flow in the chakras and chakras will be ‘closed’.

If you have seen yourself as a foetus and the moment when you’re being born – and during the breathing session I have experienced it all – then there’s no doubt the birth is a high spot for a child. And indeed, birth is the moment where one makes a decision about life. If a baby is born, let’s say, in an artificial environment, in a hospital: unfamiliar hands in rubber gloves, then the umbilical cord is cut very fast. He/she decides that life is hell, it’s a shock! And he/she doesn’t want it anymore. He/she closes all the chakras, primarily the heart chakra. Then afterwards for the whole life people take courses to open the chakras again. (Linda, 63 years old, 2012 interview)

The extracts above exemplify that birth is considered extremely important and influential. The problems a person encounters in his or her life can originate from birth. Drawing on Silje’s and Linda’s interviews, the process of birth is described as a remarkable physical effort for a new-born. Moreover, the environment that surrounds a new-born during or after birth can have a traumatic impact on the baby as well. Although birth is inseparably related to the physical realm and physical bodies, the members of the Source community are convinced that the meaning which is given to birth foremost influences life, as well as the condition of the physical body. Thus, illness primarily begins from the mental level due to the negative decisions that block the flow of energy in the chakras. When approaching the body from the perspective of the subtle body, energy becomes one of the key concepts. As birth in the Source community is conceptualised in terms of an intertwining of energy, thoughts and body, the relationship between them needs further scrutiny.

In New Age philosophy, energy “is understood to be a constitutive element of mind and the physical body, as well as to exceed the corporeal self into the ‘space’ between self, other and world” (Johnston, Barcan 2006: 29). Similarly to other New Age practices, energy and thought are closely intertwined in the Source Breathwork community. Energy itself is considered neither good nor bad, it is something that exists and connects everybody and everything. However, interpretations of energy, i.e. how people think about energy, can be positive or negative. For instance, breathwork practitioners often claim that if a person feels fear or pain in the body, it is just an expression and interpretation of energy. When thinking about pain or fear, in other words energy, in a negative way, these feelings and emotions increase in the body as they are emphasised in the mind. Thus, thoughts in combination with energy create the experience of one’s body. To illustrate the priority and inseparable connectedness of the body, thoughts and energy, the argument that the “body is condensed thought” (Silje, 48 years old, interview 2013) is highly relevant. Moreover, the idea of the intertwining of body, thoughts and energy explains the fundamental New Age belief “I am God”, “I create my own reality”, “what I think that I am”. In the Source community it is emphasised that every person has a choice: how to think about, channel, and apply the energy usefully. To utilise energy in a ‘life-supporting’ way, affirmations – i.e. positive sentences widely used in the New Age milieu – are recited and repeated deep in thought by the Source practitioners during breathing sessions as well as in everyday life. Because affirmations are believed to help re-interpret the decisions made during birth, transformation, one of the most characteristic pillars of New Age thought (see also Lewis 1992: 6–7; Johnston, Barcan 2006: 26), is followed by the practitioners.

[T]here’s no point in just re-experiencing a trauma, the purpose [of breathwork sessions] is to change. Extremely powerful changes take place in annual water-sessions in spring. There’s a guy, Steen,¹¹ from Sweden, who is the owner of the pool, and he is very experienced with working in water sessions. [...] [W]hen a person is breathing and is re-experiencing a trauma, then he raises [the person out of water] and says: “Look around! Is your body safe [reference to the affirmation]?”¹² Look at the people who are with you.” [The practitioner] has to change the negative thoughts [to positive] right away, has to continue with breathing. [...] The whole idea is to use the energy to change our unconscious thoughts. So that the thoughts become supportive... not limit life or nurture negativity. (Jana, 41 years old, interview 2011)

As I have shown so far, energy is inseparably connected with the body and mind. Changing one’s thoughts entails transformation in the physical body and other realms of life, i.e. the process of healing is activated. However, some questions remain. Although a baby is believed to be ‘conscious’ during birth, what is the explanation for remembering one’s own birth? How is access to, and healing of, unconscious thoughts and decisions explained?

The interview made by Linda directs us closer to the answers. In the first extract of her interview, Linda claims that there was a life-limiting thought in her subconscious that repeated itself as a pattern in her life. Thanks to breathing sessions she was able to change the thought, which resulted in re-establishing a free flow of energy in her body (cf. also the extract of Jana’s interview). The subconscious is the ‘place’ where all

thoughts, decision and memories that create human experience are held. It has to be emphasised that the concept of the subconscious should be looked at from the perspective of the subtle body model. As illnesses are believed to originate from the level of the mind, they need to be healed at the same level. Using the energy, the subconscious is the 'place' where thoughts can be changed, memories re-experienced and finally a person healed. As breathing itself is simultaneously understood as a physical and metaphysical activity, the access to the subconscious is primarily gained through breathwork sessions.

[B]asically, from the first inhalations and exhalations you will be immediately connected with the space of your subconscious. Well... subconscious... nobody actually knows where it is situated. I don't remember if it was Binnie or somebody else who said that the subconscious is our body and our life story, the story of our current life. (Toomas, 50 years old, interview 2011)

Another important aspect that needs to be mentioned is the understanding that the 'subconscious is our body'. This takes us a step forward to the point where we consider that the subconscious is not just a mental field somewhere, but is embedded in and more strongly related to the body. This is the same way that practitioners talk about the subconscious and changing unconscious thoughts or realising past memories, setting free the old patterns of cellular or body memory.

[T]he aspect that distinguishes Binnie's teachings from other teachings is that Binnie focuses on the human body and bringing the spirit to body and cells. [...] Coming back to yourself and even more, coming to your body and releasing patterns of cellular memory – that is what Binnie teaches. Binnie's aim is to release old patterns and replace them with new thoughts or new impulses, because the quality of life improves when I'm replacing old with new. [...] For me, Binnie's method means working with body memory. (Kairi, 23 years old, interview 2011)

The function of cells is similar to the function of the subconscious. When a baby is born the experience of the birth is retained in the cells, as Dansby states: "We remember our gestation and birth in every cell of our Being" (2012c). Basically, it can be said that both cellular memory and the subconscious are equivalent: a breathing sessions gives access to the decisions, including the memories, that are stored in the cells. When changing the cells' patterns during the session, it is believed healing takes place at deepest levels of the human body. Drawing on James Lewis, I noted at the beginning of this section that in New Age, scientific concepts are often adjusted to become religious symbols. The vocabulary of New Age teachings is often influenced by scientific terminology and rhetoric, which have an important role in legitimating the teachings and in gaining authority (Lewis 2007: 220).¹³ Instead of talking about the subconscious only, in the age of cell biology and genetic engineering it is more relevant and modern to include the concepts of cells and cellular memory in Source Breathwork teaching. However, here again one must keep in mind that cells are not understood just as part of the biological and physical body. Cells should be seen as comprised of energetic matter and therefore belonging to the realm of the subtle body. The functioning of the cells is believed to be directed by thoughts and decisions, in short, by energy that in turn connects a person with his or her surrounding environment (see also Dansby 2012b).

However, what is the role of the physical body when thoughts, decisions, memories and past experiences are believed to direct a person's life? Firstly, as breathing is a mode for reaching directly through the physical body to the subtle levels, the physical body becomes a tool that paves the way to inner and concealed levels of a human being. Secondly, it can be noted that the physical body becomes like a mirror that reflects what is happening at the level of the mind, for example as Linda claims: "The body initiates nothing, body is the final stage. [The illness] starts at the mental level [...] and then heads for the physical level manifesting itself in pains and pathologies." (Linda, 63 years old, 2012 interview) The emergence of illness is like a signal informing a person to change his or her life and thoughts. So, the body becomes a "knowing organism" (Barcan 2009: 221) that holds valuable knowledge for practitioners. Thirdly, Source practitioners emphasise that one should be constantly 'conscious' of being in the body. Moreover, the body should be 'listened' to as all sensations in the body have meanings – they can be related to unconscious thoughts. Thus, the body becomes a living metaphor, "a set of signs to be decoded and rendered meaningful" (Barcan, Johnston 2005: 67).

FINAL REMARKS: BIRTH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUBTLE BODY

In the Source community birth is viewed from the perspective of New Age thought. Birth is not considered just as a medical procedure, but foremost a spiritual and very intimate act. The perception of the body and the importance of birth are closely inter-related. Drawing on the subtle body model and the extracts of interviews that I have previously presented in this article, I touch on some of the aspects that help us to understand why birth is considered fundamentally important by Source practitioners.

As I have shown, in Source Breathwork community the perception of the body originates from the subtle body model. Since subtle bodies blur the boundaries between 'matter' and 'spirit', it is impossible to separate pure matter and pure spirit. The concept of cells used in Source teachings exemplifies the disruption of the binary logic that distinguishes the physical from the metaphysical: cells are definitely part of human biology and the physical body, but at the same time they are the holders of thoughts and past experiences; they are comprised of and influenced by the 'substance' called energy. Energy, the key concept of the subtle body, connects a person with other people and the world at the cellular level. If an individual is perceived from the perspective of the subtle body, the self and the body become extensive and open to the environment. The boundaries of the self are not bounded by the physical body, but they extend beyond corporeality. In this sense, the body and the self become more vulnerable and sensible about the environment. Birth is seen as an enormous change for the self – it is the manifestation of an embodied spirit, as Silje also stated: "[T]he Light, in other words God or the Spirit, came into the body". The new-born is considered to be intimately connected with the divinity and therefore, understood as the purest and most loving being (cf. Silje's claim: "OK, finally I am born. I am content with myself. I have a perfect body, I am perfect"). However, purity, love and divinity also entail the vulnerability of the new-born.

The breathing sessions are believed to give practitioners knowledge of what the entering of the Spirit into the body and birth mean, as the memories of these expe-

periences are retained in the subtle body, or, in the case of the Source community, in the subconscious and the cells or cellular memory. Drawing on the experiences that are reconstructed during the sessions, practitioners claim that birth can be a traumatic experience that significantly influences one's life. The experience of the sudden cutting of the umbilical cord in the cold birthing room and the physical pain that it causes, the feeling of artificial materials like oilcloth and the unfamiliar medical workers' hands in rubber gloves touching the body may be perceived as traumatic, since the new-born decides the new environment is not welcoming: "He/she decides that life is hell, it's a shock!" (Linda, 63 years old, 2012 interview). Moreover, as all people are believed to be connected through energy, even the thoughts that those near childbirth think can influence the new-born's decisions about their consequent life, as Silje said: "The doctors and the midwife are anxious and in panic". The negative decisions are thought to block the flow of energy and hence, the new-born "closes all the chakras, primarily the heart chakra" (Linda, 63 years old, 2012 interview). According to the holistic conception of the world, this means that the wholeness of a person is disrupted. So, from the perspective of the subtle body a traumatic birth interferes with the connection between matter and mind or body and spirit, in other words as Silje expressed this interference: "I was distracted by these birth experiences for 37 or 38 years". Since the self, in addition to the openness, is understood as 'multiple', the blockages of energy cause dissonances in all realms of life.

Although, the self is sensitive to the environment, within New Age groups the individual is also perceived to be an influential being that can impact and change his or her own life. A person always has a choice and an opportunity to become healed. Healing in general and healing birth trauma means using "the energy for changing our unconscious thoughts" (Jana, 41 years old, interview 2011). Experiences gained during the sessions and the teaching of Source Breathwork help a practitioner to activate the connection between body and spirit: "Binnie focuses on the human body and bringing the spirit to body and cells. [...] Coming back to yourself and even more, coming to your body and releasing patterns of cellular memory" (Kairi, 23 years old, interview 2011).

NOTES

1 I use the term New Age as an umbrella term to refer to a wide array of spiritual practices and beliefs which are commonly perceived as 'alternative' from the perspective of contemporary scientific-rationalist society (see further Hanegraaff 2009 [2002]).

2 See also Binnie A. Dansby's official webpage (Dansby 2012a).

3 See also Estonian Source practitioners' webpage Algallika Eesti Ühendus.

4 For example see also Turner 2011.

5 1. Physical Body (*Rupa*), 2. Vitality (*Prana-Jiwa*), 3. Astral Body (*Linga Sharira*), 4. Animal Soul (*Kama-Rupa*), 5. Human Soul (*Manas*), 6. Spiritual Soul (*Buddhi*), 7. Spirit (*Atma*) (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 17).

6 Take, for example, the emergence of quantum theory during the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the majority of quantum scientists view quantum mechanics as completely materialistic and deterministic, there have been several attempts to interpret the findings of modern physics more philosophically: New Age thinker Deepak Chopra eventually coined the term 'quantum healing' (Hammer 2001: 276–277).

7 Here and hereafter the names of the informants are pseudonyms.

8 The originals of the interviews are in Estonian; all interviews are translated by the author.

9 For example, practitioners of auratransformation aim to join seven chakras to change a person's external aura. According to the teaching of auratransformation, a person gains the Indigo Aura when seven chakras have been conjoined into three. In the case of the Crystal Aura only one, the heart chakra, is activated. On the contrary, in New Age Tantra the aim is to open seven chakras equally to assure the flow of energy in the body and chakras. (For example, see also *Aura-transformatsiooni*TM; Kuus 2012.)

10 Adding the eighth chakra to the seven-chakra network is a relatively recent supplement. Binnie A. Dansby has named it the resurrection chakra and it is situated between the heart chakra and the solar plexus chakra.

11 Steen is a breathwork therapist who has worked with Binnie A. Dansby for more than ten years.

12 Asking the question – is your body safe? – relates to the affirmation “My body is safe, even though I may be feeling afraid”. The aim of this affirmation is to change the negative pattern “I am dangerous... My body hurts” to a positive one. (See more Dansby 2012a.)

13 Source breathwork teachings are also influenced by New Science, a field of interest within New Age. On her webpage Binnie A. Dansby quotes the book *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine* by Candace B. Pert (1999), which concludes that the body is the subconscious and hence body and mind become one. Another popular book in the Source community is *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles* by Bruce H. Lipton (2005) in which the body-mind connection at the cellular level is stressed. Giving examples from his study of cloned endothelial cells, Lipton is convinced that beliefs can control the physical body, i.e. positive thinking prevents the emergence of diseases. For members of Source community books similar to Pert's and Lipton's represent the scientific proof of body-mind interrelatedness.

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IMMORAL OBSCENITY: CENSORSHIP OF FOLKLORE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS IN LATE STALINIST ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

The history of folkloristics contains many cases of obscene materials that were excluded from field notes, books and archives. The Estonian Folklore Archives (founded in 1927) did incorporate dirty jokes, riddles and songs in its collection. Soviet occupation changed the topics of folklore scholarship and archival practices. Between the years 1945 and 1952, the Folklore Archives' manuscript collections, catalogues and photographs were censored. Anti-Soviet texts were cut out or made unreadable. In the first years after the incorporation of the Republic of Estonia into the Soviet Union, anti-Soviet mainly meant politically sensitive materials such as jokes about Stalin, very patriotic texts or the names of some people. During the beginning of the 1950s, stricter rules were applied and obscene texts were also censored. In this article, I will focus on the censorship of obscene words and motifs and the political dimension of moralistic censorship in a totalitarian state.

KEYWORDS: folklore collections • censorship • Estonia • Soviet Union • obscenity

INTRODUCTION

Bawdy songs, jokes about Jews, tips for avoiding conscription, legends of haunting soldiers, blue stories, names of politicians – what could be the common denominator behind them? These different pieces belong to the folklore collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives and were deemed inappropriate for the archival collections of the Soviet state. They were therefore censored from the Archives between 1945 and 1952. The causes for censorship varied, but two large clusters of censored motifs appear: political and moral, the latter consisting of obscene words and motifs. Political and moral reasons have been the main causes of censorship practices throughout history as well. In this article, I will give an overview of the censorship of Estonian folklore collections through late Stalinist period with the focus on obscene materials. Controlling the morality of people has a political dimension. Tendencies appearing in the archive politics of a totalitarian state help to understand the function of memory and history. Processes in

the folklore archives give interesting comparisons with other memory institutions such as history archives, libraries and museums.

In the article, the concept of censorship is used to denote the process of destroying archival materials or restricting access to them in order to change the memories and self-representation of a society. Concepts of structural and institutionalised censorship (Bourdieu 1994) have also been useful. However, censorship during the Soviet period was operated through different practices and a network of institutions that I will sketch in the following. It should be noted that censorship is not only the characteristic of totalitarian societies, the history of censorship is parallel to book history (Aarma 1995: 8). However, (self)censorship has been described as one of the main characteristics of the Soviet period in Estonia (Annuk 2003: 20–22). Therefore, in the article, I will discuss both how censorship is connected to folklore and the wider Soviet mechanisms of controlling information.

In the institutional sense, the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (known as Glavlit) had the task of controlling all printed content. However, the holdings of the archives were governed by the People's Commissariat of Education. The goal of censorship was to restrict the publication and dissemination of materials that agitated against the Soviet regime, depicted state secrets, contained false information that would cause anxiety in society, give rise to national or religious fanaticism or were pornographic (Veskimägi 1996: 21). These categories are broad and give a lot of room for interpretations by the people and institutions working with suspicious materials.

In this article, I use the term *censorship* in a broad sense: it means banning or restricting forms of expression. I stress the broadness of the concept for two reasons. Firstly, although the article focuses on a particular example of archived folklore texts, the censorship of archives was largely part of forming a new, Soviet folklore. The banning of folklore texts took place simultaneously with changes in the principles of folklore collecting: a new, ideologically correct contemporary folklore was sought. Therefore, the censorship of folklore texts in the archives was part of a larger censorship process that aimed to change written as well of oral discourses – a process with the goal of substituting institutionalised control with an inner and unconscious control (compare with Bourdieuan terms) and through that changing society. The second reason for stressing the broadness of the concept is that censorship of literature, performing arts, film and radio is usually discussed separately from the process of classifying information in the archives. The censorship of folklore archives is interesting because it has common features with both processes: the content of the texts needed to be analysed like the literary works, whereas the materials were taken to Central State Archives or to special department at the Literary Museum. The institution of folklore archives distinguishes from the collections of documents held in other archives, because the content of folklore archives is essentially non-institutional.

SOURCES

I used two types of source to research censorship. The first group of sources consists of documents directing or depicting censorship. The directives given by various institutions, working schedules and reports of the people working at the Folklore Archives,

transcripts of meetings and correspondences can be found in the holdings of the Estonian Folklore Archives, the Estonian Literary Museum, various collections of the Estonian State Archives and in the archives of the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

The second group of source materials are the censored materials themselves. There were different methods for censoring texts. In the 1940s, the cut-outs were given to the Central State Archives and were given back to State Literary Museum in 1968. Then they were held in a special deposit. Cut-outs from the 1950s were kept in-house and were held in a special deposit in the Literary Museum. Today, this material is part of the manuscript collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives. Cut-out manuscript pages are held in seven folios, three of them containing pages cut out in the 1940s, the rest contain the pages cut out in the 1950s. Cutting out the pages was only one of the methods of censorship. Therefore, the folklore manuscripts themselves are another important source for study, as the texts that are illegible due to censorship are found in the manuscripts. The first couple of pages of a manuscript are useful sources as well, because the people checking the manuscripts needed to note their name, the date of checking and the numbers of pages that were cut out. On the basis of these materials, I compiled an index file of cut out pages that gives an overview of the reference, content, genre, possible reason for censorship, the person checking the manuscript, date of checking, and, where possible, the date of handing over the material to another institution. However, I did not check the amount of illegible texts in all the manuscripts because this work is very time-consuming and as the manuscripts are old, browsing them would cause damage, therefore, the illegible texts were checked only provisionally.

The list of reasons of censorship was created on the basis of the categories found in the content of the cut out material. Two larger categories emerged: political and moral. Political reasons include names of particular people and institutions, overly patriotic Estonian-related materials, negative depiction of communists, communism, Russians, Jews or other Soviet nations. The moral reasons include censoring all the texts that mention or depict genitalia, excrements and sex. Sometimes, categories mingled. These categories might not be the exact reflection of the reasons of censorship that existed in the minds of the people who checked the manuscripts. However, the categories of reactionary or anti-Soviet material that were mentioned in the directives, are far too broad for analytic purposes.

FOLKLORISTICS IN ESTONIA

Estonia had been governed by different states from the beginning of the 13th century. In the 19th century, the territory of Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, while its rural and urban elite was dominantly German-speaking. In the mid-19th century, Estonian national movements emerged, and interest in Estonian folklore was a part of the national movement. Scholarly societies dominated by Baltic German intellectuals like the Literary Union of Estonia and of the Estonian Learned Society had formed their own collections in the first half of the 19th century. Bigger folklore collections were created in the second half of the century by volunteer collaborators. Jakob Hurt had started collecting folklore in the 1860s; in 1888 he published an appeal titled "A couple of requests for Estonia's most active sons and daughters" in popular newspapers (*Olevik*, *Postimees*,

Virulane, Eesti Postimees) and asked people to collect various genres of folklore. Hurt's initiative became a mass campaign for collecting folklore in a written form with the help of voluntary correspondents. There were around 1400 correspondents and Hurt used newspapers to communicate with them. The process was also important because it involved so many Estonians in a nation-wide cultural project (cf. Jaago 2005). Matthias Johann Eisen became a major collector at the same time and his campaign to document folklore was also organised via newspapers (see Kuutma 2005).

Estonia gained its independence in 1918. In the young state, a broad network of cultural institutions was created. The Estonian Folklore Archives was founded in 1927. It was an autonomous subdivision of the Estonian National Museum and the central folklore archive in Estonia, situated in Tartu. The older collections mentioned in the previous paragraph were gathered together in the newly formed institution. The archive staff organised the older collections, created a system of card catalogues and register books. The collections grew, because archive staff conducted fieldwork and collected folklore using the questionnaire method. A wide network of correspondents was created and several competitions of folklore collecting for volunteer correspondents were organised. In the Estonian Folklore Archives, folklore materials were bound in volumes of 300–600 pages. The materials were grouped in collections according to the institution or person who organised the collecting of the material. The first head of the archive was Oskar Loorits. He emphasised the importance of organising the material properly to make it easily accessible to scholars. One of the goals of folklore collecting during the first years of the archives was to fill in the gaps left by earlier collections, considering genres, topics and geographical distribution (Västriik 2005: 206–208).

MEMORY INSTITUTIONS OF SOVIET ESTONIA: CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP

The political order changed rapidly during World War II. The Republic of Estonia was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. A year later, German occupation began. In 1944 the Soviet Union reoccupied Estonia and until 1991 the country was one of the republics of the Soviet Union: the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Stalinist period was marked by mass deportations, collectivisation and anti-Soviet guerrilla movements. Incorporating Estonia into the Soviet Union affected the cultural politics as well. History, literature and art needed to be re-evaluated and according to the new state ideology the collections of memory institutions should contain only items appropriate for the Soviet people.

Soviet cultural changes also reached the field of folkloristics. Although compulsory references to the Marxist classics appeared, the study questions did not differ a lot when compared to the pre-World War II period (Valk 2010: 567). Notwithstanding this, some of the topics could no longer be studied, for instance, folk religion was left out of the research questions, although it was not a banned topic in other Soviet states (Leete et al. 2008: 30). Nevertheless, from the 1930s onwards a concept of Soviet folklore was introduced: contemporary folklore that is in the accordance with Soviet ideology. Folklorists were then expected to instruct people in creating that kind of folklore (Oinas 1973: 48–52). In the late Stalinist period, Estonian folklorists were obliged to collect

Soviet folklore as a priority in fieldwork trips and it was requested from correspondents. The network of correspondents was not reformed until the mid 1950s, from when the archive staff no longer had to collect Soviet folklore (Oras 2008: 65). Soviet folklore was expected to reflect topics like collectivisation, the Great Patriotic War, the life of factory workers. When there was no folklore like this, Soviet 'folklore' was sometimes created in collaboration with a folklorist and an informant in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, as illustrated in the Latvian case (Pakalns 1999: 46–47).

Another characteristic of the period was the appearance of strict censorship that was carried out by different institutions. The key institution was the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press (Glavlit), which had the task of controlling all the published content. The inappropriate materials consisted of materials depicting Soviet history, immoralities, critics of the current state of affairs and old editions of Marxist classics. The goal of censorship was to restrict publication and dissemination of materials that agitated against Soviet regime, depict state secrets, give false information that caused anxiety in society, would cause national or religious fanaticism or were pornographic (Veskimägi 1996: 21). The broadness of the categories meant that it was very easy to find reasons to ban very different forms of expressions.

As mentioned before, the memory institutions went through several changes at the beginning of and during the Soviet occupation. Libraries, archives and museums had to examine their collections and get rid of material that was anti-Soviet. It should be noted that the censoring practices described below using the example of the folklore manuscript collections were part of a larger control of the written word deposited in memory institutions. Although the focus of this article is on the control over writing, museum collections were also controlled during the Soviet occupation (Kukk 2009: 691).

Archives of the newly formed Soviet state had to function according to the general rules applied to other Soviet countries. In the 1940s, the main goal was to find dangerous data and to create special departments for classified documents. Whole record groups were taken to special deposits, for example, most of the documents created during the German occupation 1941–1944 were classified (Pirsko 2005: 91). Similar changes took place in the libraries, where departments of special storage were created. These were special departments for banned books. Readers did not get the information about the existence or the contents of these departments. As the lists of banned books were long, the result was restriction of most of the literature in Estonian language (Annuk 2003: 21). Changes of this kind were made in Latvian (Dreimane 2004: 59–60) and Lithuanian (Sinkevičius 1995: 86–87) libraries as well. Although banning literature had already begun during the first year of the Soviet occupation, the control over the libraries was much stricter starting from the autumn of 1944 (Veskimägi 1996: 154–155) when memory institutions were forced to re-evaluate their collections.

In historical archives, some documents were easily classified by the time they were created. Censoring libraries was not that complicated either, because there were lists of banned books. In 1987, special departments of historical archives were opened and classifications were removed from the documents in the archives (Pirsko 2005: 93). The system of special storage departments for banned books also ended in the 1980s (Dreimane 2004: 60).

In addition to the control of the collections, the structure of memory institutions was changed. Regarding to the institutions analysed in this article, a new institution, the

State Literary Museum,¹ was founded on the basis of four subdivisions of the former Estonian National Museum. The Estonian Folklore Archives and the Estonian Cultural History Archives received the status of department in the new museum, and the Estonian Folklore Archives were renamed the Department of Folklore. As the institutions followed Soviet practice and every Soviet republic had a similar set of institutions, the Institute of Language and Literature was formed in 1946 as a division of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR. The institute also had a subdivision for folklore: the Sector of Folklore, which had its own collections as well. The scope of this article is the censorship of folklore manuscript collections in general, but as the censorship had most effect on the collections of the former (and current) Estonian Folklore Archives, the examples and discussion are based mainly on censorship practices in the texts and censorship practices of the Department of Folklore of the State Literary Museum. Control over the collections of the Institute of Language and Literature is also briefly mentioned.²

CONTROLLING FOLKLORE COLLECTIONS

A difficult period for folklore collections began with World War II. The collections of the Literary Museum were evacuated from Tartu to rural areas in 1943 and 1944. Assuring the physical preservation of the collection was the priority. Holdings of libraries and archives were transported back to Tartu over a period of almost a year. The final set of folklore collections was re-evacuated by March 1945 (Viidalepp 1969: 173–184). Checking the contents of the collections in a situation like that would have been too complicated. However, directives for control of the collections followed soon after. The first one, giving orders to find and separate all the manuscripts that “are not necessary for the Literary Museum or contain reactionary or anti-Soviet material”³ arrived on May 12, 1945 and was signed by Elene Pavlova, head of the Museum Sector of the People’s Commissariat of Education. More precise instructions⁴ followed on 18 May from Jüri Nuut, the People’s Commissar of Education. He gave orders for the check of all of the departments of the Literary Museum. The folklore collections were censored according to his orders, which basically repeated Elene Pavlova’s note. This first wave of censorship lasted from 1945 to 1946; most of the manuscripts were checked during that period. As stated before, a similar wave of censorship also affected other memory institutions. Checking the folklore collections was more difficult than going through the contents of libraries and archives. Every single piece of folklore needed to be read, its content analysed (ideally in the context of its creation), and aspects of the time of the collection and people connected to it needed to be taken into account. As the collections were very large,⁵ checking the contents was even more difficult.

However, there was a second wave of censorship, starting from 1950. There were several reasons for that campaign: the 8th Plenum or the March Plenum in 1950 influenced cultural politics in Estonia, as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union accused the leaders of the Communist Party of Estonia of favouring bourgeoisie nationalists. Not only the leaders of the party but also about 400 researchers, authors, artists and musicians were repressed and accused of nationalism and formalism. The process strengthened the canon of social realism in Estonia. The March Plenum was not one of the kind, similar events had taken place in other regions of the Soviet Union as well (Karjahärm, Luts 2005: 112–115).

Another reason to be suspicious about the content of folklore materials was that Alice Haberman, the head of the Literary Museum, had unintentionally published one of the Estonian Legion's⁶ songs as an example of the Soviet army song.⁷ The reliability of all the collections in the Literary Museum was questioned. No detailed written instructions for censorship are to be found; however, all of the newer collections (series RKM) were checked as well as the ERA collections from the period of the Republic of Estonia. Many of the censored texts were army songs, but the main focus of censorship was on obscene texts and motifs.

Although the focus of this article is on the manuscript collections, the photographs, finding aids and the library of the former Folklore Archives were checked and censored. Not all the manuscript collections were checked: the collection of Jakob Hurt remained uncensored throughout both waves of censorship. This bulky collection was the cornerstone of the Estonian Folklore Archives, being one of the oldest. The time distance could have been one of the reasons that this collection remained uncensored, because it could not contain politically suspicious texts. However, some obscenities are mentioned here and there in Hurt's collection, although they were not erased. There were only two exceptions to the rule that Hurt's collection was not censored: Estonian left-wing politician Hans Pöögelmann⁸ and a short story entitled "Why do Russians grumble?" (*Miks venelased jõrisevad?*)⁹ were erased.

Jakob Hurt and Matthias Johann Eisen were two of the important initiators of folklore collecting campaigns. Compared to Hurt, Eisen's position in Estonian folkloristics was ambivalent. His principles for collecting and publishing were quite different from Hurt's and the principles of organising the collections in the Estonian Folklore Archives was based on the model of Hurt's collection. Eisen's collections were constantly set against the collections of Jakob Hurt and the contribution of Eisen did not get the attention it deserved (Kuutma 2005: 96). This is reflected in censorship practices: Eisen's collections were censored while Hurt's were not. However, Eisen's collections contained more contemporary topics, among others, a collection of jokes about well-known people. These collections were censored during the first wave of censorship but only the newer parts of it were checked.¹⁰

Other manuscript collections were also checked. Texts collected in the period of the Republic of Estonia and during World War II were the most heavily censored. Texts collected during the period of German occupation (1941–1944) were largely political and depicted Soviet authorities and Russians in a negative way. That is why censorship in 1945 and 1946 was focused on these periods. Obscene texts are not that clustered in one time period or manuscript series. Only some general hints could help in finding them among the hundreds of thousands of manuscript pages, as some questionnaires are more likely than the others to get people to send obscene texts or genres like jokes and songs tend to be a lot bawdier than legends or proverbs. However, in general, to find everything obscene meant attentive reading of all the manuscripts. The censorship practices of obscene texts show, therefore, how thoroughly the collections needed to be checked and the struggles of the employees with this job shows the how demanding the task was.

It should be noted that the people checking the content of the folklore manuscripts were staff members who had worked in the same institution before the war. The whole staff was engaged in looking through the manuscript collections. The number of people working at the archives varied a little during the period, but it was generally 5–7 people.

The materials they checked and censored were often collected by their colleagues and sometimes by themselves. The overall atmosphere of repression assured that the work was done properly. For example, folklorist Herbert Tampere was arrested and detained for a year in 1945 because he was accused in holding counter-revolutionary materials (Kalkun 2005: 282). Some other folklorists like Rudolf Põldmäe and August Annist were also arrested (Leete et al. 2008: 28). Oskar Loorits, the head of the Estonian Folklore Archives, fled to Sweden in 1944 and his works were banned and censored. His name was one of the reasons for censoring folklore texts and his photos were removed from the photo collection of the archives. Therefore, people working at the Department of Folklore had faced a serious struggle; they needed to destroy materials that were valuable. Fear of being repressed or bringing difficulties to one's family was great enough, but the members of staff did not leave their jobs because of the task of checking the manuscripts.

The staff members were trusted to check the contents of the collections at libraries as well: the staff members had the lists of improper books and they needed to remove them from the collections (Veskimägi 1996: 130–134). Of course, for stricter censorship to apply, the work should have had carried out by Glavlit officials, but it was too tedious and would have needed an army of checkers. The censoring by librarians and archivists was provisionally controlled and therefore it was conducted thoroughly enough.

It is important to note that the folklorists checking the manuscripts were not official censors and should not be accused of the damage done to the manuscripts, they simply carried out the tasks given to them in fearful times. The head of the Department of Folklore and the director of the Literary Museum needed to describe the progress of checking the manuscripts in their reports. For the content of the archives, it was good that folklorists who knew the materials carried out the censorship. However, in 1945, some of the manuscripts were censored by the people working in the Tartu Branch of the State Central Archives,¹¹ who cut out many more pages per manuscript than the folklorists did.¹²

There were different methods for censoring the folklore texts. They were either redacted with ink, paper was glued over them or the pages were cut out (see Photo 1 and 2). On one of the first pages of the manuscript, the person checking it made a note of her or his name, the date and the numbers of pages that were cut out.

In 1953, a special commission formed by the Estonian Academy of Sciences checked the contents of the collections in the Literary Museum. The commission found some problematic texts from the collections of the Department of Folklore: the Estonian War of Independence was mentioned and some extremely obscene texts had remained in the folklore manuscripts (Ahven 2007: 132). Nevertheless, no bigger wave of censorship of the folklore collections followed.

The sheets cut out from the manuscripts during the 1950s were in the department of special storage of the Literary Museum and were returned to the Department of Folklore in 1977–1978, at the latest. These papers were not returned to their original places in the manuscripts, they were kept separately from other collections. In 2002, more papers like this were found when the deposit rooms were reorganised. These were the cut-outs from 1945–1946 that had been kept in the special department of the Tartu Branch of the State Central Archives. These papers were returned to the Literary Museum in 1968 and were kept in the department of special storage there. When they were returned to the department of folklore, they had ended up with old materials of little importance.

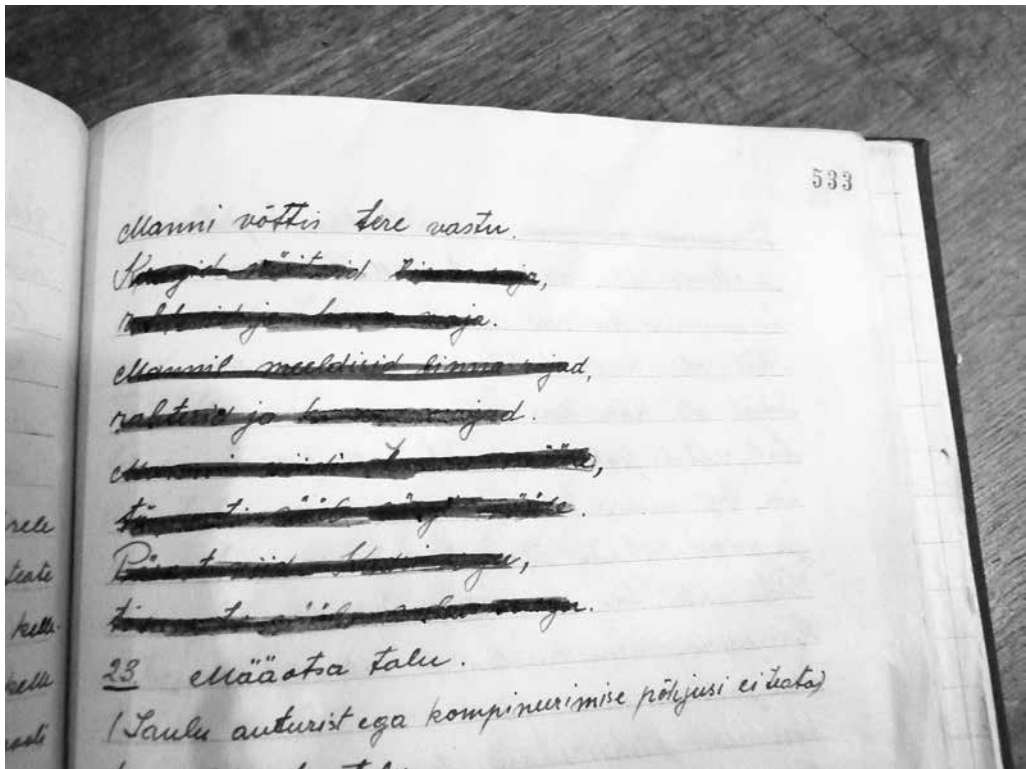


Photo 1. ERA II 304, 533 (22): erased words and expressions.

As mentioned before, there was another institution with their own folklore collections, the Sector of Folklore of the Institute of Language and Literature. The institute was founded in 1947. Their collections were small, but censorship affected them as well. Attention to the collections of the institute started with the controlling of another branch. In October 1948, there was a conference on the topic of museums at which several manuscripts of dialect examples were put on exhibition. Someone noticed an anti-Soviet sentence, after which all the collections of dialect examples (about 20,000 pages) were checked. Some pages were cut out and sent to the department of special storage of the Literary Museum (Ahven 2007: 50). What is more, the collections of the Folklore Sector were also checked and several pages were cut out. The censorship practices were much stricter than in the Folklore Archives. Everything that was even slightly obscene was considered inappropriate. Even very typical and quite mild jokes and anecdotes were cut out, for example *The Old Maid on the Roof* (ATU 1479*),¹³ which describes a spinster who freezes to death in the hope of performing a task and getting married. As these folklore texts were collected during the Soviet occupation, there was not much that could be considered anti-Soviet in the strict sense. The censored texts are mostly mildly obscene or mention some of the Bible characters.

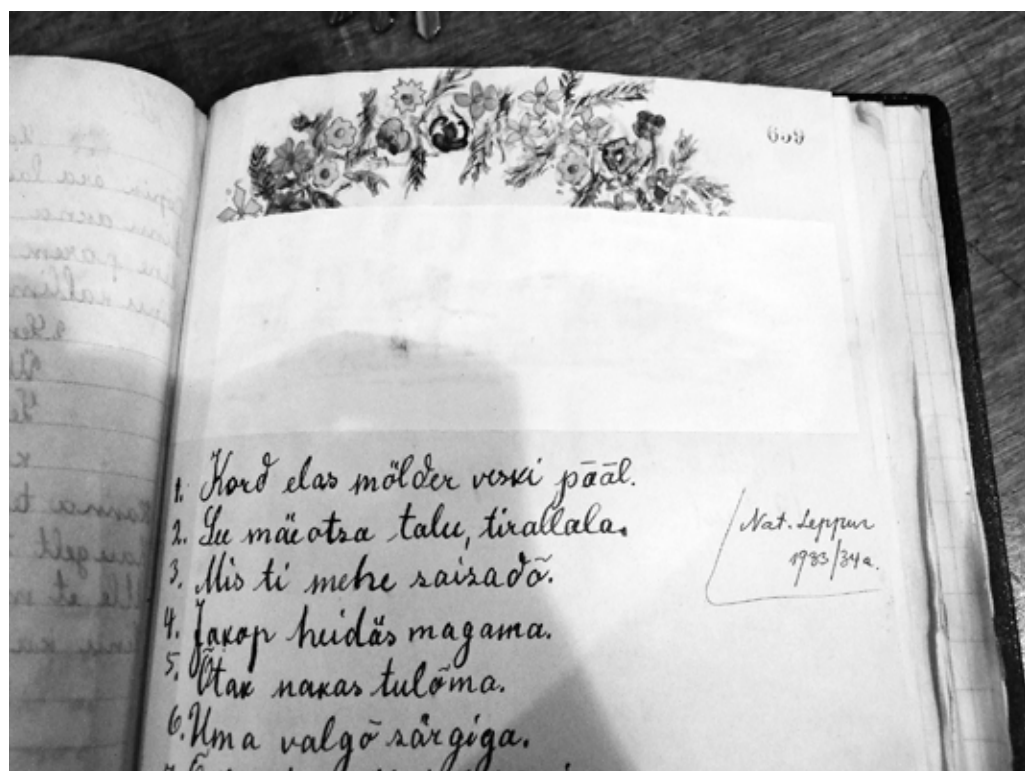


Photo 2. ERA II 80, 659: paper glued on manuscript page.

CENSORING OBSCENITIES

In the Estonian Folklore Archives of the pre-Soviet period, obscenities were collected among other folklore materials. Of course, all the layers of possible self-censorship could not be traced, but there are obscene words and motifs in the folklore items collected by the folklorists working in the archives and sent by correspondents. Sometimes, the names of the people connected to these obscene pieces were not mentioned, only very general remarks were written (for example, "Found on a sheet of paper between a book returned to the town library").¹⁴ Folklorists working at the Archives collected poems written on the walls of public toilets, and bawdy songs and blue jokes were also recorded. Although obscenities did not receive much scholarly attention during the period, they were recognised as folklore items.

In the late Stalinist Soviet Union, political and moral spheres were tightly intertwined, therefore the censorship of obscene materials had a political dimension. However, the distinction between the political and moral causes of censorship of folklore materials is not simply an analytical category. Over 1,000 folklore items were cut from manuscripts because of their obscenity in the 1950s. The amount is striking when compared with the more political causes of censorship such as the names of anti-Soviet people (the reason for the censorship of 46 text items), overly nationalistic texts (49 items), negative depiction of Soviet nations or overly positive depiction of Germans (about 100

items). Jokes, songs and short poems for rhyme albums were the main genres censored during the 1950s. Obscene motifs, mainly those depicting sexual or scatological scenes, were the most widely censored.

However, defining obscene and applying the criteria was a demanding task. There were some recurrent motifs, for example, the album of verse motifs involving use of pubic hair from a vagina to make toothbrushes.¹⁵ Words denoting prostitutes were also censored. Censoring obscene pieces was not an easy job. To start with, meanings of words had changed when compared to the period of collection, as the folklore collections reflect the development of the Estonian language. Words and expressions – for excrement, for instance –, a plain everyday language for informants half a century earlier, were obscene for reader of the 1950s. Therefore, words referring to excrement were censored rather unsystematically, often being erased while remaining in place in other manuscripts on several occasions. However, there is even an example of a word denoting urinating being first covered with dark ink and then the story with the word being cut from the manuscript, despite this being the only obscene and/or inappropriate motif.¹⁶ Some texts like that were not cut out, but the content was deemed questionable. Then the fact that certain pages were “raunchy” (Est. *rõve*) was written on the first page of the manuscript.

In addition, censoring everything allegorically sexual needed full attention to all motifs. The dialogues that compare female genitalia with an apartment¹⁷ contain no directly obscene vocabulary. The same goes for many other jokes – the sexual innuendo is hidden in the scripts. Censoring texts like this needed the reader to be fully focused on her¹⁸ task in order not to miss any allegories.

That is why checking the folklore manuscripts took an unexpectedly long time and several discussions were held on the complex nature of the task. The issue was raised in several meetings and by the end of 1951 the board of the Literary Museum agreed that censoring the original manuscripts should not go on any more. Only the typewritten copies were systematically checked thereafter.¹⁹ Making generalisations about censorship practices is often difficult. For example, in the manuscript volume ERA II 178 the saying “Moves back and forth like the foreskin of a man from Laitse”²⁰ has been deleted both of the times it was written, but the other obscene motifs surrounding it were left untouched. The manuscript was checked on September 18, 1945 by Selma Lätt, but it is likely that she did not censor this saying, because obscenities were censored mainly during the second wave of censorship in the 1950s. Who thought this particular saying was offensive and when it was censored is almost impossible to find out.

LATE STALINIST ARCHIVES REFLECTING AND CONTROLLING SEXUALITY

According to Eric Ketelaar (2007), archives are models of panopticon and a reflection of a wider surveillance society. Archived information supports jurisprudence, and together, these mechanisms discipline people (Foucault 1991: 208). Discipline creates productive and predictable citizens, whose characteristics are described by statistics that can take only the bodily part into account. Such information is useful in order to control access to goods and services (Ketelaar 2007: 145). As Jaques Derrida has famously noted, “there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida 1996: 4).

Power and control go as far into private life as sexuality. Pornography was banned in the Soviet Union under Article 228 of the criminal code. Censoring obscene motifs from folklore archives could be seen as part of this general ban. The two most common purposes of censorship in general are firstly to ban ideas that could threaten the political status quo and secondly to control the morals of the people. In democracies, both kinds of ban are not that strict, although they do exist. Controlling morality is still an important issue. Most states apply some kind of rating system for movies and computer games to find their suitability for young audiences. New information technologies emerge with new kinds of censorship, Internet censorship being the largest and most controversial. Censoring folklore and Internet censorship are similar in many ways. Governments or private organisations may try to ban access to certain websites, but as the Internet is based on distributed technology, it is very difficult to control. Internet users are often anonymous, the information flows uncontrollably and often virally. These are the characteristics of folklore as well. And in democracies, access restrictions to archives still exist. The reasons for them vary, with personal privacy, and state and public security being the most usual. However, in the late Stalinist Soviet Union, the system of censorship was continuously strict. All kinds of information that might be useful to an enemy could not be released. Similar precautions are characteristic of wartime. During wartime and in the Stalinist period, being able to use the archives was an exception, not the rule.

The absence of official, institutionalised censorship does not mean a lack of censorship in the society altogether. Pierre Bourdieu notes that there always is internalised censorship, the kind of self-censorship that could be noticed in the politically correct use of language. Inner structural censorship is determined by the field in which the expressions are to be uttered. Instead – and by the controlling institutions – structural censorship determines the authority that a person has. Authority determines expressions. In a state of perfect censorship, people think and utter only the things that are allowed (Bourdieu 1994: 138). Institutions in the state apparatus that have the goal of control of expression, work on the purpose of changing society in a way that erases the need for institution. Total censorship does not only affect discourse, but also bodily practices. In totalitarian states such as the late Stalinist Soviet Union, structural censorship had the goal of effecting the sexuality of the people. The Stalinist Soviet Union tried to control all aspects of public and private life; controlling sexual behaviour is part of the pattern, although in reality, discourse and practice could have differed a lot. Erasing the discourses of lustful sexuality would help to create a world where sex happens for reproduction, not for recreation or other purposes without clear advantage for society. A similar line of thought was behind censorship in the Middle Ages. There is also the aspect of the ideological vantage of the Soviet Union compared to the other states. By erasing all written evidence of immoral behaviour, the state could be shown as morally superior, which was a benefit in the Cold War.

Controlling archives did not mean controlling folklore – in its orality and virality, folklore can hardly be controlled. But it controlled the representations of folklore in different contexts, the possible new interpretations of folklore. When only a certain kind of folklore is collected and published, it affects the overall notion of what folklore is. Although the state never had this overarching power of controlling all of the possible discourses (for alternative discourses cf. Yurchak 2006), this dream always existed and

created the background for censorship. It was also the background for socialist realism, the official art form of the Soviet Union during the late Stalinist period. Social realism as a method and aesthetic canon eliminated alternative experiences. It combined the classicist, the monumental, the traditional. Art needed to be optimistic; its goal was to affect people. The canon of socialist realism also meant the denial of previous art forms – art needed to be re-evaluated. In Estonia, art and artists of the period of independence were suspected (Karjahärm, Luts 2005: 88). The March Plenum and subsequent repressions strengthened the canon of socialist realism in all fields of art (ibid.: 114–115). The second wave of censorship was a part of this project of creating a purified notion of creation.

Desire is resistant both to the court and to the economy. Sexuality determines the identity of a modern human being. A body that perceives and desires freely is in discord with a totalitarian state because desire is a revolutionary act (Larson 1999: 426–428). In a state, especially a totalitarian state, the people justify their existence and their part in society by being productive. Productivity manifests itself in work and reproduction. Free sexuality does not fit this model. The other important aspect is panopticism: exact and calculable information about people helps to create plans and have full control over these people. People with unexpected desires make it more complicated to foretell the ways opinions in society work – and therefore, it is much more difficult to control these people.

The situation was somewhat different in newly formed Soviet Russia. According to Anna Rotkirch, the October Revolution brought sexual reform among many other reforms. 1920s were the period of sexual liberty: sex-related topics were part of public discourse. In the Stalinist period, however, sexual topics were tabooed and ideology favoured only the married monogamous heterosexual couple (Rotkirch 2004: 95). In the 1920s, the ideology behind sexual liberties arose from the critique of bourgeois values. The idea of monogamy was considered to be capitalist as it had the connotation of owning one's partner. This reform was reflected in the law: abortion was legalised in 1920, homosexuality was not a criminal offense according to the Russian Criminal Code of 1922. Services like public kindergartens were not created with the purpose of emancipating women, they were supposed to make living in big collectives possible and weaken the strength of the traditional family form (Clark 2008: 187).

Soviet discourse of the 1920s did not hide the discussions of sexuality. These discussions strengthened the idea that sexuality and power are intertwined (Naiman 1997: 22). Although sexuality and power relations were expressed in the public discourse, the general idea was that communist society should not be overly sexual; the proletarian state – as opposed to the capitalist state – does not oversexualise the world. According to the relevant Soviet theories, human sexuality was the result of social relations, not biological factors, which is why it could be changed by social conditions (ibid.: 127–128).

Starting from the 1930s, that is, the beginning of Stalinism, the family regained its importance. This kind of change was still the result of the interest of society as a whole. The state needed workers and therefore big families. That is why contraceptives were not that available any more and in the years 1936–1955 abortion was banned. Divorce was more difficult than before as well. The state functioned well for comrades who worked and raised children, helping to build up the new society. Prostitutes and homosexuals were seen as social anomalies, whose sexual desires were not controlled and threatened the unity of the state (Clark 2008: 189). These tendencies work in different totalitarian states. Chinese scholars, for instance, have described the way the sexuality

of an individual in a modernised world was a pretty common topic of fiction, poetry and drama in the 1920s. With the leadership of Mao Zedong it changed: descriptions of sexual activities were considered bourgeois. The purpose of sex was supposed to be only procreation, desire and pleasure had no place in communist China. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, all references to sex were erased and marriage was considered to be one of the aspects of revolution. Only starting from the 1990s were sexual topics discussed – and widely discussed in novels, movies and other media (Larson 1999: 430–431).

Describing the repressed topics in literary form might create overt interest in these practices along with the wish to try them. This has been the motivation for censorship in different societies: text is obscene when it encourages sexual actions (on the example of Victorian England see Wee 2010: 182). The stories in folklore archives about lustful sex, jokes about homosexuality and songs about prostitutes described the discourses and practices repressed and banned by the state. Therefore they would not have been readable for all the people visiting the folklore archives. The state is threatened not only by strictly political issues; everyday practices such as sexuality might be a problem as well. Keeping texts like this in archives for everyone to read would open the door to unproductive and unpredictable ways of using one's body. This works the other way around as well: uncontrolled ways of using one's perception and gaining experiences would lead to an understanding that the written and oral discourses in society are not as free as the possibilities of perception.

CONCLUSION

Folklore collections always reflect the values in a society that has created them. The way these collections are maintained reflects all of the following time periods and ideologies. Between 1945 and 1952, the folklore collections of Estonia were checked and their contents censored. This was a part of a more general trend of controlling memory institutions typical to a totalitarian state. Not only were folklore archives censored but special departments were also created within different archives and libraries. The folklore collections, however, form an interesting example because of their nature as being between archives and literature. Folklore collections of former and current Estonian Folklore Archives were checked in two waves: firstly in 1945–1946 and secondly in 1950–1952. The first wave focused on political censorship: the names of nationalist figures, political jokes and other materials of that kind were cut out or erased. The next wave was about moral censorship and meant removing all kinds of obscenities starting from the mentioning of faeces in the rubric of folk medicine and taking in allegorical sexual motifs in jokes. Censoring obscenities was more complicated than political censorship and the work with the manuscripts was left unfinished. Expurgating or bowdlerising the bawdiness has been characteristic of folklore collections and publications from the beginning of folklore collecting. The distinctive need for moral censorship in a Soviet state could be explained by the overall notion of hiding purposeless sexuality and substituting it with a world where sex happens only for procreation and sexuality is easily predictable.

NOTES

1 The name of the institution changed through the Soviet period: from 1946 it was part of the system of the Academy of Sciences, in 1956 it was named after Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the compiler of the Estonian national epic. In the following paragraphs, the general name of Literary Museum denotes the same institution regardless of the exact official name.

2 The third institution dedicated to the study of folklore, the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu was reorganised during the Stalinist period into a sub-program and linked to the Chair of Estonian Literature, who had their own folklore collection.

3 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 12, l 3.

4 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 8, l 4.

5 To name the largest collections in the year 1945: Jakob Hurt's collection consisted of 114,696 manuscript pages, Matthias Johann Eisen's collection 90,100 pages, ERA collection 265,098 pages, Samuel Sommer's collection 124,648 pages (Korb et al. 1995: 7–8).

6 Military unit within the Waffen-SS.

7 EKM arhiiv, n 1, s 102, l 13/9.

8 H III 20, 350.

9 H I 2, 440 (8).

10 According to the notes in the manuscripts, the volumes were censored from the 52nd volume onwards, the first 50.000 pages remained unchecked.

11 For example, ERA II 10 – ERA II 16. According to the notes at the beginning of the manuscripts, 25 volumes were checked by outsiders, all of these from the ERA collection, that is, from the first period of the Republic of Estonia and German occupation.

12 The average number of folklore items cut from the manuscripts was 2.59 items per manuscript. When counting only the manuscripts checked by the folklorists, the number reduces to 0.6. The strictest staff member of the Central State Archives decided that 118 folklore items in one manuscript should be cut out.

13 KKI 1, 103 (65).

14 ERA II 74, 475 < Tartu I. – M. Pukits (1934).

15 See, for example: ERA II 59, 223 (26), ERA II 17, 513, ERA II 10, 592 (4).

16 ERA II 59, 195/6 (8).

17 ERA II 11, 647/51 (7).

18 All the people censoring the manuscripts in the 1950s, were female.

19 EFAM, item "Work plans, schedules, reports 1951–1953".

20 ERA II 178, 52 (11a); ERA II 178, 215 (59).

SOURCES

ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives.

H – folklore collection of Jakob Hurt.

ERA – folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives.

KKI – folklore collection of the Institute of Language and Literature.

RKM – folklore collection of the State Literary Museum.

EKM arhiiv – the archive of the Estonian Literary Museum as an institution.

EFAM – materials of the history of Estonian folkloristics in the Estonian Folklore Archives.

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MEANING OF RITUAL OBJECTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY URBAN WEDDING IN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the changing symbolic potential of items in the Bulgarian contemporary urban wedding. Based on my fieldwork material regarding the wedding cake and other items, I investigate cultural change in modern Bulgarian society not only as a result of the one-way process of transference, adaptation and incorporation of mass produced commodities into Bulgarian culture but also as a process of cultural change and variation. In that sense, I investigate the alternation between global and local perspectives of the forms of material culture in which certain levels of meaning, inherent to objects, play a crucial role, as for example the social communication factor, kinship ties, cross-generational continuity, local ritual and symbolic systems, local food culture, and even the personal fate and private life of an object's owner. In this article I focus mainly on the wedding cake as a specific ritual item, functioning in the contemporary urban Bulgarian wedding, transmitted during the last decades from West European culture into the Bulgarian wedding tradition, and analyse the specific dialogue between 'global' items and local culture. Furthermore, taking as my example the wedding cake and other ritual objects (the wedding chicken, the wedding bread, and the sponsor's stick) I question the concept of the globalisation, homogenisation and unification of forms of material culture in contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: wedding cake • wedding chicken • wedding bread • wedding rituals
• globalisation • material culture

INTRODUCTION

Many objects, in traditional culture as well as today, possess a dual nature because they can be 'implemented' as objects and as signs. In this sense, in some publications focused on material culture studies, the opinion that every artificially produced item possesses utilitarian and symbolic qualities has been established, and therefore potentially these items can be implemented as object or as sign (Baiburin 1983: 9). Some authors affirm that objects have a communicative function: they wield a code by means of which transference of messages is realised. Objects operate as elements of that code and therefore meanings can be attached to them (Segal 1968: 39). In a broad sense, Jean Baudrillard develops the idea that anthropologists should surmount the hypothesis of the predomi-

nation of the consumer value of objects, i.e. their pragmatic status. Baudrillard (1972: 3–21) establishes the opinion that consumption and function are only two revealed discourses of items, in reference to which their social discourse appears to be fundamental. In other words, the very physicality of an object, which makes it seem so immediate, sensual and ‘assimilable’, belies its actual nature. In that sense, material culture is one of the most resistant forms of cultural expression, so far as culture is understood as a dynamic relationship through which objects are constituted as social forms (Miller 1987: 11). From that point of view, in this article, I will analyse some interesting aspects of the symbolic meaning of ritual objects that today occupy central positions at the urban Bulgarian wedding – the wedding cake, the wedding chicken, the wedding bread and the sponsor’s stick.

Furthermore, in this article, I aim to analyse urban culture in Bulgaria through the prism of globalisation and mass-production, taking as an example the ritual objects used at modern urban weddings. Analysing local-global, traditional-modern and Bulgarian-Western perspectives on these items, I reconsider cultural change in modern Bulgarian society and question the idea of the globalisation and homogenisation of the cultural meaning attributable to items. The case-study of the wedding cake is interpreted in order to argue that ‘ready-made’, ‘global’ items that can be observed in many European cultures or even all over the world, which were thought to have homogenised social or ritual meaning, acquire local meaning when placed in a specific local social situation, in particular in Bulgarian urban culture. It is sure that questions about the meaning of artefacts are increasingly tied up with larger issues like how far artefacts marked with homogenising global meaning are given specific local meaning in the context and in the specific cultural situation in which they are consumed (Miller 1994: 406; 1995). Therefore, the symbolic potential of material culture could be understood not only as a one-way process of adaptation and incorporation of mass-produced objects into Bulgarian culture, but also as a process of cultural variation. In that shift between global and local perspectives of material culture many levels of meaning, inherent to items, play a crucial role, as for example the social communication factor, kinship ties, cross-generational continuity, local ritual and symbolic system and even the personal fate and private life of an object’s owner.

In other words, undertaking detailed research regarding a specific ritual item – the wedding cake that can be observed at weddings in many European countries and worldwide – I will focus my research in this article on the specific ways of dialogue between the cake as a ‘global item’, and local culture. In this sense, some examples can be given: the decoration of wedding cakes adorned with colourful sugar motifs that imitate traditional Bulgarian embroidery; and performing a traditional dance in which dancers hold wedding cake or wedding chicken in their hands. Many similar examples can be given: food and different items constructed of food substances, cloth, clothes and woven items, mass-produced commodities, souvenirs, and domestic possessions and items belonging to popular culture and the built environment are all considered to be clues to understanding global-local interconnections. Christmas, which has emerged as the most promising candidate for the first contemporary global festival has also been the focus of anthropological research (Miller 1993). Thus Christmas souvenirs and other objects ‘imported’ from Western culture into Bulgarian culture serve as another examples of global-local or Western-Eastern dialogue.

The wedding cake has become part of a range of ritual actions in the contemporary wedding ritual in Bulgaria and presents interest for the researcher. For example, a ritual dance with wedding cake and decorated baked chicken is performed during the wedding, which is not observed in other countries, for example, Britain, and could be regarded as a specific regional custom; the ritual cutting of the wedding cake and its apportioning, which is common to many cultures, is regarded as a central part of the Bulgarian wedding. The wedding cake is considered to be an item transmitted from the West European wedding, which has perhaps begun to appear in the contemporary urban wedding ceremony in Bulgaria in the last decades, although I think that it will be very difficult to establish the exact date of its incorporation into the Bulgarian wedding ritual system. Today the wedding cake is decorated by somebody belonging to the staff of the restaurant where the wedding takes place or is bought from a shop, in contrast to another ritual object, decorated wedding bread. Wedding bread is sweet (normally covered with honey) and today, during the wedding ceremony, it is cut into pieces in a similar way to the wedding cake. Today wedding bread is either shop-bought or kneaded, and after that baked by some ritually significant person – the mother-in-law or the bride's mother. The tiered iced cake, covered with vanilla cream and embellished with decorative elements made of sugar, also appears in other festivities in Bulgaria such as, for example, Christmas, New Year's Eve, birthday parties, anniversaries and corporate parties. These tiered iced cakes used for all occasions – from wedding ceremonies to corporate parties – all have similar ingredients, taste and form. The distinction is in the sugar decorative elements and symbols: dolls of newlyweds placed on the wedding cakes; sugar badges placed on the cakes meant for corporate parties; sugar symbols of age or zodiac signs on the birthday cakes.

In this article the wedding cake as well as other items embodying certain social contexts are analysed. From the social perspective, the wedding cake (and its cutting and apportioning) functions as a connection between people involved in the wedding, for example, as a tie between sponsors and newlyweds. Moreover, it plays a role as an interaction between those present at the wedding in that it is something shared between all the wedding guests, indicating the idea of unity, which is also expressed by the joint cutting of the cake (Charsley 1992). In this way the rite (or system of rites), which is part of the cultural identification of a society, reflects in a dynamic way the interactions between an individual and existing social groups, and in a specific way ritually regulates these interactions (Zhivkov 1981: 4).

Because of the limited amount of research on the chosen subject of investigation existing in Bulgarian specialised literature, my theoretical study is based on my fieldwork, conducted in several Bulgarian urban regions. This work began in 2000 when I started my PhD research project and ended in 2013.¹ My fieldwork continues to the present day and includes interviews, photo-documentation and personal observation. Within the framework of this project, informants living in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, and in several medium-sized towns such as Stara Zagora and Svilengard² were interviewed in groups or individually, with attention focused on the wedding cake and the wedding chicken as ritual objects. I carried out 32 interviews with informants who were all women, except one man who was at that time working part-time as a wedding DJ. My informants belonged to two age groups: 22–26 years old and 45–65 years old. This fieldwork material was completed with my personal observations at three weddings, one in Sofia and two in Stara

Zagora, where I was invited as a guest. In addition, I followed several wedding forums on the web, for example, MyWedding.bg and Сватбен Каталог, which I consider very interesting primary source of information regarding contemporary wedding customs. In this study I compare articles published in wedding journals with opinions expressed in Internet forums. Furthermore, I juxtapose interviews with articles published in popular magazines, as well as with information found on the Internet, which I consider a primary mediator of information in contemporary popular culture. My ethnographic work in these regions had focused on material culture and social symbolism of the material world and my central concern was to collect information indicating how, by means of items, for example the wedding cake and the wedding chicken, people talk about their kinship relations or social position, or express ethic ideas. I also reflect on traditional material culture and contemporary goods, questioning the idea of the globalisation and Westernisation of forms of material culture in Bulgaria.

CONTEMPORARY URBAN WEDDING CUSTOMS IN BULGARIA

The urban wedding in contemporary Bulgaria, as evidenced by my fieldwork, is an extensive ritual with many local variations and which incorporates many complex symbolic actions and objects. Here I will briefly describe the main ritual actions performed in the contemporary urban Bulgarian wedding, taking as example several wedding ceremonies that I attended during my fieldwork research.

The contemporary urban wedding in Bulgaria is not a very long ritual action – it takes one afternoon or one night, unlike traditional Bulgarian weddings which took up to three days. There are noon weddings where lunch is served and night weddings where dinner is served to the guests. First of all, the groom goes to the house of sponsors (the best man and the maid of honour), sometimes accompanied by a group of people playing traditional Bulgarian music. Upon his arrival, the groom traditionally gives wine (or other alcohol) and asks the host whether he agrees to become sponsor at his wedding. Then the wedding procession continues, heading to the bride's home. When the procession of decorated cars arrives, she enters one of the rooms of her house and her relatives guard the door and do not allow the groom to enter until he pays. Sometimes the guards of the room demand a money payment, sometimes the groom makes some kind of promises, for example to take care of the bride or to travel with her abroad, etc. In some cases, the groom, the best man and their friends try to make a breakthrough and enter the room. Then, the groom, the sponsors and the guests are greeted by the bride's parents and are directed to the room where the bride is hidden. The groom pays (about 20 leva) and receives the bride. Regardless of how much money is given to the guards of the bride's room, later they have to return the money to the young family. During my fieldwork I observed an interesting custom – one of the bride's shoes was hidden and the groom had to find it; once he found the shoe, he had to put it on the bride's foot, but she said that the shoe was too big. In this situation, the groom should put money in the shoe to make it comfortable.

There is a tradition that the father or the brother of the bride leads the newlyweds across the threshold of the house holding a cloth, which they hold at the opposite end. Leaving the house, the bride pours water, and sometimes kicks a jug, throws a plate-full

of corn behind her back or breaks a glass. Then the wedding procession goes consecutively to the church and to the Civic Council. When leaving the Civic Council, wheat, coins, and candies are thrown over the newlyweds. Then the wedding procession goes to the restaurant where some elaborate ritual actions have to be performed: the newlyweds step on a white cloth decorated with flowers and petals; the mother of the groom greets the couple and feeds them with bread covered with honey and salt; the bride kicks a small copper jug full of water and flowers so that the water spills, the guests observe the colour of the spread out flowers and in that way predict the gender of the couple's future children. The newlyweds and the guests dance *horo* (*xopo*).

The next ritual action to be performed is the breaking of the wedding bread, which is performed simulating a struggle between the newlyweds – the newlyweds break the wedding bread into two parts. It is believed that if the bride manages to break a bigger piece, she will take the most important decisions regarding the family life of the couple; if the groom breaks a bigger piece the opposite will follow. Afterwards the throwing of the bridal bouquet and garter is performed. Here, it is believed that the unmarried girl who catches the bouquet will be the next to marry and the unmarried boy who catches the garter will marry soon. The next ritual action is the dance with the cake and the chicken, with, usually, the last action being the joint cutting of the wedding cake, which is later offered to the guests.

The wedding ritual system in Bulgaria is much more complex and includes a variety of ritual actions, although I am not going to extend my description of the Bulgarian contemporary wedding as it is not the main purpose of my investigation. However, I think that this context is important for the analysis of the objects on which I concentrate my research – the wedding cake and the wedding chicken.

THE WEDDING CAKE AND ITS CUTTING

In British wedding tradition, as developed from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries (Charsley 1992: 141), the wedding cake³ was developed not as an integral part of any meal but as a festive or celebratory elaboration of bread (Charsley 1988: 232–241). It was much later, and in a different way, that it was worked into a pattern with other foods as part of a distinctively British afternoon tea. Other food items have been associated with weddings, often more or less ordinary dishes given a special use in the wedding context (Charsley 1992). Later on, the wedding cake appeared looking like the contemporary item. Bread and cakes are commonly used in weddings in many European countries. Today the wedding cake is a common item in weddings all over the world and has provoked the interest of many anthropologists. For example, the tiered iced wedding cake is an important element of the contemporary Latvian wedding meal (Spalvėna 2011: 12). The Western-style wedding cake in modern Japanese weddings is another example of a borrowed element incorporated (as a symbol of fertility) into existing rituals that presents a problem for symbolic analysis (Edwards 2009). The wedding cake has also been subject to fieldwork research and has been analysed as a ritual item functioning in the context of Macedonian wedding customs (Dimishkovska 2008). It is remarkable that this food-item has been located even in African societies by anthropologists who raise the question of why and how particular ritual changes occur and

what the symbolic content of the cake is (Wilson 1972: 187–201). Here, I give only a few examples and will not widen my analysis by making a comparative study of the meanings of the wedding cake in different cultures as my fieldwork is restricted to Bulgarian culture. Therefore, in this article I am going to centre my research on the symbolism of this object in the context of the Bulgarian wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis among several cultures is an interesting and promising issue that could be undertaken in further investigations of the subject.

The tiered and iced wedding cake is a widespread item in the wedding tradition in Bulgaria today and often occupies a central position at the wedding ceremony. It is not difficult to notice that its taste, form and ingredients are identical to any contemporary British wedding cake or similar to any Western-style wedding cake. The Bulgarian wedding cake is flour-based sweet food made of sugar, flour, eggs, cocoa, sour cream, vanilla, baking powder, milk and butter. It is glazed with chocolate cream or white sour cream and normally it has a round form and a sweet chocolate, vanilla or fruit taste. The cake is decorated with sugar or plastic flowers, wedding rings, butterflies or birds – these are normally very detailed and elaborate decorative motifs, requiring great confectionery artistry. It often has one to three or five levels and therefore is brought on a big hand-cart. According to one of my informants, sometimes at its top plastic or sugar dolls of newlyweds are placed and the names of the newlyweds are written on the surface.⁴ Generally, the base is white or has soft yellow or brown tones; the decorative motifs normally obtain soft red, yellow or violet tones. Sometimes, instead of sugar figures of newlyweds, a sugar limousine is placed on the top, even sugar or plastic dolls dressed in traditional Bulgarian garments.

The wedding cake is not a homemade object – it is a gorgeous item that is always bought from a pastry shop and is made by a professional confectioner. Nonetheless, it is not an expensive item – its price-range varies from 50 to 250 leva⁵ and therefore everyone can afford it. My informants often denominate this big and sumptuous tiered wedding cake the “bridal cake”, distinguishing it from the “sponsor’s cake”. It would be interesting to see how the cake reveals social distinction, if its size is important, where and by whom it is made, but my fieldwork does not give me substantial material to make such a conclusion as all cakes are purchased, economically affordable items, and my informants did not give me any hints to make me think that the size could be regarded as a sign of social status. In contrast, an expensive wedding dress, bought from a brand shop or an expensive wedding limousine are considered by my informants to be objects revealing social distinction. Bearing in mind that status seeking is regarded in ethnology as part of a complex of behaviours in which individuals consciously or unconsciously strive to be the focus of attention in order to improve their positions in the rank hierarchy of the group (Wiessner 1997: 2–5), in this study I regard the competitive dance with the two food-items – the wedding cake and the wedding chicken – as a way to increase the social status of a person within the group and as a method of establishing new family relationships between the family of the groom and of the bride.

In the Bulgarian magazine *Свамба* (Wedding), which in the context of the urban social environment operates as a popular medium and spreads a certain type of ‘urban mythology’ (different urban beliefs, legends and instructions regarding wedding customs), newlyweds receive information concerning the wedding cake. Thus, I read in an article published in the magazine that “by tradition”, the wedding cake has several

tiers, that it is white or has soft tones, is garnished with sugar figures, is round or heart-shaped as a sign of love and that it can echo colour and form from the wedding dress. It is supposed in the article that the cake could even suggest the character of the groom:

If you do not want to be traditionalist, you could use your fantasy in order to choose a different and original cake, suggesting your character and habits... A special table should be placed in the restaurant and on it has to be placed the wedding cake. Some plastic flowers have to be spread out on the table as decorative complements. Generally, the wedding cake has to be cut into pieces and served during the official dinner, immediately after the main dish.⁶

In the pages of *Свамба*, distributed at newsstands in many big cities, prospective newlyweds can view photos and choose a wedding cake. On the Internet they could, on the basis of profound visual material distributed by wedding agencies, choose not only a wedding cake but also the sugar newlywed figures that decorate the top, and select a DJ⁷ and a wedding programme. The DJ (who can be male or female) has a very fundamental role in the Bulgarian wedding and he or she could be regarded as a ritual figure. Well-informed about traditional customs and gifted with a sense of humour, on many occasions the DJ administrates the wedding ceremony in entirety, reducing in that way the role of the main participants in the event – the parents and sponsors (who in traditional culture were central and very honoured figures) – to mere observers. In this sense, many popular magazines function in the contemporary urban situation not only as a way of advertising commercial products and everyday information, but as mediators of information similar to that of folklore type, where cultural experience is not transmitted verbally (for example, in traditional culture) but in written form. Therefore, magazines, television, cinema, the Internet, world-wide tourism are today mediators of information and one of the conduits of cultural globalisation, placing us in a world of constant flux, fundamentally characterised by objects in motion (Appadurai 2001: 1–21).

Thus, in many Bulgarian wedding web pages I found information concerning the wedding cake and regarding its history and meaning. This information is spread widely on the Internet, is repeated in some Internet forums and is converted into some kind of urban mythology. I will give an example:

History of the wedding cake – customs: Today the cake symbolises the first meal shared by the couple. It comes from ancient Rome; it was made only of flour, salt and water. The bride did not eat it. She was peppered with it – an ancient ritual of fertility and numerous progeny. British people used to hide a ring in the cake; several young men had to search and find it. There was a belief that whoever found the ring acquired happiness and luck. A tray with a piece of cake placed on it had to be thrown through the window. If the tray broke into pieces, the couple would have a happy life. The more pieces there were, the more happiness was destined for the couple.⁸

There are many Internet forums where women who are planning to get married soon exchange photos of wedding cakes, express opinions about the decoration and symbolism of the cake, tell each other where they can buy a tasteful one and how much it costs. In one of these Internet forums I found different opinions, for example this one, written in 2012 by a woman living in Varna:

When cutting the cake, the newlyweds feed each other, putting a small morsel of cake in each other's mouths in order to have a sweet and happy family life. After that, they have to feed the sponsors and the unmarried couples, placing in their mouths a piece of cake. In some regions they keep a piece of cake for the first anniversary (of the marriage), and the figure atop is given to a couple who will get married soon.⁹

In one Bulgarian Internet journal I found another point of view expressed in an interview with a food designer who explained her interesting interpretation of the symbolism of the wedding cake:

[Interviewer:] Tell us briefly about the symbolism of the wedding details.

[Designer:] The wedding cake should be a reflection of the trinity – it presents masculine and feminine, which are united at the top. The cake has a pyramid structure with a very clearly defined base and top. It is therefore important to highlight it with a figure – a lily that blooms, the sun or something else. Masculine and feminine must also be represented at the base. For this purpose decoration is implemented consisting of two parrots, two doves or two rings. We live in a duality – the duality of 'up and down'; we do not have to be very enthusiastic and we do not have to be very earthbound – that is typical of our society – we are too material. There must be a harmony – we have to be mundane, but at the same time we have to strive for the spiritual.

[Interviewer:] Do you find the small figurines of bride and groom out-dated?

[Designer:] No, they are widely used. The cake can also be completed with some live flowers or one flower, an orchid, a rose, one or two birds, and rings.

[Interviewer:] What about cakes decorated with embroidery?

[Designer:] I loved the cake with Bulgarian embroidery, especially this one that looks simpler. A long time ago I wanted to make a cake like this. It is neatly and very precisely made.¹⁰

Several wedding cakes embellished with decorative motifs representing traditional Bulgarian embroidery were presented at this culinary exhibition in Sofia, the presentation of the achievements of the alumni of Sofia High School of Bakery and Confectionery Technology. I think that maybe cakes with similar traditional motives could be found functioning in Bulgarian wedding ritual system. One of the wedding cakes mentioned above is decorated with sugar motifs representing colourful traditional Bulgarian embroidery with, on its top, two sugar figures of newlyweds, dressed in traditional Bulgarian garments.

In the interview, the designer explained her amusing personal interpretation of the item, which made me think that often the interpretation given by the informant may differ from the interpretation of the anthropologist and that objects can be interpreted differently depending on the observer's position. There are three possible positions: the position of the person who produced the object, the position of its consumer and the position of a bystander, which sometimes leads to "incongruity" in the item's interpretation (Segal 1968: 39). The impact of the item is related to the fact that everybody 'reads' the message from a certain level, at which many factors play crucial roles, for example, professional activities and interests, education background, age, the social context of the object's production and implementation.

The cutting of the wedding cake today can be observed in different variants in Bulgaria. At many weddings today the newlyweds hold out their hands, cut the cake together and afterwards put a piece of cake in each other's mouths (*захранване*).¹¹ According to one of my informants, the newlyweds hands come together when holding the knife and cutting the cake.¹² Normally the newlyweds have only one plate, fork and knife. At some weddings the bride places her right hand over the hand of her future husband. One of my informants told me that the first slice is meant for the sponsors.¹³ At some weddings the maid of honour puts her hand over the hands of the newlyweds while they cut the first slice and then gives a small slice of cake to the bride, putting it in her mouth. In other wedding ceremonies the bride must hold the knife with her right hand and the bridegroom must place his hand over hers to cut the first piece together. If the cake has several tiers, they have to start cutting it from the upper layer. Sometimes a ribbon is fastened on the knife. The bride and groom have to eat the first piece together, which according to my informants is a symbol of the "beginning of their life together".¹⁴ Subsequent pieces are cut by the bride and served to her new relatives; the bridegroom offers pieces of cake to the rest of the guests. At some weddings a friend of the groom must cut the pieces of cake that will be offered to the rest of the relatives. If the wedding cake has decoration of flowers, the flowers have to be removed and placed in a basket. My informants told me that the flowers can be removed only when the newlyweds have already eaten the first piece of cake.¹⁵

RITUAL DANCE WITH A WEDDING CAKE AND A WEDDING CHICKEN

In fact, in many contemporary weddings in Bulgaria, two wedding cakes are needed – one large, tiered, wedding cake that many informants name the "bridal cake", which is involved in the action of the joined cutting – and another, smaller, wedding cake that my informants denominate the "sponsor's cake", which is involved in the "out-dance" (*надиграване*).¹⁶ This is a traditional dance or a dance competition that is performed between two or more people, usually sponsors of the wedding, who have to prove that they can dance a certain traditional Bulgarian dance longer and better than the opponent. The sponsor's cake is normally smaller than the bridal cake – it has to be small enough to be carried in one hand and it must be possible to dance with it. It is a round iced cake, made of the same ingredients as the bridal cake and is decorated with some sugar flowers. If there is only one small wedding cake, it is used for both purposes – the cutting and the dance.

There is another object involved in the dance – a chicken, which is often called the "sponsor's chicken" or the "wedding chicken". Generally, this is a baked or boiled chicken, decorated with some additional elements in order to acquire anthropomorphic features. The cooked chicken is put on a flat round bread and an egg is placed where the chicken's head used to be. The egg is decorated as a head with eyes and a mouth drawn in pencil, and sometimes a kind of a beak is fashioned from a piece of carrot with a red pepper put over the egg as a hat. A jacket is made from a pancake and an apron is made from red peppers. Around the decorated chicken, eggs decorated as piglets, lambs or chicks are placed and sometimes yellow plastic chicks are used as decoration.



Photo 1. Wedding chickens dressed as shepherds. The wedding chicken in the middle is female and therefore holds a spindle. Sofia, 2011. Photograph by Stoyan Ivanov.

Generally, the wedding chicken represents a peasant surrounded by chicks or piglets. In an Internet forum in Bulgaria where people exchange information and photos of their weddings, I found many pictures of sponsor's chickens and also some interesting explanations. Here I will cite one of these opinions, written by a woman from Sofia in 2012 who got married about ten years ago in Vraza, a small town situated in north Bulgaria:

At my wedding, there was such a dance with the chicken and if you allow me I will explain to you first-hand. So, the chicken is boiled whole and is pinned on round bread. The chicken has to resemble a bride – it is pinned in a standing position, the head is made of a boiled and peeled egg, a headscarf is also made; the eyes, the nose, and the mouth are painted. It could be even decorated with a bunch of flowers. The chicken is dressed in garments and an apron. It becomes a true bride this chicken and that's it. A few hours at least are necessary in order for it to be prepared: it's tricky work. There is a tradition in the wedding – dancing in front of the sponsor. Girls and women from the bride's family dance with chicken, cake and pastry. The idea is that the sponsor steals or buys the chicken and the other things. He throws money over the chicken but the person who dances with it doesn't give it to him. It is a grate dance! You know.¹⁷

Usually, the ritual dance consists of the following: a friend of the bride, usually a woman, dances in front of the sponsor holding in her hands a tray with the baked chicken and the sponsor has to out dance her by showing that he can dance longer and better, otherwise he has to buy the chicken by giving her money. A friend of the groom has to dance holding the wedding cake in his hands in front of the best man's wife. The best man and his wife (the sponsors) make a redemption payment at the end of the dance. In some Bulgarian weddings, on the day after the wedding the couple visit the sponsor's home and they all eat the wedding cake together. In some weddings, wedding cake, roasted chicken and some sweets are placed on the table in front of the bride and the competitive dance is performed. Sometimes the bride's sister and the groom's cousin dance *horo*¹⁸ in front of the guests; afterwards they dance a distinct traditional Bulgarian dance called *rachenitsa* (*ръченица*). According to the people interviewed, at various weddings the bride's sister and the groom's cousin perform a dance in which they step onto the wedding table.

One of my informants told me that the person who wins the competitive dance, receives as a gift the wedding cake, the loser receiving the chicken.¹⁹ In several wedding ceremonies in Bulgaria, the chicken, cake and wedding bread are placed in front of the couple. All wassail and thereafter the best man or the mother-in-law gives a greeting speech followed by the competitive dancing. The sponsors have to be bestowed with a wedding cake, chicken and bread while they are dancing. In this case, some friends of the bride dance holding in their hand the wedding cake or the wedding chicken. The dance-off is performed and in the meanwhile the best man and his wife try to grasp the appropriate objects – either the chicken or the cake - bribing the boys with money to help them. Then, according to one of the people I interviewed, the sponsor brings a basket full of apples, pears and eggs, and bribes the opponent with these instead of money.²⁰

Another of my informants told me that at a wedding in Svilengrad the *rachenitsa* dance was performed with a very big wedding cake, placed on a hand-cart and that a hand-cart was used for baked lamb rather than chicken. At this wedding, the groom's sister danced near the hand-cart with the lamb opposite the best man while a young man danced with the cake in front of the best man's wife. In this case the sponsors have to steal the objects or buy them but later on, and at the end of the wedding the wedding cake has to be gifted to the sponsor. The same informant told me that there are very interesting weddings where the dancing competition is performed between two professional dancers wearing traditional Bulgarian garments, and the sponsors.²¹ Sometimes



Photo 2. Wedding chicken, surrounded by chicks. Plovdiv, 2010. Photograph by Stoyan Ivanov.



Photo 3. Wedding chicken, decorated with sunflower and pumpkin seeds. Sofia, 2013. Photograph by Ivo Nikolov.

the sponsor does not even dance but takes a seat, observes the professional dancers and bribes them, throwing money over them and on the floor.

Several years ago I received an invitation to a wedding at which I observed how the best-man danced in front of the bridesmaid, who held the wedding cake and also danced. The duration of the dance depended on the cunning of the sponsor and his desire to gain the objects. On this occasion he threw money around and over the cake in order to buy it back. In the course of the dance he grasped the bridesmaid in his hands, held her up and continued dancing with her in his arms, trying to prove in this way that he was a better dancer.²²

INTERPRETATIONS

In this section my central concern is to analyse the meaning of the wedding cake in relation to the phenomenology of cultural change. As an item, 'imported' in recent decades from Western culture, it exists in local culture as an object that both preserves some of its imported Western meanings and acquires local features when placed in a different cultural context. Thus, I question the cultural globalisation and homogenisation of the forms of material culture and trace the dialectic of cultural dialogue expressed through objects.



Photo 4. 'Dancing' wedding chicken. Sofia, 2011. Photograph by Nadia Soyanova.

The cutting of the cake by the newlyweds who join hands and place a small piece of cake in each other's mouths is obviously a custom popular in many cultures, although here I will analyse the joint cutting of the cake in the Bulgarian wedding based on my fieldwork materials.

My informants believe that the wedding cake is a part of the Roman marriage ceremony, symbolising fertility and good fortune. This information circulates on many Internet sites in Bulgaria dedicated to the wedding ceremony. On the same Internet sites, and on some international websites, I found information about preparation of the wedding cake, for example, the best components have to be used in the preparation and the mix has to be as rich as possible because a rich mixture signifies abundance. Possibly people believe that, in this way, with proper witchcraft, more of that profundity will be attracted to the couple. It is interesting, in my opinion, that the quality of fertility ascribed to the wedding cake is very similar to the wedding bread in traditional Bulgarian culture, which is decorated with nuts, beans and other products symbolising fertility. Today, according to beliefs circulating in popular urban culture, a wedding cake with a good round form is regarded as sign of a well-shaped marriage. The first piece of the cake has to be cut by the bride so that the couple will not be childless. Today the husband has to help in that procedure, placing his hand over the bride's, the common cutting signifying that the couple announce that they will share all possessions. The bride feeding her husband the first piece is thought to be a symbolic sacrifice by means



Photo 5. Wedding chicken with a cigarette in its mouth, holding a stick decorated with olives, and surrounded by two loaves of wedding bread. Sofia, 2013. Photograph by Ivan Todorov.

of which the bride invites the bridegroom to take everything that she possesses and could offer (Mikkelson 2005). It is a sign of bad luck if somebody other than the bride cuts the first slice. In England the bride cuts the cake with a sword which she takes from the groom; she cuts a part of the first slice, after which the groom cuts the other part. The bride does not have an active role in the social activities except cutting the first slice of the cake and making a wish. (Opie, Tatem 1989: 434) Although this is an example from a very different cultural context I give this example to demonstrate how some Western customs are incorporated into contemporary Bulgarian culture almost without changing them, unlike some other ritual situations where Western customs are mixed or dissolved into local ritual system.

Prior to the cutting of the cake during the wedding rite in Bulgaria, the newlyweds cover their faces with cake cream – an action that the parents sometimes do not agreed with. One of my informants told me: “The thing that I can not approve of is that they cover their faces with cake cream and that action is performed while the background music is playing. The mother-in-law thinks that thereby their life will be sweeter.”²³ The wedding cake, as sweet food, expresses the idea of a happy life and fertility and therefore with the action of spreading of cake substance on the faces of the newlyweds apparently some of its quality will be ‘transmitted’ to them. This is additionally expressed by the gesture of mutuality in the joint cutting.

The wedding cake's function as a ritual object in the urban wedding in Bulgaria, may be regarded as a culturally defined substitution of traditional sweet ritual bread and therefore it acquires the meaning of fertility. In many urban weddings today I observed both items, cake and bread, functioning in the ritual system. The cake as a ritual object is duplicated in some weddings at which two cakes are bought and both are placed on the wedding table or are involved in the ritual dance. A similar dance was performed in the traditional Bulgarian wedding but with ritual wedding bread (*сватбен хляб*) rather than with wedding cake. Nonetheless, these objects are not replacing each other but are used in a particular sequence. Often two or three loaves of wedding bread are prepared: one of them is baked by the mother-in-law, who feeds the newlyweds small morsels; another is shop-bought and is broken by the newlyweds simulating something like wrestling. These ritual actions are performed in the restaurant, followed by the dance with the wedding cake and the wedding chicken, after which the joint cutting of the cake is performed.

It is well known that many sweet dishes operate as ritual objects in the Bulgarian wedding today – wedding cakes, ritual breads (*ритуален хляб*),²⁴ sweets, raisins, and honey. The cake itself is multiplied in some Bulgarian weddings as sometimes as many as three wedding cakes are made for one wedding ceremony. As sweet food it duplicates the symbolism of fertility, well-being and a 'sweet life', meanings, expressed by other items operating in the wedding ritual such as round ritual bread covered with honey and decorated with ornamentation and raisins, glazed with chocolate walnuts, sweets, etc. Many forms of material culture and objects with ritual significance are constructed of synonymic elements. They are organised on the principle of repetition, substitution and duplication of substances and meanings because the semantic designation of the rite is often contained in a condensed form in every one of its constituent parts (Mikov 1983: 37–42). Thus the notion of fertility is multiplied in a number of objects used in the contemporary wedding.

Analysis of the joint cutting of the cake could go further by means of a comparison with some ritual actions in the Bulgarian traditional wedding, the meanings of which can be easily read. Regarded as a rite of passage (van Gennep 1909), the marriage in traditional society is designated by many symbolically significant objects. One example is the mutual nourishment of the newlyweds that is performed not with a piece of cake, like today, but by interchange of morsels of bread and salt. For example, in the Bulgarian village of Znepole a table is laid in front of the newlyweds with only one dish, and with one fork and one spoon placed on it. Salt is placed on their knees; the groom dips a piece of bread in the salt on his wife's knee and eats it; the wife dips a piece of bread in the salt on her husband's knee and eats it. The one dish, fork and spoon placed on the table signify the unity of the newlyweds, as are the wishes that they "never be separated, be united".²⁵ An interesting comparison could be made here between this traditional custom, as documented in the archive materials, and contemporary Bulgarian weddings where a single plate and fork are placed on the table and after cutting the cake the couple serves the first slice on only one plate and eats it together using only one fork. The interpretation of the mutual nourishment with cake, which means the "beginning of the common life of the newlyweds",²⁶ is common in many cultures.

As stated by some anthropologists, sharing is a standard interpretation of food distribution in culture, although the process of cutting presents some problems because

it is ruled by a clear prescription. The joint cutting is what separates the wedding cutting from other festive cutting, for example of birthday cakes. Given the main theme of unity, of unification and of matrimony – a notion that some authors see most strikingly expressed in the Biblical image of the couple becoming “one flesh” – it is not difficult to note that two people cut the cake, which is normally the prerogative of one and thus confirms their unity (Charsley 1987: 94–110). Food cutting and apportioning for serving is not done in normal domestic conditions by two people, rather than by only one person. By this means, the bride and the groom could be seen as appropriating the cake – they apportion it, on an occasion in their lives when they are also distributors. They both make that object theirs – it belongs to them in order to share it with their guests in one situation where that activity is, in most cases, the obligation of the parents. In spite of the fact that the bride and the groom get married and are placed at the centre of the event, more often the parents take the role of hosts and the who are expected to pay for the wedding. In that situation the newlyweds are treated at the same time as guests, because the wedding party is organised and paid for by their parents, and as hosts because they cut and apportion the cake, a host’s responsibility in another situation. They offer pieces of cake to their parents as hosts offer food to their guests. Therefore there is ambiguity in the possession of this item, which is the centre of the ritual (*ibid.*).

Another reading of the item identifies the wedding cake with the bride, who, veiled and dressed in white, approximates the form and the colour of that sweetmeat and in this way the cake cutting could be considered metaphorically; in such a scenario the cake is the bride and its cutting the cutting and eating of the bride. Hence the cake and its cutting could be interpreted as a sexual metaphor (*ibid.*: 106–109). In that sense, is interesting that some urban beliefs in Bulgaria stipulate that the wedding cake should take the colours of the bride’s dress and should resemble the wedding dress in shape.

An interesting aspect, relevant to the wedding cake, are the ritual enactments involving the cake in a range of rituals, for example the dance. The sponsors dance in front of professional dancers or family members and try to bribe them or to steal the ritual objects – the cake and chicken. Hence, we could observe how an individual (or entire community) ‘enters’ into certain ritual role, which is common to many ritual practices and is regarded as a kind of a ‘play’ model (Zhivkov 1981: 23). The re-embodiment, which is considered a fundamental theatrical feature, could be observed in the performance of many rites, customs and magical actions. Usually, the performers represent different people, animals or objects although there is a lack of dialectical contraposition between stage and auditorium, which is the main focal point of every theatre (Bogatyrov 1971: 75).

In the Bulgarian traditional wedding several kinds of ritual bread are documented that are meant for different parts of the wedding ceremony. Similarly, in the contemporary wedding ceremony, two kinds of wedding cakes can be observed: the sponsor’s cake and the bridal cake. Today, the sponsor is supposed to buy back the sponsor’s cake, giving money to his opponent, but afterwards the cake is given to him as a gift and is placed in front of him on the wedding table. The central placement of the cake, and the ritual enactment are comparable with the sponsor’s stick (*кумово дръвце*) in traditional Bulgarian culture. The sponsor’s stick is a ritual object made of the branch of a fruit-tree or pine tree that is decorated with flowers, green apples and red strings. This decorated branch is fitted in a strait position in the middle of a round ritual bread cov-

ered with honey and nuts. In the traditional Bulgarian wedding the sponsor's stick is delivered to the sponsor for ransom money (*baksheesh*), is placed on the wedding table in the groom's home, and positioned in front of the sponsor (Ivanova 1984). Documental sources prove that similar ritual dance was performed in the region of the village of Provalia, where a maiden belonging to the bridal family dances *krivo horo* with the sponsor's stick and consequently the maiden gifts it to the sponsor.

I have never seen this ritual object in a contemporary wedding ceremony and my informants never mentioned it in the interviews²⁷ but the proximity of the terms designating two different objects – the sponsor's stick in traditional culture and sponsor's cake today – is interesting. Both items are sponsor's objects, belong to the sponsor, and are gifted to the sponsor or he receives them after winning the dance competition. Both objects have a round form and a sweet taste, and are decorated with flowers, fruits and nuts. This comparison could be very interesting, provided that the wedding cake is considered a Western item incorporated into Bulgarian culture in the last decades. This formal and ritual proximity between these items demonstrates the methods of transformation within the forms of material culture. Apart of the sponsor's stick, in traditional weddings was documented the existence of live chickens that were delivered to the sponsor the same way, by bargaining and by giving a redemption payment. Usually, bride's friends bargain in order to receive the cock (or chicken), which is alive and usually decorated with a towel, strings of threaded popcorn, a wreath and strings of red peppers.

On the basis of these studies, it could be assumed that the cake is a ritual item, probably involved in the process of mediation between people in the Bulgarian family; for instance, it could be a ritual way of establishing new kinship ties, perhaps between sponsors and newlyweds, i.e. it is a means of incorporation and of social communication. Sociologists who examine social networks in cross-national comparison, especially the assumption that in modern societies kin ties are loosening while non-kin ties are gaining importance in people's social networks, conclude that this assumption applies only for the northwest European cultural area while Italians, Hungarians and other nations from South and East Europe do still maintain very close kin relations (Höllinger, Haller 1990: 103–124). This can be assumed for the Bulgarian and Balkan family as well. According to ethnologists there are many indications that the Balkan family pattern maintains archaic patterns (Kaser, Halpern 1997: 63–72).

According to my fieldwork, kinship relations and in particular sponsorship continue to play a very important part in contemporary Bulgarian society. Social relationships, displayed through sponsorship today, can be juxtaposed with the traditional concept that the matrimony of the man at whose wedding one has acted as a sponsor, symbolically depends on the sponsor himself and the sponsor is obliged to assure that matrimony (Ivanova 2001: 71). In a broad sense, in traditional culture and in contemporary urban society, the wedding appears to be a reorganisation of entire kinship groups. Both in the past and today, the social statuses of newlyweds and family members are changed through the wedding. Family members are supplanted in the upper age group; for example, the maiden and the groom become wife and husband, the parents of the newlyweds become father-in-law and mother-in-law (*ibid.*: 4).

CONCLUSION

By drawing examples from various cultural contexts the dialectic of tradition and modernity is seen in this study through the prism of material culture. I think that it is obvious that the meaning of objects is not taken for granted even in today's global culture in which some objects like the wedding cake can be seen in nearly every European country. Therefore, if the meaning of objects derives from the orders into which they are incorporated, that means that the same artefact may change its implication and signification simply by being introduced into some new environment (Miller 1994: 400). Anthropologists develop the idea that the tension between homogenisation and heterogenisation of culture, seen by means of material culture studies, appears to be one of the problems of global interaction. Therefore, the new global culture can no longer be seen by the anthropologists through centre-periphery models, rather as a complex, disjunctive order. Americanisation and commoditisation of material culture has another dimension as far as forces from various metropolises when brought into new societies tend to become indigenised in one or another way (Appadurai 1996: 32).

Hence, in spite of the numerous and to some extent contradictory meanings that could be deduced from the wedding cake and dishes functioning in the contemporary wedding as ritual objects, it could be concluded that they are ritual objects, involved as mediators among members of the family. Through these objects new kinship relationships are ritually signified. In that sense, food items acquire the function of social communication. They are created for common eating, and in that sense for destruction and therefore in some respect they acquire meaning only when eaten and destroyed. As Roland Barthes points out, food is "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" (2008: 29). Bread is not just bread – different types signify different situations. Food is a highly structured need, anthropologically speaking. The sense of food is not elaborated at the level of its cost, but rather at the level of its preparation and use (*ibid.*: 30).

The wedding cake operates in the ritual system as an expression of the idea of fertility. The common eating of the cake is common 'eating' of the values that it expresses. In this way the symbol of abundance and fertility is multiplied in a range of similarities such as form, function, preparation, and semantics objects similarly to traditional culture that operates with identities and repetitions inasmuch as many forms of ritual material culture are constructed of synonymous elements (Mikov 1983: 37–42). They are organised on the principles of repetition, mutual substitution and selection because the functional and semantic purposes of the rites are contained in a 'reduced' form in every one of its constituent parts.

Thus, the wedding cake, the wedding chicken, and the wedding bread in the Bulgarian wedding 'talk' not only about their purpose as objects, but also indicate the position of their possessor in the social space. By means of these objects, the social positions of the family members can be identified as well as their transition from one social status to another. Therefore, the order of things is culturally constructed. The fact that we not only order things but are in turn ordered by things indicates that artefacts obtain a multiplicity of meanings and identities, and that the connection between form and meaning is complex and sometimes ambiguous (Miller 1994: 406). Furthermore, objects express a certain social position that can be interpreted differently depending on the observer's

position: the position of the person who produced the object, the position of its consumer and the third position of onlooker, which sometimes leads to incongruity of the item's interpretation; therefore the item's impact is related to the fact that everybody reads the message from a particular level.

NOTES

1 This article is based on my PhD research realised at the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia. I studied comparable forms of material culture, and developed the structure and theoretical framework of the article at the University of Vienna thanks to an OeAD scholarship.

2 Sofia is the largest city in Bulgaria. It has a population of around 1.2 million. Stara Zagora is an important economic centre that has a population of 138,272. Svilengrad is a town situated at the border of Turkey and Greece with population of 18,132.

3 In my article I use the definition of Simon Charsley (1987) concerning the wedding cake as an item. In that sense I define it as material object, referring to its physical properties.

4 The informant is a 25-year-old university student living in Sofia. She told me about her wedding in 1999.

5 50 Bulgarian leva corresponds approximately to 25 euros and 250 leva to approximately 125 euros.

6 *Сватба*, 1996, vol. 2, pp. 3–22. All the explanations, articles and opinions in this magazine were written in Bulgarian. In my article I offer English translations.

7 The DJ (disc jockey) is normally employed by the newlyweds or by the restaurant, he generally works for discotheques and nightclubs but in recent years many DJs started working for wedding parties as well. Their tasks are to play music in the restaurant and to announce on the microphone the order of the wedding rituals, sometimes offering explanations or ironic comments in order to entertain the guests.

8 See Svatbenata torta.

9 I found this post in an Internet forum (see Tedy 2012)

10 I translated from Bulgarian a part of an interview with an artist-designer and lecturer at Sofia High School of Bakery and Confectionery Technology. She was a member of the jury of the "Wedding Cakes" contest – a presentation of bread, food and drink in Sofia. The interview was published in the Internet journal *Az-jenata.bg* (Lolova 2012).

11 *Zahrnavane* is a traditional Bulgarian custom consisting of the action of putting a piece of food (normally bread) in someone's mouth (it is generally performed between two members of a family). Today it is a widespread custom and is performed during the wedding ceremony.

12 The informant is a 23-year-old student born in Svilengrad and studying in Sofia. She talked about her brother's wedding in Svilengrad city in 2001.

13 The informant is the above-mentioned woman from Svilengrad.

14 The informant is a 54-year-old art teacher, who works in a secondary school and who narrates about her son's wedding.

15 The informant is the above-mentioned 54-year-old art teacher.

16 I translate this Bulgarian word (*nadigravane*) as 'out-dance'. This is a traditional Bulgarian dance in which two or more people compete through dance. Generally, the opponents dance traditional dances, for example, *horo*.

17 The comment was written by Valentseto in an Internet forum at the Bg-mamma web portal (2010).

18 *Horo* a circle dance originating in the Balkans. The traditional Bulgarian dance *horo* does not necessarily involve being in a circle, but more commonly in a curving line. In Bulgarian tra-

ditional culture the *horo* dance had an important social role. Today more than five types of *horo* are usually danced at every Bulgarian wedding. They differ in the rhythm of the music and the steps taken.

19 The informant is a 65-year-old pensioner who worked all her life as a teacher in a secondary school teaching history and German. She told me about her daughter's wedding in Stara Zagora city in 1996.

20 The informant is a 54-year-old teacher who teaches art in a secondary school and who talks about her son's wedding.

21 The informant is the girl who narrates about the wedding in Svilengrad.

22 The informant is a 45-year-old man who works as a teacher of mathematics and in his free time works as a DJ for weddings and celebrations for some extra money. I was invited by him to a wedding ceremony where he worked as a DJ. The wedding took place in 2002 in Stara Zagora.

23 The informant is a 54-year-old teacher who talks about her daughter's wedding that took place in Stara Zagora in the year 1999.

24 Ritual bread is an indispensable component of any popular custom in traditional Bulgarian culture associated with marriage, birth, funerals, the popular calendar, medical practice and the construction of buildings. As a bloodless sacrifice, ritual bread symbolises the fertility and well-being of the family or clan. Richly decorated ritual breads are made for weddings, Christmas, Easter, and St. George's day. Ritual breads are decorated with dough birds, dough chicks, vines, the shepherd's crook, and the ploughman. Today, for almost every Bulgarian wedding, ritual bread is made or purchased. It is generally decorated with dough flowers and birds, and is covered with honey. Regarding the wedding bread see Janeva 1989.

25 Archives of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, vol. 150, p. 16.

26 *Сватба*, 1996, vol. 6, pp. 3–24.

27 Nevertheless, I acquired a wedding photography, dated from 2008, where the way in which a young man is gifting the sponsor's stick to the newlyweds can be clearly seen.

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Archive materials from the Archives of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Internet pages and forums:

Az-jenata.bg – <http://www.az-jenata.bg>

Bg-mamma – <http://www.bg-mamma.com>

MyWedding.bg – <http://www.mywedding.bg>

Сватбен Каталог – <http://www.svatbencatalog.com>

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PLACES REVISITED: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND STORIES OF BELONGING

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on fieldwork material, the following article seeks to explore the ways members of transnational families create, maintain and negotiate relations to multiple places. People are not only shaped by the places in their lives, but they also employ different strategies to make a place feel like home. This repositioning is a constant process, affected also by the surrounding societal and cultural context. The choices to stay or to move have to be justified not only to oneself, but also to others (relatives and wider society). While doing this, people have to be more explicit about their relations to different locations, to put into words the feelings they have towards certain places. In this article, I concentrate on the emotional and social side of peoples' place-related experiences.

The article is based on interview material I have collected for my PhD dissertation in folklore. Interviews were made with immigrants from the former Soviet Union living in Finland and their family members living in the country of origin (in Russian Karelia and Estonia). The aim is to capture the experiences of both family members relocating and those staying put, and to discuss the meaning of place in the identity formation of people living mobile or transnational lives.

KEYWORDS: transnational families • storytelling • place-relations • identity • belonging

INTRODUCTION

We have an apple tree mother grew from a seed. It is a very interesting apple tree, gave such huge apples. But when [mother and father] moved away, the apple tree also ceased to bear apples, it was longing, you see. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H33: 156)¹

The following article* explores how home and belonging are negotiated in relationship to individual migration or migration of family members. I aim to discuss different,

* This research was supported by the Estonian Research Council (grant no. 9271 and IUT2-43), the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT), and the Kone Foundation (the Families on the Move Across Borders: Children's Perspectives on Labour Migration in Europe project).

mostly discursive strategies that members of transnational families² use in order to (re) position themselves in relation to different places. People are not only shaped by places in their lives, they also work on this relationship to make a place feel 'their own' or 'home', to narrate and also to justify the importance of certain places in their lives.

A transnational way of life may entail different possibilities to feel at home, and in many places simultaneously. The relations to different places can be (re)created, for example by using personal experience stories as well as narratives of the family. A transnational way of life does not entail rootlessness, although themes of homelessness and feelings of estrangement are present in my material. Home and movement are not neatly opposed; people's relationships to place are rather more complex and context bound than either "rooted belonging" or "rootless mobility". (Ahmed et al. 2003: 3) In this article, I wish to explore belonging from different positions, analysing the stories of both those family members who have moved and of those who stayed in their homeland. As Rebecca Golbert (2001) has written, the research on transnationalism tends to concentrate on diasporic communities, thus ignoring the transnational experiences and practices of people who have not left their homes. The lives of such people are still structured by the tension between mobility and different local cultural practices.

This article is based on material I have collected for my PhD dissertation, which deals with storytelling in transnational families. The research material consists of field diaries and forty relatively open interviews I made during the years 2001–2004. The interviewees are former Soviet immigrants living in Finland and their family members living in the country of origin (I have conducted interviews in Russian Karelia and Estonia). Most of the interviewees who now live in Finland have moved from Baltic countries and Russian Karelia, only some individual interviewees have arrived from other areas of Russia, mostly from bigger towns. Where possible I have interviewed more than one person in the same family. Eight of the interviews are group interviews, where at least two of the family members were present.³ Interviewees were able to choose whether they would like to talk in Finnish, Estonian or Russian. During many of the interviews two languages were used interchangeably.

As the research crosses different kinds of border, my position as a researcher in relation to the interviewees and the material is equivocal. When asking myself which culture or group I represent for the interviewees, I cannot give a straightforward answer. Being originally from Finland, but living in Estonia while doing fieldwork, my own family could also be characterised as transnational. When carrying out interviews in Finland I felt that I still represented the majority of society for the interviewees, while in Russia I was also generally taken as a representative of the new homeland of the relatives who had moved to Finland. My position in Estonia was slightly different, and with some of the interviewees in Finland a kind of changed position occurred: they left Estonia to live in Finland, while I had gone in the opposite direction.

Almost 40 per cent of all immigrants in Finland have come from Russia, Estonia or from the (former) Soviet Union⁴ and 60 per cent of them are women.⁵ The number of immigrants increased sharply during the 1990s when former Soviet citizens of Finnish background were given the opportunity to apply for the status of a returning migrant and for permission to move to Finland with their families.⁶ Some of the immigrants I interviewed moved to Finland to study, or for work or marriage.

A significant number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and of my interviewees are so-called return migrants and their family members, although it has to be kept in mind that these categories and reasons to move overlap.⁷ Return migrants from the former Soviet Union generally have Ingrian Finnish roots – they are descendants of people who migrated from the territory of present-day Finland to the easternmost part of the Swedish Empire starting in the 17th century. Today, this area lies in North-West Russia, in the vicinity of St. Petersburg. As a result of wars, deportations and persecutions during the 20th century, many people of Ingrian Finnish background ended up living in Estonia and in Russian Karelia. Other groups of Finnish origin in the area of the former Soviet Union are descendants of Finns who moved there between the years 1918 and 1939 and after World War II. Finns who moved before World War II were either so-called ‘Red’ emigrants, illegal immigrants during the great depression in Finland, or Finns who moved to the United States and Canada and from there to the Soviet Union in the 1930s (see *Maahanmuutto- ja pakolaispoliittinen toimikunta* 1996). During the Soviet period keeping up Finnish identity and language was not easy, and in fact many of these families are multilingual and with mixed ethnic backgrounds.

For this article, I have analysed the interviews looking for things that attach people to different places, allowing a location to be transformed into a meaningful place for them (cf. Tuan 2011: 6). I am interested in how people conceive home(s) and other significant places in their lives, and what kind of meanings and feelings people attach to these places. In the first section of the article, I will present in more detail the direction from which I study the place-relations of members of transnational families. The discussion of the meaning of agency, routines and certain kind of nature for the interviewees is followed by the analysis of sometimes-necessary processes of distancing oneself (emotionally) from the former homeland. The focus of this article is on the social aspect of places – and on the importance of people connected with them – and discursive processes by which something ‘foreign’ is made one’s ‘own’ and how something that is one’s ‘own’ becomes ‘foreign’. In the last section I will concentrate on identity negotiations in multicultural and transnational contexts. The understanding I take on identity comes from cultural studies (Hall, du Gay 1996), emphasising the situated, contingent and constructed nature of identity and identification, set against intrinsic, essentialistic notions. As Stuart Hall (2000: 234) has written, all identity terms depend on marking their limits – we define ourselves in terms of what we are not as much as in terms of what we are. In the context of migration, identities are given greater attention and negotiated anew in relation to different others and in relation to different spatial formations and multiple histories. The migrant identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through memory, fantasy, and narratives, in relation to (imaginary) homelands and communities, as well as to the places where people currently reside (see Hall 1990). Narratives of migration and settlement can also be seen as narratives in which (possibly) settled and stable senses of self are unsettled and challenged (Baynham 2007: 376).

PLACE AS A MEANINGFUL LOCATION

Space is often understood to be transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place – a meaningful loca-

tion – as people get to know it better and endow it with value (see Cresswell 2004: 7; Tuan 2011: 6, 136). If we are interested in the sense of place, the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place, we see places not only as concrete, tangible worlds of matter but rather as intangible worlds of meaning, with stress on the sensual-emotional and social-cultural aspects (see Cresswell 2004; Karjalainen 1997: 41; Tuan 2011).

Contemporary ties of belonging are more spatially diverse than before (Kuusisto-Arponen 2011: 1) – increasingly, people are required to create, maintain and negotiate a range of relations to multiple places. The growing mobility and lack of simple place-related identities both questions the stable sense of place, and makes people long for this familiar and safe place (see Harvey 1989). One's relationship with one's place of residence does not get too much attention in the midst of everyday life, but in the case of relocation, the relationships with both old and new place of residence have to be contemplated more consciously (cf. Karjalainen 1997: 41). People often maintain relations with different places, thus creating a transnational social space that has the potential to both connect and change places of both departure and arrival (see Hynynen 2004: 212).

In this article, I am especially interested in the emotional and social side of peoples' place-related experiences, the subjective and emotional attachments people have to places. As Sara Ahmed (2000: 89) has written, the question of home or of a certain place feeling like home can only be approached through the emotions that a person has or does not have towards a certain place. For interviewees living in Finland, the explicit reasons for moving there have often been social or economic, but still an emotional connection to a new place of residence has to be established. This repositioning is a constant process that takes place in a certain societal and cultural context. Indeed, it should be kept in mind that although feelings people have towards certain places may be very personal, they are shaped to a large extent by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves (see Rose 1995: 89). In addition, the choices to stay or to move have to be justified not only to oneself, but also to others – to left-behind relatives, and to the surrounding people in the host country. When hoping to establish a relationship with a new place of residence, to make it feel like 'home', people employ different strategies: they use the past, look for connections with people and places, turn to familiar routines, try to find a common rhythm, work to produce a certain kind of homeliness. They might also have to challenge the prevailing discourses or identity positions given to them by others.

Different societal changes or the migration of family members, relatives or neighbours might lead people to reflect upon the meaning of place for them. When family members who remain discuss the meaning of place and the factors binding them to different locations, the emphasis is on other aspects as compared to their relocated family members. Their story of transnational (family) life is different. However, I would refrain from opposing rootless mobility and rooted belonging. Being grounded does not necessarily mean being fixed; and being mobile is not necessarily about being detached. The work of making home is an on-going process. Movement does not always take place "away from home", and staying put also includes movement. (Ahmed et al. 2003: 1, 10)

The prospects for a person to feel at home in a certain place, to feel attached to it, are affected by a number of things. On the basis of my interviews, one of the most important factors is a certain kind of nature, and the (special) relationship people claim to have with nature. Many of the interviewees, especially people who are from Russian Karelia, spoke a lot about moving in nature, vividly describing the environment surrounding them and different places in it (cf. also Hynynen 2004: 217). Some of the interviewees also stressed the particular quality of their relationship with nature as compared to the Finns. As described by one woman on her twenties, the relationship Finns have with nature seems to lack a certain genuine touch:

[I]n my mind, people in Finland don't have that real, authentic touch with nature, that they go to their summer cottages and to the forest and so on, but when they go to the forest they put on Nike trainers and an Adidas hoodie and then they go and walk a little in the forest and come back. (Woman, from the Baltic States, H35: 16)

In some families, stories about moving in nature form the core of their family story corpus. Nature might also have formed important surroundings for storytelling. In some of the interviews, the significance of moving in nature as well as the salience of stories and storytelling in people's identification processes are explicitly stressed – as is the repetitive nature of these activities. When thinking about a person's spatial identity and relationship with certain places, his/her experiences and activities are also important: places also come into being through praxis, not just through narratives (Rodman 1992: 642). Routines, cycles and repetition are ways of making and strengthening socio-spatial ties (see Kuusisto-Arponen 2011: 4).

Pihla: How have you felt when you think about your ethnic identity, who have you felt you are?

Ilona: Well, the first time I thought about it when, when the time came to apply for a passport. There was this nationality. I thought this way: my mother is Ingrian, and father is Karelian. What do I know about Ingrians? Very little about the relatives, I don't know the language, I have always lived here in Karelia, in the midst of Karelians and Karelian culture and spoken Karelian. And I think I'm more Karelian and wrote there I'm Karelian. Also now I think and feel I'm Karelian. It's probably because I've spent a lot of time with my grandfather [...]. We always went to forest with him and he told [stories], it always happened in Karelian. [...] He talked and told different stories and told about the woods and we went fishing, he taught me how to row and check the nets and [...] all the things like that. We were together and he spun the nets, I was always with him, spend a lot of time and surely something has kind of, I don't know, like a child soaks up all of this. And then comes that kind of understanding that, and a feeling. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 18)

The importance of a certain kind of nature has also been mentioned, when people talk about their adaptation to Finland. The place is more likely to feel like home if nature is somehow similar to the nature of the former place of residence. The importance of the water element in a new place of residence, for example, has been stressed by the daugh-

ter of a man who was not eager to move in the first place, but eventually followed his children and wife to Finland:

Dad had to [move], although moving was hard to him. He [had] built a summer cottage and a boat was so old that it was not used and [it was] gone, it had served 13 years this boat. And he didn't have that strength anymore. Well then he was glad when he moved and realised that there is a lake here and they bought a boat and (P: yes). And then daily fishing started. He liked it a lot here, walked in the town. When he settled in the new place, sometimes nostalgia of course festered. I always tried to ease his feelings, [saying] that yes we do remember how we boated, the wonderful scenery and how lovely it was with you. I could see he was pleased and [laughs], it is true. It all is true. Also my sister remembers it all. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H21: 45)

Both the statements asserting that the daughters remember their common trips in the natural surroundings, and how similar nature was in the former and current places of residence (making it possible to continue familiar activities in the new location), help to create continuity on their parts and thus help them adjust to the new environment more easily. Natural (and religious) places can be understood to have a kind of metaphysical dimension: they can be experienced as extensions of the sphere of human existence, providing consolation and safety, as Ari Hynynen has written. He has interpreted the making of natural or religious places as an attempt to appropriate absolute space, basically originating from nature (see Lefebvre 1991). The great world religions, like nature, are global and may help to create a sense of communion in one's life. (Hynynen 2004: 217–218)

On the other hand, my interviewees' relationships with nature are usually neither only symbolic nor aesthetic, they also have a practical side in the form of fishing, hunting, collecting berries, mushrooms and herbs. People also want to pass skills and the tradition of moving in nature on to future generations.

The same goes for gardening (and making preserves), which is important for many of the interviewees, and also for those who have moved to Finland. In their countries of birth, gardening had and still has a greater financial significance for many people. For immigrants it can be – apart from being a productive hobby – a way to make friends with locals who have the same interests:

Since in summer there is nothing else to do so (P: okay), to be without work here, it's just therapy [gives a laugh] (P: yes). And that kind of, productive hobby [gives a laugh] (P: yes). And there I immediately did find friends [laughs] (P: okay). There all the people are Finns and. There is no difference as they are, most of them are – have told us that they have moved from that area, before the war and their parents are from there (P: okay). (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H16: 19)

It is also worth noticing that according to this woman, there are no big differences among the people working on their vegetable allotments: most of them – including Finns – have their roots in the same area, the area that is now part of Russian Karelia.⁸ In addition, other interviewees have assumed that the warm reception they or their family experienced could be due to the similar experiences in the family histories of local people: "And that [town] is also that kind where is lot of those evacuees from Karelia,

they were especially kind. They have come there almost the same way, had nothing [with them].” (H36A: 50)

With these practices, an important part of the former lives of the immigrants has been brought to the new environment. As Barbro Klein (1993: 46) has written, for people who have migrated, gardening both maintains links to the past and plants new roots. In gardening, taking a place into one’s possession by being active is emphasised. Routines (moving in nature, making preserves, other hobbies, etc.) that can be continued in the new place of residence help the feeling of home to emerge.⁹

The aspect of agency is of great importance when talking about feeling at home in a certain place. There must be the possibility to do something meaningful. On the other hand, life in Finland can also be seen as positive in the sense that there is no need to *do* something all the time: a person’s energy is not needed just to cope with everyday chores, s/he also has time for other activities (which are seen as more recreational or part of personal development). For example, according to one interviewee, her parents did not have enough time in Russia to meet relatives and friends, everyone was busy doing household tasks and working in their vegetable patches (H33: 150).

Finding a job is naturally a factor that makes people more easily adjust to their new environment, to regard the place as their own. If employed, people also more easily feel they are accepted by the majority. Some of the interviewees have said that they have a bad conscience because they have not found a job; they would prefer not to be seen as ‘freeloaders’. As one of the ageing women formulated it: “There are enough people to be taken care of in Finland. On the other hand, when I think that my children and grandchildren also came, I feel a bit better” (H24). An important aspect of belonging is indeed to be accepted as part of the community, as a full member, and to feel safe within it; belonging is not a question of identification only. There is, indeed, a range of places, locales and identities people feel they do not and cannot belong to, even if they want to. Concern about belonging is indeed strongly activated precisely at the moments when there is a sense of exclusion, of non-belonging (Anthias 2006: 21).

RESHAPING THE TIES TO THE LAND OF ORIGIN

In some interviews, the former place of residence is described in beautiful colours. There are signs of some kind of nostalgia for previous times and places: people might, for example, wish that their children could have the same kind of childhood as they had. Some people have also praised the active cultural life of their land of origin. As one interviewee said, her new hometown in Finland was so quiet that at first she thought there was nothing happening. However, it seems that she changed her mind later on. As Yi-Fu Tuan has written, it often takes time to know a place, to acquire the feel of a place. “It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. [...] The feel of place is registered in one’s muscles and bones.” (Tuan 2011: 179–184)

There are interviewees who are not exactly happy with their lives in Finland and are considering moving back to their former homelands. In their descriptions, the land of origin is naturally depicted differently, in colours that are more positive, although not necessarily glowing.

I have really a simple life, this is a painful thing for me. [...] I think I had a better life in Russia. Perhaps my stomach wasn't always that full, but it wasn't important for me. But life was normal, I had a good job, and I don't know, maybe it was a mistake that I came to Finland. I don't know, it's difficult to say. At this point I sometimes think it was a mistake. There was a time in the 90s that was difficult [...] we didn't get our salaries on time and everything, and I had two children. There was something I think, I wanted to find a better life and I moved. Now I think, maybe I just should have borne it and tried to live there. Maybe it would have been better. I don't know, difficult to say. But I can't say I'm happy to live in Finland, no. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H25: 30)

There were no people who had returned among my interviewees, but some of their family members (children, ex-spouses) have, for example after a divorce in Finland. Some people have stated that for them it seems that society in Russia or in Estonia has changed so much that they cannot consider moving back there: they would not feel at home there anymore, after living in Finland for, for example, ten years. One of the interviewees who said this, however, owned an apartment in his former homeland until recently, which suggests that he might have wanted to keep the backdoor open, just in case he or his family wanted to return at some point (H36A: 22; H39: 108).

Often people who have moved or are planning to move to Finland seem to be rather critical of their former homeland and the living conditions they used to have there. People have in these cases grown apart from their former lives as well as their former places of residence. Especially in the narratives of the younger generation the native land is often depicted as 'the other', since the interviewees have lived most of their lives in Finland. As one 14-year-old girl who moved to Finland at the age of three said: "I wouldn't go to live in Russia at any cost, because I feel that I would be as much an outsider there as any other foreigners" (H27: 38). Some of the younger interviewees have felt that they have a hometown in their country of origin, even if they do not refer to the land as their homeland. Usually some close relatives live there, and thus they feel can move around there without problems (see H20: 62). The representatives of the younger generation (people who moved to Finland when they were 15 years old or younger: the so-called generation one-and-a-half) might feel quite irritated about being connected to the former homeland of their parents, and about the need to always be ready to explain their roots and reasons for being in Finland to others, even to strangers (cf. Rastas 2013: 50). They might also be tired of hearing about the advantages of their multicultural background and knowing several languages.

Somewhat surprisingly, older generation immigrants have also distanced themselves from their former places of residence. For example, one woman told me that when visiting Russia for the first time after moving to Finland, it was difficult for her to confront the past. Food served in the native land also seemed so dubious that she had taken food with her from Finland (H16: 77). A female interviewee in her thirties described how difficult it was to let her daughter visit Russia with her grandmother. "At first it was a shock for me [and] I didn't let her go [gives a laugh], then I thought, goodness, with my mother, – I think [it is] safe, yes, I do trust my mother" (H21: 76). The hesitation might be partly because of the difficulty of letting her daughter travel with someone else, on the other hand I understand this hesitation also to be related to the travel destination, even if this is her former homeland.

Among the things that distance people from their former homelands and motivate them to move away, a feeling of insecurity has often been the most important thing. One of the interviewees mentioned repeated burglaries, thefts from the vegetable patch, and boats that were stolen – repeated penetrations into the family’s private sphere (H16: 52). In addition, other interviewees have mentioned that the uncertainty of tomorrow and of fulfilling basic needs made them move, although living in another country might have been a shocking experience to begin with. The rhythm of life in Finland has often been experienced as very different from what they were used to.

Experiencing the former native land as something foreign and unsafe can also be part of the necessary emotional distancing that is needed when building bonds with a new homeland. One might have to break loose from one place, at least to some extent, to be able to build a relationship with another place. When carrying out interviews in Petrozavodsk with people planning to move to Finland, Olga Davydova has recognised that people try to cut loose from their homeland by attaching different negative qualities to it. In the new homeland, however, the majority there might continue to attach these people to their former homelands, which might feel like a forced return to the state from which they have been trying to cut loose through a long and emotional process (Davydova 2004: 254–255).

PEOPLE MAKING PLACES, PLACES MAKING PEOPLE

In my material, a relationship with geographical places is often narrated via important people. As Marjatta Marin has argued, the concept of a place is very much social in its nature: by “living a place” people make it meaningful (Marin 2003: 23). The family commonly becomes the focal point through, or with which, people live places. Some scholars even claim that places offer little outside the human bond: in the absence of the right people, things and places are quickly drained of meaning (see Tuan 2011: 140).

What comes to interviewees who have moved is that the new place of residence in Finland has often been chosen because there are relatives or other acquaintances living nearby. It is quite common that people have at first lived with some of their relatives or friends. People moving from Russian Karelia often prefer to live near the border, which makes it possible to visit Russia more often, and to bring groceries and preserves made by relatives back to Finland. Realising the importance of relative distance is also important: for example, Petrozavodsk is closer and more easily accessible to Joensuu (in Eastern Finland) than to some other localities in Russian Karelia, although Joensuu is on the other side of a national border. Many of the interviewees from Russia have also not applied for Finnish citizenship, in order to make it easier to visit their country of birth more frequently.

For the older generation, leaving their country of birth in order to move to Finland is often not what they have been dreaming of. Many of the older people I interviewed feel that migration is more suitable for young people and that they are too firmly rooted in their home country. They might visit other countries, but: “Then back home, home [is] better. There’s no place like home”.¹⁰ Dwelling, country house, friends, relatives, working place and the possibility for an active life are usually mentioned as reasons for not moving. “There is nothing to do there” (H31D: 32), as one interviewee living in Russian

Karelia put it, referring to the importance of being able to continue an active life after crossing the border. Life in Finland is considered to be “good” (good referring here first and foremost to the economic situation and personal safety), but people’s *hearts* are said to belong to their home countries.

One older interviewee, Ira, talks about her dear aunt who had moved to Finland about ten years before the interview and who persuaded the interviewee to move. She says that before the family split up life was better. “All of us, we were here together, [...] all helping each other and everything was so nice. And now, all who died, who went away. Just like being alone [gives a laugh]; it feels like I’ve been left all alone.” (H32: 19) Despite this, she does not want to move from her homeland and explains that this is mainly because of the importance of people close to her, and because of the closeness between people in general.

It is beautiful to live there, but another thing is longing. I don’t know how, maybe you don’t understand but I know we don’t have a kind of life we’d like to have. But we do have people around us, people to talk to and to be with, we always meet each other and visit each other, say supporting words to each other. It’s different but nice at your place. But the way it is, let it be, why change. Of course, she invites me, persuades me to come to her, she lives alone and is in low spirits. But where would I put the children: grandchildren were still little and one has to stick with one’s own. She has children and a lot of grandchildren there. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H32: 20)

Homeland and its meaning is defined here first and foremost through social relations. Interviewees have by and large stressed the importance of close relations and a wide network of relatives. Compared to their families, the family lives of Finns seem to be centred more around the nuclear family. My interviewees also often stress that in their families the close connection between children and parents does not disappear when the children grow up. The meaning of family support is usually emphasised during different crises, and (part of the family) moving to another country may be experienced as such. Close relations with family, relatives and neighbours help the feeling of home to emerge. If newcomers do not manage to make friends with locals, the role of their family is even more essential. Home can also be found in the relationship with one’s partner. One younger interviewee, in her twenties, said that she does not really relish either Finnish society surrounding her or that of her parents-in-law. Home for her equates to her husband:

I have that kind of theory again, that with Riku we have our own world, we live together, we have built our own world in this apartment and live here with each other, and live extremely well. Because I couldn’t claim for example that I like Finnish society. I don’t particularly like Finnish people and I haven’t taken to Finnish society. But this is not to say I couldn’t live here, of course I can live here. But [pauses], but I like living with Riku here rather than dealing too actively with Finnish society. So in that way I think our life kind of has our look. (Woman, from the Baltic States, H35: 15)

Relatives who remain in the native country might feel more strongly (or speak more openly) about networks of relatives weakening when family members move abroad.

The relatives who move away can be, in the course of time, counted out from the immediate family circle, at least on an emotional level. Many interviewees who have stayed in the country of origin while their family members moved to Finland, have described how their relatives and family members turned into foreigners. Those who left for Finland are starting to think and act like Finns. People sometimes feel that their relatives in Finland do not understand contemporary lives in their former home countries. In addition to which Finland, with its different customs, nature, towns, rhythm of life and mentality in general often appears foreign to them. However, as people age they might consider moving because of the foreseeable need for (more intensive) care and a fear that nobody will be there to help them then. Another concern is about who will take care of the graves of the family, if relatives have relocated.

When it comes to making friends in Finland, many of my informants have felt that it is easier to befriend other Russians or Estonians, or other people from the former Soviet Union. Somehow they feel more familiar. Interviewees have naturally also made friends with Finns (in the allotments, for example, as described earlier). Some people tend to stress how “people are people everywhere”, some of them more open and happier than others (H16: 75). I would say that there are two (seemingly) contradictory discourses present all the time, even within one interview. On the one hand people emphasise differences, and on the other similarity. Whether the practices and people are conceived as foreign or not depends on situation. In one context a person can say there are no differences between people and cultures in Europe, while in another context s/he can feel them very clearly, which – it depends on the argument s/he wants to make.

Many of my interviewees have also said that it is easier to make friends with other foreigners than with Finns. However, it is interesting to note that there are clear hierarchies between different immigrant groups in Finland, and between different groups from the area of the former Soviet Union. An illustration of this is how not all of my informants agree to be called immigrant, and try to separate themselves from other people from the same area. For example, young interviewees talked with a condescending tone about those of their schoolmates who do not try to socialise with Finnish pupils and talk in Russian with each other (H27: 11). One of the girls stated:

But, I don't feel that I'm Russian myself, and well, yes [...] I'm half Finnish, 'cause my mum is half Finnish and mother's father and mother's grandmother are Finnish. But I don't feel that I'm any different in the company of my friends and so. And I'm also calling other Russians “those Russian girls” [...] (H27A: 14)

When I asked an older interviewee how people have treated her in Finland, she told me about a conflict with another woman from Russia. In a way, this incident also reflects older contradictions and attitudes that people in the Soviet Union had towards Finns:

Pihla: Have people generally regarded [you] well here, in Finland?

Helmi: Well the treatment here, there has not been any that kind of, contradictions [gives a laugh] [...] Well, I was seriously offended in one of the lectures in the My Profession in Finland course, when a Russian woman told me something. She had married a Finnish man and maybe they had talked about it in the family circle because she said, “well these Ingrians”, and she herself was half Greek and half Russian, from Moscow. I was always really annoyed when [gives a laugh] [she] spoke like that and in the end I said, what do you know about these people [to]

... speak like that, who are you yourself here? Then she fell silent. Didn't talk anymore [gives a laugh]. Speaks like that. And many Russians have the same kind of attitude, and also in Russia, calling us *чухонцы*¹¹ [gives a laugh], yes. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H16: 59)

When talking about immigrants from the former Soviet Union (or Russian and/or Estonian speaking minority people) in Finland, it is not possible to speak about a homogeneous group or community.¹² As the preceding examples also show, there are sometimes quite a few tensions among people who are grouped together by outsiders, or by the majority. Members of minority groups seem to have adopted the public discourses on desirable and undesirable immigrants, and sometimes work hard to separate themselves from the latter group. Thus, there is grouping and labelling similar to that exercised by the majority among immigrants themselves. For example, the status of the first re-migrants was generally quite different as compared to the later arrivals, although the special position of these people has also been passionately discussed in some interviews. According to the immigrant advisor I interviewed, the first Soviet immigrants knew nothing about social security and other benefits in Finland; the first Ingrians came only because they felt they had roots in Finland: they retained a sense of Finnish identity, a feeling of that Finland was their ethnic homeland (H19: 28). On the other hand, another interviewee claims quite the opposite, while talking about her mother and other relatives staying in Baltic States. In her opinion, the first arrivals were active persons, like her own husband, thanks to whose initiative they moved to Finland. "But those *real* Ingrians, who should be here, they are still there [...] and probably will never get here. Those that would maybe not been needed at all, they are all here already." (H8A: 23)

IDENTITIES AND FAMILIES IN MAKING

Home can also be found in religion or in language, which are not necessarily place-bounded things. Indeed, religion can either bind people to place or free them from it, universal religions rather tend to give freedom (see Tuan 2011: 152). As mentioned earlier, the relation to the nature and religion can create continuity in people's lives, when other things are changing. Some of the interviewees have described religious continuity through generations, as grandparents have been passing the religious knowledge to grandchildren.

Pihla: Well, what kind of meaning religion holds for you, for yourself?
Alma: Well, it is [gives a laugh]. Grandmother taught us mostly when we were little. I remember when we were still little kids, we were just listening to grandmother saying evening prayers, the Lord's Prayer. We didn't learn it by heart, but we did understand the meaning, because grandmother had an icon there, a picture of Jesus there at the corner. And on the bedroom wall there was a lovely picture, Jesus knocking on the door and that kind of good, that kind of warm picture it was I think, at least it lived on in my memories. Well she always told that there is a Jesus knocking and then she told the whole Bible to us, I remember everything, now of course afterwards I studied it, during the studies, but from those days I knew it, the whole story how it happened: How he shared bread [...] and I can't remember all

the details but he cured the people and was then crucified, she told like, we understood everything since I remember everything.

Pihla: She was an Orthodox?

Alma: No, Lutheran (P: Lutheran, yes.) And we have also been baptised. My younger sister has not been baptised. But me, my brother and I have been baptised (P: yes). When we were little. But we were not supposed to talk about it at school, otherwise we would have been expelled from school. Or someone said, father or mother said that don't talk, at school. Atheist, it was an atheistic country back then. (H21: 57–58)

The recurrent theme in the interviews of re-migrants is how both the ethnic background and the religious affiliation had to be concealed during the Soviet time. In the case of Ingrian re-migrants, the relation to Lutheran church is often stressed. Being Lutheran rather than Orthodox has been one of the central elements in making of Ingrian identity, although it has also been contested. Many of the Ingrian background families I have interviewed are Lutheran, but in the families of my informants, it is at the same time not exceptional that multiculturalism has reached also the religious sphere. People take peacefully or even playfully the fact that one of the children of the family may be Orthodox, another Lutheran and third atheist (H31: 24–25). Interviewees have also described peaceful co-existence of religions in the small locality in Russia Karelia: Lutheran and Orthodox congregations are using the same rooms one after another, and many older women are attending services of both congregations. (H9: 49; H38: 69–70) On the other hand, religion might also be found after moving to Finland, when its meaning can be emphasised because of the difficulties people have faced. "It helped that I was in a church. It might be that because I'm living through such a difficult period, it helps." (H3: 19)

Some of the re-migrants with Ingrian Finnish background have learned or at least heard Finnish language already in childhood. One of my informants stated: "Finland was not foreign, Finnish language was like own to heart" (H24). Also another interviewee, living in Russian Karelia, has described the first time she visited Finland. She was quite nervous, but after seeing a little girl playing with a dog, hearing her speaking Finnish, also she calmed down, felt more like home. "[T]hat kind of familiar, native, felt like it was the same as in our childhood, the same language, all the words were understandable." (H31A: 35)

The very same language, together with Finnish background, might have caused people to feel "otherness" while they were living in their country of origin. One woman in her thirties described how she felt different in Russia, since other Russian (speaking) girls did not understand her interest in Finnish language and culture. "But it was my own", she says. (H21: 14) While talking about ethnic identity of people with Finnish background coming from the former Soviet Union area, the concept of forced or doubled otherness has sometimes been used, referring to contradiction between the ways a person him/herself defines his/her identity, and how others perceive it. In former Soviet Union, these people have been called Finns and many have been teased because of that. When they have moved to Finland as returning migrants, they often considered themselves as Finns in spite of possible language problems and possibly mixed ethnic background. Nevertheless, in the eyes of majority of Finns these people are Russians or Estonians (see Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind 2000: 126). Like one interviewee put it:

I have acquaintances who live in [Finland] and tell: in Russia we are not Russians since in passport we were Finns, but in Finland we are also not Finns, because we returned from Russia. In Finland we are not Finns but Russians. In Russia we are not Russians, we are Finns, very complicated. There we are not the same as we are here. Here we are actually nobody, only foreigners. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H25: 5)

People who have moved to Finland with a status of a re-migrant have a pronounced need to stress their Finnishness. Re-migrants strive to legitimise their life in a new country (in the eyes of other people) by proving their Finnishness and Finnish roots. One of themes used to argument their Finnishness is a (strong) relationship with the homeland of (grand)parents – to Finland or to Ingria – and consciousness of own roots (Davydova 2002: 164). This has influenced also which parts of family history and what kind of family stories are actively remembered and told. In the interviews people have shortly mentioned for example Russian or Jewish background of their forefathers, and then concentrated on telling about Finnish branch of their family.

Those interviewees, who have not relocated, also have to describe their belonging in the context of migration of family members or neighbours. When some members of the family or community move, others might have to verbalise the reasons for staying put, and also negotiate their relations to other people with same ethnic background. Also younger people in the sending countries may be quite critical about the so-called return migration to Finland. This citation is from a person, whose cousins, aunt and some other relatives live in Finland, while she herself and her parents have stayed in Russia.

Pihla: Well how about you or you and your parents, when came this, this possibility that to Finland, it is possible to move to Finland as a return migrant, did you ever consider it?

Ilona: What return migrant? [gives a laugh]

Pihla: Yes [I also laugh]

Ilona: What return migrant? I always think like this, what return migrant? Because my mother was born here, her homeland is Russia, she has lived all her life here in Karelia. What return migrant? [We laugh] And I have also always lived here, I'm Karelian. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 36)

Earlier during the interview Ilona has told about her feelings of estrangement among the Finnish people in Russian Karelia.

[Y]es they were a bit like, they had an own kind of circle, where were only own [people]. I think also now it's like this. And I can say I'm also Finnish, because my mother is a Finn, but when I went to different kind of feasts where there were Finns, I felt myself a little foreign there. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 21)

Later in the interview she also describes in detail how important it is for a person to know about their family and family history. One has to be able to answer, who s/he is and where s/he is from. One also has to decide, which part of the family history s/he wants to emphasise. Ilona has decided to highlight her Karelian roots, and gives less attention to her mother's Ingrianess.

I am sure that I am Karelian. I know my relative up to sixth generation and I know that my homeland is my Karelia, North-Karelia.¹³ I know those customs and I am always interested about this. And I am sure in life, who I am. And I, I know what for this, what I [will] do [...] what for I will do it. And I think that it is important for a person to know about his/her own roots. It kind of gives confidence in life for a person. And gives understanding about the goals, goals of life. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 53)

The importance given to roots and ethnical background can also change in time. Sometimes the societal situation needs to change or one has to go further away from home to recognise the importance and speciality of home and one's own roots. Travelling away can thus form a spatial practice that can further root back home (see Baker 2012: 29). Questions related to identity need to be pondered more consciously when compared to new environment and to "others".

When family members do not stay in the same country, family relations and responsibilities have to be negotiated anew. Because of the often sporadic meetings with other family members, the notion of a family and its emotional and economic utility has to be constructed more deliberately, rather than taking it for granted through continuous day-to-day interaction (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 15). When a family does not live together, other signals are needed to show that the people in question do form a family and feel that they belong together (Jallinoja 2000: 207). In a situation like this, the family is increasingly constructed and maintained through discourse. Two of the most important things binding family members together are shared roots and a common past, both of which are repeated and constructed in stories about the words and deeds of family members. Family stories are passed, along with family photographs, films and other items, from one generation to another. Family stories can help to increase self-understanding and self-respect. In a marginalising situation, a strong positive identity might provide people a place from which to 'push' and strength to cope with difficult situations (Huttunen 1999). As Sara Ahmed has written, feelings of otherness and displacement can be a question of memory: to feel at home in a certain place, one might have to reconnect with the past. Stories of dislocation can also help one to relocate by giving a shape to the past. (Ahmed 2000: 84, 90–91)

Through photographs and stories, it is possible to build a relationship with Finland and with the everyday lives of relatives now living there. With the help of photographs people can feel they are part of their relatives' everyday lives in Finland, almost as if they see and experience what is depicted in the photographs. When one of my interviewees was telling me about the life of her son and his family in Finland, while showing me photographs they had sent her, it felt as if she was telling me about events, and a land, she had seen and experienced herself. Finland as a country was brought closer to her heart through these pictures and stories.

On the other hand, it is not always possible to talk about the family as a discursively produced unit, since some aspects of family life – for example caregiving – call for the immediate presence of family members and thus bind people to places in a very concrete fashion. In certain cases it is possible to talk about "caring from a distance", but caregiving generally involves activities that demand face-to-face interaction, physical contact, time and presence (see Zechner 2008: 36–37). Bearing in mind the tradition and continuous importance of intergenerational care chains in Russia and Estonia, organis-

ing transnational care in a way that would be acceptable to all family members provides a challenging task, which often has to be solved by women. Decisions to relocate are often justified by referring to what is best for the children,¹⁴ but at the same time migrants have to decide how to take care of their aging parents (or in some cases also children who have been left behind), who might not be interested in relocation. Caring transnationally means that migrants have to act simultaneously within two sets of cultures of care and immediate and extended family needs may create conflicting demands (*ibid.*: 37–42).

CONCLUSION

People's place-related narratives reflect the different, sometimes contradictory feelings associated with multiple places in people's lives. Even in the space of one interview, the relationship with significant places for the person in question can be constructed in different ways, reflecting the situationality of that relationship. There is a need to (re) define a relationship with a place according to context, explaining the substance as well as the feelings of belonging to that place and non-belonging to another. The narrative can be seen to be constructed as a kind of answer or even as a backlash to the way family and relatives, on one hand, and the surrounding society and different others on the other, are understood to define this relationship. In similar way, narratives are used to construct us and them, what is our own and what is foreign.

In migration studies, the stress has often been put on a certain kind of detachment or placelessness of a mobile subject. However, as Baker has stated, despite increasing mobility, our physical situatedness in time and space places us. Our bodies remain, though mobile, situated in one place or another, and this localises at least some aspects of our lives and identities. (Baker 2012: 23–26). Indeed, as Sara Ahmed et al. (2003: 3) have noted, rootless mobility should not be understood to stand against rooted belonging. In addition, people living mobile or transnational lives do have feelings of belonging and create relations to places important to them. On the other hand, being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed (*ibid.*: 1). As identities and belonging are understood to be processual in nature, they are negotiated when people themselves ostensibly seem to stay put.

Places and the personal – physical, sensual and emotional – experiences related to them continue to be of essential importance in identity formation. The feeling of belonging to a certain place is also important for members of transnational families, and people use different strategies to construct this attachment. According to my study, common language, nature, continuing routines, family history and relationships, among other factors, have made members of transnational families feel at home in certain places. People can feel they belong to many places simultaneously, although sometimes attachment to a new home or homeland would appear to call for detachment from the former homeland.

NOTES

1 I use pseudonyms when talking about the interviewees. In the text, the combination of letter H and a number refers to a certain numbered interview and the number after the colon to a cer-

tain part of this interview. The list of the interviewees cited in the text can be found at the end of the article. The main reason for moving, as stated by the interviewees, has also been mentioned.

2 According to Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3), “[t]ransnational families’ are defined here as families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders.”

3 In total I have interviewed 31 women and 14 men. Fifteen of the interviewees were under 30 years old, twelve of them were 30–49 years old and eighteen of them were older than 50 years old. I have met some of the interviewees several times, either to make additional interviews, or informally, just for a chat or a cup of coffee. However, the plan of making repeated interviews with the same people – this was done with six people – did not work out quite as well as I had hoped. When asking to meet for another interview, people were often hesitant and said that they had already told me “everything”. Sometimes family members of people already interviewed reacted the same way. For example, the partner of a woman I had already interviewed said: “I think everything about me has already been told”.

4 According to Statistics Finland, in 2012 35.8 per cent of foreign nationals permanently living in Finland had Russian or Estonian citizenship and 37.8 per cent were Russian- or Estonian-speaking. Of foreign-born inhabitants 34.1 per cent were born in Estonia, Russia or the former Soviet Union. (Statistics Finland 2012a; 2012b; 2012c)

5 This can be explained by the fact that the foreign spouses of Finnish men are likely to hail from Thailand, Russia, and Estonia, while for Finnish women there is no particular concentration of spouses’ countries of origin (Lainiala, Säävälä 2012: 12).

6 For the moment, the right to apply for the status of returning migrant has ceased. The system of return migration for Ingrian Finns will be abolished after a transition period. However, those who registered before July 1, 2010, have the right to move to Finland with the status of remigrant. This right also remains for those people who were evacuated from Ingria to Finland and returned to the Soviet Union after the war, and to those who served in the Finnish army during the 1939–1945 period. (Act on the amendment of the Aliens Act 57/2011, confirmed on 25 March 2011 [Laki ulkomaalaislain 48 §:n muuttamisesta 57/2011].)

7 For example, a person might have come because of his/her studies or work in the first place, and later on decided to stay after finding a spouse in Finland or using the status of returning migrant.

8 I assume she refers to the Finnish Karelians that have been evacuated before and after Winter War (1939–1940) from the area that used to be Finnish Karelia. In the peace treaty of Paris (1947), Finland had to cede areas to the Soviet Union and a total of 430,000 evacuees, of whom 407,000 were Karelians, were resettled in different parts of Finland (see Fingerroos 2008, also about Karelia as a place of memories and utopias).

9 Elsewhere I have focused on the importance of following traditional gender roles in creating a feeling of continuity in the context of migration. There is something permanent regardless of the changes taking place (Siim 2007: 229; cf. Rotkirch 2000: 131–132). Unaltered everyday routines can thus form a kind of safe haven during other changes in life.

10 «А потом обратно домой, дома лучше. В гостях хорошо, а дома лучше.» (H31A: 33)

11 This is a derogatory term that has been used for Finns as well as other Finno-Ugric peoples. Many of my informants say that they have been called *tsukhna* when speaking Finnish in public places, for example.

12 Lisa Wiklund has used the term “reversed diaspora” when referring to people of the same ethnic origin avoiding each other rather than forming a group. When researching this sort of group it is possible that a researcher creates a community where there is none. (Wiklund 2012: 122)

13 She refers here to Viena, alias Dvina Karelia.

14 It is widely agreed that children are often the main ‘rationale’ for parental migration and

are very much affected by transnational migration, whether they relocate or remain at home when their parents migrate. However, transnational migration has rarely been studied from the children's viewpoint, which the ongoing project *Families on the Move Across Borders: Children's Perspectives on Labour Migration in Europe* seeks to remedy; see Lulle, Assmuth 2013.

SOURCES

The research material consists of field diaries and forty relatively open interviews. If possible, more than one person from the same family has been interviewed. Eight of the interviews were group interviews in which at least two of the family members were present. In total I have interviewed 31 women and 14 men. Fifteen of the interviewees were under 30 years old, twelve were 30–49 years old and eighteen were older than 50 years old. The interview material and field diaries are in the possession of the author. Interviewees cited in this article:

- H3 Woman, 40–49 years old, from Russia. Marriage.
- H8A Woman, 40–49 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H9 Man, 20–29 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Study/Return migrant.
- H12B Man, 30–49 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H16/ H24 Woman, 50–59 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H19 Immigrant worker, living in Finland.
- H20 Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H21 Woman, 30–39 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Study/Marriage, also Ingrian background.
- H25 Woman, 50–59 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H27A Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H27B Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia. Return migrant.
- H29/H31G Woman, 20–29 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31A Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31B Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31C Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31D Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31E Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Karelian.
- H31F Woman, over 60 years old, lives in Russia. Ingrian background.
- H32 Woman, over 60 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. (Partly) Ingrian background.
- H33 Woman, 30–39 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H35 Woman, 20–29 years old, from the Baltic States. Studies/Marriage.
- H36A Man, over 50 years old, from the Baltic States. Return migrant.
- H38A Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia, Ingrian background.

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OFFICIAL STATUS AS A TOOL OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL? A STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE LAWS IN RUSSIA'S FINNO-UGRIC REPUBLICS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the legal and institutional position of Finno-Ugric languages according to the language laws of the national republics in post-Soviet Russia. The aim is to understand whether the republican authorities intended to use the official designation of state language as a policy device with which to ensure the revival of titular languages. The approach of the study is to test revivalist theories that establish a link between official status and language revival by comparing the number of institutionalised elements of official status in the republics. For the purpose of comparison, the study focuses on education and work environment among the domains within the public sphere of language use. The results demonstrate that the framing of official status in these sectors provided only some additional opportunities for the expansion of language use, while the extent of their institutionalisation directly correlated with the level of political representation of ethnic elites.

KEYWORDS: official language • language revival • language laws • Finno-Ugric peoples • Russia

INTRODUCTION

Change in language behaviour is an outcome of a complicated variety of sociolinguistic, political and legal processes, and the study of language policy alone cannot explain all tendencies in language practices. Yet, without doubt, the impact of state language policy is among the most important causes for change in a sociolinguistic situation, although this change will not always be one that policy-makers envisage as their goal. The most influential device of public policy is the designation of a language with an official status, which imposes compulsory use of this language on authorities and population in its interactions with authorities. This officialisation can pursue a variety of goals, and attempts at the revival of minority languages could be one of them. However, the connection between the official language and language revival is a problematic one. There is evidence from some countries that pro-active government policy enhanced language revival, while in other countries official recognition 'from above' actually discouraged grass-roots enthusiasm of activists (Sallabank 2012: 116–117). Can designation of a language with an official status serve the purpose of language revival?

This was a topical question in Russia in the 1990s and still is today. In the early 1990s domestic scholars observed the link between the ideology of language revival in

the Union and Autonomous Republics (SSRs and ASSRs) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and designation of their state languages but denied the sincerity of revivalist rhetoric of republican elites. Instead, official designation was interpreted instrumentally as an attempt by the elites to establish language preferences beneficial for them (Guboglo 1993; Aklayev 1994). Since that time more international and domestic research studies have been conducted into language legislation in Russia's republics, studies that found the importance of language laws for language maintenance (see, for example, Mikhalchenko 1994; Neroznak 2000; Galdia 2009). Notwithstanding this, there is no consensus on the nature of the link between the state languages of the republics and language revival. This link has become particularly problematic since the year 2000, when with the election of a new Russian president there was a political turn towards recentralisation of the country. As part of the new policy, self-governance of the republics was substantially constricted, any reference to 'sovereignty' was removed from their constitutions, the federal authorities started to interfere more and more with regional language policies (see Zamyatin 2012a: 40–42). In this situation, language shift and other problems of minority languages would be ignored unless ensured as the policy goal. Was language revival a concern of those who drafted the republics' language laws?

The purpose of this study is to explore the legal and institutional position of titular languages according to the language laws of the Finno-Ugric republics in order to understand the laws' impact on language revival. The first section of the article will outline the formation of the status planning as the main policy device in post-Soviet Russia and will establish the context for the comparison. In the case of minority languages, this policy approach demands extensive regulations to ensure their institutional and other support beyond a mere formal recognition of their official status, and the amount of support varied greatly in the republics. The approach of this study is to test the presupposition of the lobbyists and lawmakers that framing the official status could serve and did serve as the means of language revival. The second section will present the data of a comparative study on the language regulations in the Finno-Ugric republics and the circumstances of their adoption. The cases of the Finno-Ugric republics are interesting because they represent different configurations of official status, which allows variables in policy making to be highlighted. Among the cases studied, Karelia represents an outlier case, where the policy was pursued in a situation in which the titular language was not established as a state language and for a long time there was no language law. Finally, the third section will summarise the findings that identify ethnic elites as the driving force behind language revival and will discuss how and why different elements of official status were framed in different republics. The results allow for further theoretical elucidation of the impact of formal language status upon actual language practices, as well as the scope and limits of this impact.

LEGAL DESIGNATION AS THE WAY TO ENSURE LANGUAGE
REVIVAL BY MEANS OF COMPULSORY USE

The Functions of Official Status in the Case of Minority Languages

Political thinkers argue in justification of an official language that citizens need to have shared values and a common language for society and the state to function properly. In the tradition of liberal thought the argument is that all members of society knowing a common language is a prerequisite for on-going political debate, in which shared values are born (Patten, Kymlicka 2003: 37–40). This implies the necessity for every citizen, including minority members, to know the official language, which is, therefore, the source for requirement that knowledge of the official language is a precondition for citizenship. When the dominant majority language is simultaneously an official language, serious measures are needed for the maintenance of minority languages. One way is also to grant official status to minority languages, which, however, raises the problem of the re-conceptualisation of officiality for the purpose of minority languages and further justification. What does it substantially mean for a language to function as an official language and what areas should be covered for a minority language?

First of all, official use should not interfere with the freedom to choose the language used in private affairs. Regarding the public sphere, different classification of these areas could be suggested. According to a functional classification, the official language operates as 1) the working language of state authorities and organisations, 2) the language of communication of authorities with citizens and other public communications, 3) state institutions provide public services in the official language (see Zamyatin 2013c: 124–125). These functions can be performed both in the majority and minority language, or in either of the two. If there is more than one official language, an obvious reason for the (co-)official status of languages is the obligation of the state to provide public services to those minority members who do not speak the majority language, or speak it badly. Another justification of (co-)official status is the need for the symbolic political recognition of a group not just as an ethnic or/and linguistic minority, but as a national community.

The latter line of argument fits the case of Russia's republics, which historically were established as the exercise of the right to national self-determination of their 'titular peoples' (for a discussion on the ethnic nature of Russian federalism, see Bowring 2000: 216–219). This right can be exercised internally in the form of autonomy for a province or other historical territorial unit within a larger state. Being in the minority within a larger society, ethnic groups or 'titular peoples' are constituted in the political space as collective entities with their 'own' territories, that is, titled after them. A territorial unit marks, then, a community with the need of a common language or languages in order to function. All in all, not the personality principle but the territorial principle of accommodating languages in society became the policy cornerstone in Russia. The symbolic role of common languages for communities is used as an argument by authorities to introduce compulsory study of official languages of this territory by all its inhabitants irrespective of mother tongue and ethnic affiliation and for the knowledge of these languages by civil servants. On top of this argument, yet another justification for (co-)official status might be given, which is the endeavour to ensure protection of a *de facto*

minority language in a wider society. Establishing the official norms with this and that obligation for official language use in the public sphere then becomes particularly important for raising prestige of a *de facto* minority language, that is, for reinforcement of (ethno-)national identity.

Language Policy versus Language Rights: A Historical Outline of Status Planning in Russia

The Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was proclaimed on a day (12 June 1990) that is celebrated, somewhat infamously in recent years, as Russia's independence day. While the Declaration recognised the freedom to use one's native language, it has not designated state language(s) nor has it otherwise touched upon language issues. The foundations of Russia's language policy were laid somewhat later, in the early 1990s, and included, *inter alia*, the freedom to choose one's languages of communication and education, the principles of equality of languages and prohibition of discrimination on the basis of language, enshrined first in Russia's language law (Law of the RSFSR... 25 October 1991) and then in the Constitution of the Russian Federation (12 December 1993). Most significantly, these documents established Russian as the state language of the country and recognised the right to its national republics to establish their own state languages.

Since the Soviet period Russian was the *de facto* official language not only of the central authorities but also of regional authorities. Non-Russian languages functioned as the working languages of the ASSR authorities only in some USSR Communist Party (CPSU) local committees and local administrations, while Russian was the dominant language throughout the State apparatus (see Iskhakova 2002: 9–10). During *perestroika* popular movements arose out of dissatisfaction with the state-of-play in inter-ethnic relations. The late Soviet nationalities policy was virtually directed at the Russification of non-Russians in the RSFSR. The leadership of national movements in Russia's ASSRs expressed their concerns with the linguistic situation of low-prestige non-Russian languages and the continuing language shift towards Russian. In the view of this leadership (referred to hereafter as ethnic elites), first *de facto*, and since 1991 *de jure*, official status of Russian as the sole state language of the country gave it a more favourable position and, thus, contradicted the formally proclaimed equality of languages, leading to their actual sociolinguistic and political inequality.

In the condition of the transition period, territorial language rights, minority language rights or some other right model could become a mechanism to manage diversity and to solve the problem of inequality of languages in Russia. However, for a number of reasons, including Soviet legacies and a failure of democratisation, not the rights-based approach but the policy-based approach has become the mechanism for management of language issues (Zamyatin 2013c: 143; these approaches resonate with the culture-protective and legal models of linguistic mobilisation suggested by Viktor Birin et al. 2005: 10–12). Those few rights that were recognised in legislation, foremost in the education law (Law of the Russian Federation... 10 July 1992), are formulated only as declarative and not self-executing rights. For example, not only federal law but also every regional language law contains a clause on the right to receive education in one's mother tongue. In practice, its implementation depends on the language plan-

ning activities of the republics, which might create the possibilities and might not. If an individual would go to court with the case for his or her right, non-execution will be excused by cost argumentation and numerous other 'objective' obstacles. Within the rights-based approach, used in some other countries, individuals have rights that they can employ in court even against the state, if the latter infringes the rights. The Soviet-style language laws are not directly enforceable but need administrative regulations for their implementation.

Moreover, a lack of language rights is not compensated by international treaties, because among the main European conventions in the field Russia is a party only to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities with its minimal level of protection, but not to the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which themselves, however, do not contain rights but state obligations (see Zamyatin 2013c: 107).

Language Revival: From Formal to Legal Designation of Languages

In the conditions of the policy-based approach, ethnic elites came up with the idea of 'language revival' as an alternative solution to linguistic problems. This idea found its shape in the policy goal of expansion of the use of non-Russian languages in the public sphere and raising their prestige through officialisation of the titular languages. Since the Soviet period, the titular languages were not used or were only symbolically used in the public sphere. So, official designation was identified by ethnic elites as the primary revival mechanism because it was a legal regime that could imply the compulsory use of titular languages in the public sphere, which could, *inter alia*, serve as an instrument of preferential treatment of titular groups and their elites.

Pyotr Voronetskiy (2009) argued from a normative perspective that the designation of the state languages of the republics cannot be motivated only by efforts for the preservation and support of the language as a cultural value, because this task has to be solved by other mechanisms. However, in the light of the virtual absence of the other, that is, right mechanisms, the elites had only a short menu of options. In fact, as non-intervention by the state into the private affairs of citizens included the freedom of language choice and became an element associated with democratisation, the policy could not directly address the problem of broken intergenerational language transmission in the family, which would be a straightforward approach to the language shift. At the same time, because the principle of ethnic federalism established a link between territories, ethnicity and language, the ethnic elites viewed as justified preferential treatment for the autochthonous groups in their titular republics and looked forward to a policy of state support for their languages as an appropriate way to achieve equality of languages.

Simultaneously, both titular ethnic elites and Russian regional elites saw their joint interest in designation of the state languages of republics by the declarations of state sovereignty of 1990 as one more attribute of national statehood to ensure more self-governance vis-à-vis the federal centre (Zamyatin 2013a: 155–157). In this light, the Russian regional elites even agreed as a concession to include in the elite pact the state languages as ethnic institutions established according to the constitutions of the republics (Zamyatin 2013b: 341–343). Yet, in all ASSRs, in practice Russian was designated as another state language at the republic level, which implanted the problem for imple-

mentation; this prevented in many instances compulsory use of titular languages and accompanying language preferences (see Zamyatin 2013c: 116–118).

The sovereignty declarations and the constitutions of Russia's republics, where official designation of their state languages was first made, contained only symbolic and formal designation, which was sufficient for the Russian regional elites. However, language revival as the expansion of language use made sense only beyond formal recognition as an increase in the number of functions performed by the titular language. That is why ethnic elites envisaged the official status of the titular languages to include their actual functioning in the capacity of state languages. The latter implied the legal designation in language legislation and, first of all, the adoption of a language law that would list the domains and sectors of compulsory use of titular state languages. While such legal designation was achieved relatively quickly in some republics, in others, notably those whose titular group was in the minority, it became problematic for the ethnic elites to advocate not only the expansion of official functions but also the inclusion of language revival as a policy goal in the first place.

A study of the laws would shed light on the policy goals behind these documents and the level of institutionalisation of titular languages. There were some comparative legal studies on the languages laws, for example, in the republics and other regions of Siberia (Katunin 2009; 2010) that, however, were focused neither on elucidation of the policy goals nor on the functions. Language legal regulations are usually classified according to the domains of public life: education, courts, administration, mass media, cultural and economic life and others (see Iskhakova 2002: 9–11). In the next section, the study proceeds with a comparison of the legal regulations in the Finno-Ugric republics on: 1) the compulsory study of titular state languages by all students or compulsory study of native language and its functioning as the language of instruction, and 2) language preferences for some professions. This study undertakes comparison only in the sectors of education and the work environment because the way language functions in these two sectors implies their compulsory use. As a result, language revival here needed significant resources for its implementation and was, thus, the most debated. Apart from this, the compulsory use in these sectors is not directly connected with instrumental use and preferential treatment because it does not have behind it the issue of status and access to resources, as in the case of language requirements for top officials (which represents the first function described above and is studied separately in Zamyatin 2013b). In these sectors, accordingly, the third and the second function of the official language are exercised. In addition, these sectors are the most illustrative of language promotion. However, a restriction of this study is that it does not evaluate the actual implementation of the legal provisions, which is accomplished for the sphere of education (Zamyatin 2012c).

LEGAL DESIGNATION OF STATE LANGUAGES IN THE FINNO-UGRIC REPUBLICS: THE RESULTS OF A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Komi

Among the Finno-Ugric Republics, the Republic of Komi is the one that regulated the language issues quite early by establishing the legal and institutional basis for its state

languages. In Komi already after the elections in March 1990, the Supreme Council created its Commission on Culture, Nationalities Policy Affairs, Development of National and Internationality Traditions, Protection of Historical Heritage, which started activities on language law from the very beginning of its work (Popov, Nesterova 2000: 46).

The Commission ordered the Institute of Language, Literature and History to prepare a draft language law. The Komi national organisations criticised the first draft law for its weakness in the area of language revival and, in particular, for the originally planned long-term implementation period that had to last up to ten years. In their view, the Komi language was developed and standardised enough to function in the public sphere, although there were some discussions regarding the question of whether there should only be one written form (see Tsypanov 2009: 210–213). Yet, the problem with passing the bill was that by *perestroika*, ethnic Komis composed only about a quarter of the total population. In 1985, 37 per cent of the deputies were ethnic Komi in the Supreme Council, the Soviet-style regional legislature, and 31.6 per cent were elected in 1990 (Popov, Nesterova 2000: 148, Table 8).

Even if these figures were higher than the population share, ethnic representation was still insufficient to pass a language law in the wording envisaged by leaders of the national movement. Yet, it proved to be possible for ethnic elites to reach an agreement with majority elites quite early, in 1992, due to the strategy of cooperation with republican authorities, chosen by leaders of the national movement, such as Valeriy Markov and Nadezhda Bobrova, and their lobbying of the draft among the Russian-speaking deputies of the Supreme Council. This became possible partly due the position of Yuriy Spiridonov, the Head of the Republic of Komi (Tsypanov 2001a: 123; 2001b: 185–186). The support on the part of Spiridonov was compatible with the need of the regional political elites to ensure their position versus the central authorities. This cooperation and participation of ethnic elites in elaboration of the laws on language (Law of the Republic of Komi... 28 December 1993) and culture (Law of the Republic of Komi... 22 December 1994) also enhanced their early adoption (Popov, Nesterova 2000: 37–39).

The final text of the language law (Law of the Republic of Komi... 28 May 1992) had quite strong provisions. There were language requirements for some professions to know both state languages (articles 7, 13, 18). The list of such professions demanding knowledge of both state languages and other languages in the state authorities had to be defined. Legal acts had to be translated into the state languages (article 7). According to the law, “Komi and Russian state languages are studied in all schools” (article 19), which meant that in theory it became compulsory for all students of the Republic to study Komi as another state language, but in practice twenty years later only about one third of students do (see Zamyatin 2012c: 88). Komi has not been used as the language of instruction since the 1970s and its expansion in this direction was not included, although it was planned for the future. So, the right to choose the language of upbringing and instruction, even if in the law, was not enforceable in Komi. The law included the right to choose Komi or Russian in order to enter high professional institutions, higher education institutions and to accomplish research, which also remained on paper. According to a study titled “Public Opinion of the Population of the Republic of Komi on the Issues of Statehood and Sovereignty” conducted soon after adoption of the law, 37 per cent of ethnic Komis and 24 per cent of the total population were in favour of compulsory Komi for all students. In 2004 the numbers in favour were 35.8

per cent of Komis and 13.3 per cent of Russians or 26.6 per cent of the total population (Shabayev et al. 2009).

After the campaign to “[bring] regional legislations into concordance with the federal legislation” was initiated by the federal centre, amendments were made to the Komi language law in the direction of its deterioration, although somewhat later than in the other republics (Law of the Republic of Komi... 16 July 2002). As elsewhere, many legal provisions were weakened in such a way that now actions had to be performed “according to the federal legislation” (see Tsypanov 2003; 2005). The demand for official and public servants to know the state languages was substituted with the demand to know just one of the state languages, which in practice meant, of course, Russian. The list with language requirements was not mentioned. However, an obligation was imposed on heads of authorities and municipalities to create conditions for acquiring the minimum language knowledge needed for work by all public servants. The latter was removed in the next wave of amendments (Law of the Republic of Komi... 6 July 2009). The amendments also ensured that the languages of upbringing and instruction are defined by the founder of the education institution. Yet, compulsory study of the state languages and language requirements are still in the language law. Similarly, the amended education law has not excluded compulsory study of languages (Law of the Republic of Komi... 15 November 2006).

Mari El

In the Republic of Mari El the Supreme Council created its Commission on Internationality Affairs in 1990. The first draft of the language law was prepared by a working group of the Supreme Council and published for discussion in three languages (Russian, and the two main varieties of Mari: Hill Mari and Meadow Mari) in 1992 (Kondrashkina 2000: 160). Hot debates arose around the proposed compulsory study of the state languages for all students (later article 11) and the language requirements that officials had to have some knowledge of the state languages (later article 14) (Sharov 1994: 78; 2001b; Anduganov 2000; Belokurova, Denisova 2003: 50). The third Congress of the Mari People suggested that these provisions would be voted on openly in the Supreme Council (Resolution On Language... 31 October 1992). However, at that time deputies of Mari ethnic origin represented only approximately one third in parliament and the draft language law was not even discussed in session. Through the absence of a language law, the laws on education (Law of the Republic of Mari El... 4 November 1992) and on culture (Law of the Republic of Mari El... 31 May 1994) partially fulfilled similar functions in their respective spheres. In 1994–1995, when the republican constitutions were adopted, the national movements throughout the whole country entered a period of decline, signified by a decline in the general ability of national movements to use language and other ethnicity-related phenomena as channels for political mobilisation (Gorenburg 2003: 75, also Zamyatin 2013b). Nevertheless, the inertia of the sovietisation processes, which started in the circumstances described, made possible the adoption of language laws, as happened in Mari El.

According to official data, the share of ethnic Mari in the Mari ASSR Supreme Council of 1985 was 42 per cent, in 1990 it was 30 per cent (Sharov 2001a: 96). In the State

Assembly of the Republic of Mari El elected in December 1993 the share of Mari was 46.2 per cent. 13 out of 30 deputies in the Republican Parliament were of Mari ethnic origin, 14 were Russians, 2 Tatars and one Ukrainian. This composition reflected the ethnic structure of the population (Belokurova, Denisova 2003: 57). In other words, in 1995 the titular elite was represented powerfully enough in political establishment to pass the language law. The dispute inside the titular elite about whether the Hill Mari language also had to be granted the status of yet another state language of the Republic was unsettled (Kuznetsova 2008). The internal clash somewhat postponed the adoption of the Language Law. Despite the relatively small size of the group, the Hill Mari elite was predominant in power at that time and the President was of Hill Mari origin (Kasimov 1992). A compromise was achieved through an agreement that the application of the Mari state language had to be performed according to the areas of residence of the Hill and Meadow Mari.

The debate resulted in the language law of 1995 a few months after the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Mari El (24 June 1995), in which three languages were recognised as the republic's state languages. Certain categories of officials and public servants now had to have a command of Russian and also of one of the state languages, that is, Meadow Mari or Hill Mari, to the extent needed to carry out their professional duties (article 14). Moreover, "heads and employees of education institutions are chosen taking into account their knowledge of the languages of institution" (Law of the Republic of Mari El... 26 October 1995; Decree of the State Assembly of the Republic of Mari El... 26 October 1995). However, despite some practice, these provisions were never implemented in principle. In the sphere of education, the law included the right to choose freely the language of upbringing and instruction as well as the equal right to receive education in one's chosen native language. In addition to free choice of education institution, the law included the demand that Mari and Russian as the state languages are studied in all republican education institutions. However, the law settled on a transition period of five years for the switch to the teaching of the state languages in all education institutions (article 11, 62). Finally, the right to "pass exams in one of the state languages" was mentioned, although never actually enforced.

In the 1996 election to the State Assembly 50 deputies had to be elected personally and 17 deputies represented the administrative units of the Republic out of the total number of 67 deputies. This meant that 28 deputies had to be elected from urban areas and 39 from rural areas, which should have ensured higher ethnic political representation. However, in practice only 17 elected deputies were of ethnic Mari origin, including one representing the national organisation Mari Ushem (Mari Union). Thus, the share of ethnic Mari deputies was only 25.4 per cent (Belokurova, Denisova 2003: 64).

In June 2000 the fifth Congress of the Mari People was held, addressing the problem of the low ethnic political representation. The congress expressed its support for ethnic Mari candidates in the State Assembly election campaign of 2000. However, the amendments to the Mari Constitution and to the election law abolished the previously formed territorial and administrative-territorial electoral districts and formed only territorial districts. This way ethnic representation was reduced because of the lost extra seats from rural administrative-territorial districts. These amendments were a part of the campaign of bringing the republic's legislation into concordance with federal legislation (ibid.: 75–77).

As a further step in this direction, the Office of the Republican Public Prosecutor found the Mari language law and education law to be in conflict with federal legislation and protested against these pieces of legislation to the President and head of parliament of the Republic in August and September 2000. In January 2001 the Public Prosecutor proposed his own amendments, in which there was a requirement to change 24 of 65 provisions of the current language law. Even if the proposed amendments were mainly of decorative character and did not directly touch the provisions on the status of the Mari language, they attempted to change the balance, giving a clear priority to the Russian language. Leaders of the Mari national movement and some deputies of ethnic Mari origin strongly opposed this proposal. A conciliatory commission was formed to discuss disagreements (*Reshenie* 2001; Shkalina 2001: 12).

In the State Assembly of the Republic of Mari El elected in 2000 only 37.3 per cent of all deputies were of ethnic Mari origin, and they were unable to create an obstacle for the adoption of the amendments (Sharov 2001a; 2001c). The language law was amended in the direction of its significant deterioration (Laws of the Republic of Mari El... 19 September 2001, 2 December 2008, 16 March 2009, 12 March 2011). The compulsory study of the Mari language for all students was not excluded as the norm from the language law, but the education law was abrogated as contradicting federal legislation. The new law on regulation of relations in the sphere of education excluded compulsory study of Mari as the state language by all students (Laws of the Republic of Mari El... 29 March 2001; Sharov 2002). Sociological research studies of 1994 and 2001 have shown an increase among ethnic Maris in support for the compulsory teaching of the state languages to all from 59.2 per cent to 61.2 per cent and a decrease in support among Russians from 21.8 per cent to 19.4 per cent (Kudryavtseva, Shabykov 2002: 28, Shabykov 2006).

Mordovia

In Mordovia the first draft language law was prepared in 1991, but public support for it was very low (Maresyev 1996). After the first Congress of the Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) People in 1992 a draft language law was discussed and rejected by the Supreme Soviet Council because the deputies opposed the demand for compulsory study of the titular languages in all schools and the demand of language preferences for some administrative professions (Kargin 1995: 51; Maresyev 1995: 178; Iurchenkov 2001: 88, 90). Unlike the other republics, political representation in the republic's parliament remained relatively stable and reflected the share of the titular population in the whole population of the republic. Bearing in mind that the share of Erzya and Moksha was 32.5 per cent of the population of the republic, in the Supreme Council of 1990 their share was 34.9 per cent, in the State Council of 1995 it was 33 per cent (43.5 per cent according to Polutin 2000) and in 2000 in the State Council it was 38.6% (Dolgayeva 2001). However, even the deputies of titular origin were reluctant to openly support the draft law (Mosin 2001).

Only the second Congress in March 1995 demanded, along with the designation of the Mordvin languages as the state languages, the adoption of a law on state languages (Resolution... 24 March 1995). Some actions were arranged to speed up the process of the adoption of the language law. For example, the political developments in Mordovia

were compared with equivalent developments in Komi and the other republics in the public appeal made by the representatives of intellectuals and social movements to the republican authorities (Appeal 1997). It was stated that Mordovia lagged far behind in finding a solution to ethnic problems and concrete steps were proposed and requested, including the adoption of the language law. At the same time, leadership of the national movement was now ready for a compromise. It withdrew some demands, including language requirements for top officials (Iurchenkov 2001: 90).

The attitude of the state authorities also changed. When Nikolai Merkuskin was appointed Head of the Republic in 1998, he expressed his willingness to address national issues (Latypov 1995). The language law in Mordovia was adopted in 1998 (Law of the Republic of Mordovia... 24 April 1998). As in the constitution, the law designated Russian and Mordvin (Erzyan and Mokshan) as the state languages. This was the compromise text, which sanctioned the use of the titular language in many domains of the public sphere only by necessity (Mosin 2001). Optional study of the state languages was introduced (article 10). Parents now had the right to choose the language of instruction according to federal legislation, which in practice meant that students continued to study in native languages in rural schools. In addition, the right for those who received education in native language to enter exams of high professional and higher education institutions in Mordvin (Moksha or Erzya) was mentioned. In the same year the education law was adopted (Law of the Republic of Mordovia... 30 November 1998). Unlike all other Finno-Ugric republics, Erzya and Moksha are still used as the languages of instruction in rural schools. There was an attempt to introduce their compulsory teaching to all students in 2004 but it largely failed because support for such measures is very low both among the majority and minority populations, although typically for Mordovia no data are available. Due to the late adoption of the laws, as in the case with the Constitution, there was no need for major amendments either in 2000–2001 or in the late 2010s (Law of the Republic of Mordovia... 12 March 2010).

Udmurtia

In comparison to other republics, the national movement in Udmurtia has had little success in creating a legal framework for language revival at the legislative level. The first draft law on the state languages, elaborated by the Society of Udmurt Culture, was presented in 1991 (Draft Language Law... 1991). Its successor, the national organisation Udmurt Kenesh (the Udmurt Council) appealed to the Supreme Council to adopt the new version of the draft language law (Decision... 11 November 1992; Draft Language Law... 1992). However, the Supreme Council rejected the draft. The drafts of 1991 and 1992 contained among other provisions clauses on native language of instruction, on compulsory study of the state languages by all students, and on bonuses for officials for languages knowledge.

Even if in the Soviet period the Soviets were only decorative bodies, the endeavour to ensure a balance between industrial workers and peasants sometimes led to over-representation of minorities. For example, in Udmurtia, while the ethnic Udmurts counted only for about one third of the ASSR population, they were in the majority in rural areas. Consequently, in the Supreme Council of 1986 they constituted 42 per

cent of the deputies. However, when the Soviet system was abolished, the minority political representation in parliament proved to be an insurmountable obstacle, which largely defined the fate of a language law in the case of Udmurtia. The ethnic elite was relatively well ethnically mobilised and had a sizeable representation. For example, all 52 ethnic Udmurts out of 200 deputies of the Supreme Council in 1991 composed a deputy group backing ethnicity and language demands. However, in Udmurtia there was never a moment when ethnic representation would reach half, as required for the adoption of laws in the legislative procedure, as it was the case in Mari El at one point.

As in other republics, ethnic representation decreased rapidly with the abolition of Soviet practices of ethnicity preferences and quotas. In some years political representation was low and did not even reflect the actual proportion of Udmurtia's minority population. In elections to the State Council in 1995 Udmurt Kenesh did not win a single set. Only 16 of 100 deputies of the State Council 1995–2000 were ethnic Udmurts and they did not create a separate faction (Yegorov, Matsuzato 2000: 318). The adoption of a language law was hardly possible at all after 1995 and the period of decline of national movement activism in the conditions of majority rule.

Moreover, even in 1990, when the majority was not strongly against the adoption of a language law, it proved impossible to draft a law for a rather technical reason: there was no authoritative centre that could produce a draft language law. Only in 1996 was a draft law on state languages prepared in the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the State Council on Science, Public Education, Culture and Nationalities Affairs. Among the elements of compulsory language use, only the clause on compulsory study of state languages by all students was left (Draft Language Law... 1996). However, this draft did not pass. The absence of a language law delayed and complicated the start of the language revival project. This was partly compensated by the adoption of the laws on education (Law of the Udmurt Republic... 31 January 1996) and on culture (Law of the Udmurt Republic... 18 December 1996). The education law was particularly important for the initiation of language reform because it guaranteed the right to learn the native language and obliged the republican authorities to create facilities for the study of the state languages for those citizens who wish to do so. In practice, Udmurt was taught as a subject only, in the main, for ethnic Udmurt children. Russian remained the language of instruction in all schools.

The case of Udmurtia demonstrated the importance of institutional support for linguistic demands in the executive branch of power. Unlike in Komi, in Udmurtia the Udmurt Congress had no right of legal initiative and could not present its demands directly to parliament. As the legislature remained inactive, the executive authority had to produce the law. Again, unlike in Komi, the relevant authority, titled the Committee for Nationalities Affairs of the Republic's Government (since 1999 the Ministry of Nationalities Policy), was nominally created only in 1994. The author of this article worked as a lawyer in this Committee and prepared one of the drafts of the language law, being a graduate student at the law faculty. Because of the failure of the previous drafts, the procedure was chosen to receive approval at the government level and to present the draft law as a government initiative. The process of elaboration of the new draft was more sophisticated than with previous drafts. Several existing language laws of other republics, notably Komi, Mari El, but also Tatarstan, were taken as the pattern. In order to be presented to parliament in the name of the government, the draft had to be supported by other ministries and

government agencies of the Republic. Many executive authorities were against the draft, which was not needed in their opinion, or were reluctant to support it. The procedure also included an expertise by the specialised federal authorities of both legislative and executive branches and consultations with national organisations of all ethnic groups – ‘the peoples of Udmurtia’. While the Russian Ministry of Nationalities Affairs and the Committee of Nationalities Affairs of the State Duma were supportive, among other organisations the republican Society of Russian Culture was against many of the draft provisions that favoured the Udmurt language.

Only 11 of 100 deputies of the State Council of 2000–2005 and 17 deputies of the State Council of 2005–2010 were ethnic Udmurts. After a decade that included eleven considerations at the level of commission of the Supreme Council and later State Council, the language law in Udmurtia was passed only in 2001 and unsurprisingly was quite weak. The law recognised the right of citizens to choose freely the language of upbringing and instruction, which, however, remained on paper. This right and the right to receive pre-school, primary and secondary school education in one’s native language are restricted to the potentialities provided by the education system. These rights had to be ensured by creation and support of “national schools, classes and groups”. The law proclaimed that Russian and Udmurt as the state languages are studied as subjects “according to the legislation”. In effect, there was neither compulsory study of Udmurt nor language preferences for public servants (Law of the Udmurt Republic... 27 November 2001; Bannikova 2002: 22–24). Timing is one of the reasons for the weakness of the provisions of the language law in Udmurtia, even in comparison to Mordovia, because by the year 2000 an overall shift in the policy had already started.

Nevertheless, the law had its impact. Right after its adoption the support for compulsory study of Udmurt in all schools among ethnic Udmurts was 31 per cent and ethnic Russians 3.4 per cent (Smirnova 2002: 505). Notwithstanding this, the sociological research titled National Relations in Udmurtia ordered by the Ministry of Nationalities Policy in 2003 has shown that only one quarter of respondents of both majority and minority background was in favour of such measures. An amendment to the language law added the clause that the Republic creates conditions for citizens to learn the state languages and other languages of the population in the areas of compact residence within potentialities provided by the education system (amendment to the Law of the Udmurt Republic... 21 June 2010). A new education law did not contain the obligation to facilitate the study of the state languages by those citizens who wish to do so (Law of the Udmurt Republic... 15 December 2009).

Karelia

An anomaly of language policy in Karelia is that it has not designated the titular language as its state language. Among the reasons for this should be listed the use of Finnish as the *de facto* second official language in the Soviet period, the absence of a written form of Karelian until 1989, prohibition by the amendment to Russia’s language law (Law of the RSFSR... 25 October 1991 amended by the Federal Law... 11 December 2002) of the state language of a republic to be based on the Latin script as well as a low share of the titular group and low political representation, etc. (see Zamyatin 2013a:

139–141). Among the republics of Russia, Karelia is the republic with the lowest share of the titular group. Whereas up to 1985 the share of ethnic Karelians in the Supreme Council was 30–40 per cent, in 1990 it was 13 per cent; in the Legislative Assembly in 1994 it was 13 per cent and in 1998 it was 6 per cent (Hämäläinen, Kozhanov 1992; Strogalschikova 2000: 165).

Karelia is one of two republics (the second is Dagestan) where a language law was not adopted in the form that it was in other republics. Despite the numerous draft language laws and motions to pass language legislation, in Karelia for a long time language issues remained unregulated. As a result, the creation of a legislative framework for language revival in Karelia was significantly postponed. A lack of language law was somewhat compensated for by the adoption of laws on education (Law of the Republic of Karelia... 18 January 1994) and on culture (Law of the Republic of Karelia... 24 January 1995). Karelia's education law contained similar language provisions to the education laws of the other republics and stated that the republic creates the conditions for Karelians, Veps and other nationalities to ensure their right to receive general education in the native languages and to choose the language of education within the potentialities provided by the education system (article 6).

The first two draft laws were elaborated in 1994 by the Republican Ministry of Justice and proposed Russian as the sole state language (Draft Language Law I and II... 23 March 1994). There was no intention among the drafters to give the Karelian language the possibility to have any elements of official status and to be officially used in the territories where concentrations of Karelians live. One of the drafts proposed the use of Russian and Finnish by publication of laws, and in the texts of forms, seals, stamps and signboards. Another draft law would establish the possibility to use Finnish along with Russian, but not Karelian, in the territories of historical settlement of the indigenous populations in management of public affairs.

The national organisation *Karjalan Rahvahan Liitto* (The Union of the Karelian People) advocated the officialisation of Karelian. With the participation of the Union, the State Committee on Nationalities Affairs drafted a law that, for the first time, proposed the establishment of two varieties of Karelian (Olonets Karelian and Karelian Proper) on a par with Russian as the state languages (Klementyev, Kozhanov 2012: 178). After further elaboration and exclusion of the distinction of varieties, the draft law was published in the mass media for public discussion (Draft Language Law III and IV... 20 March 1996, 3 September 1996). The need for the status of state language for Karelian was justified by the facts that Karelians are the titular nationality of the republic, it is their native language and that Karelians themselves demanded this at the first Congress of the Representatives of Karelians. As a justification for arguments against the designation of Finnish as a state language the data of the sociological research was given, specifically that only 2 per cent of Karelians spoke Finnish and wanted it as the state language (Birin et al. 2005: 112–114).

There were many publications speaking against the draft, including the multiple opinions of ethnic Russians against the official status of Karelian. One of the most important among their arguments was the issue of cost. Moreover, counter-activities were arranged: the republican department of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, known for its use of Russian nationalist rhetoric, even initiated the collection of signatures against the official status of Karelian because it has no unified written form, and

against Finnish because it is a foreign language. The Russian nationalist organisation *Russkoye soglasiye* (Russian Consent) expressed the idea to designate only Russian as the state language of the Republic. An alternative draft law, which proposed Russian as the sole state language, was supported by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the Union of Communists of Karelia, *Russkoye soglasiye* and other Russian nationalist organisations. An idea was expressed regarding the procedural issue that state languages could be designated only by referendum (Birin et al. 2005: 147, 154–156, 158–159, 165, 171–172, 182–183, 192–194). Several more drafts were elaborated in 1997–1998 (Draft Language Law V–VIII). In 1998, a draft law was presented to the parliament but did not pass (Öispuu 2000; Khairov 2002). The proponents of the draft law hoped that after the 1998 election the new parliament would pass the law. Yet, the new Constitution of the Republic of Karelia (21 February 2001) designated only Russian as the state language of the republic.

Attempts to designate Karelian as the state language were continued, but without any success. One interesting novelty was the idea to designate Karelian as a regional language in the context of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, just signed by Russia in 2001 but as yet not ratified (Kleyerova 2001). Between 2001 and 2004 the draft laws *On the Languages in the Republic of Karelia*, *On the Languages of the Peoples of the Republic of Karelia*, *On the State Guarantees for the Preservation, Learning and Development of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish Languages in the Republic of Karelia*, *On the Regional Languages in the Republic of Karelia*, *On the State Support of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages in the Republic of Karelia* were discussed (Kleyerova 2000). Only the law *On the State Support of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish Languages in the Republic of Karelia* was passed by the Legislative Assembly, on 19 March 2004.

This 2004 law has a narrower scope of application than the language laws of the other republics, and cannot be called a language law in the proper sense. Nevertheless, the law created possibilities for the use of Karelian in different domains of the public sphere, including education (article 5). According to the law, the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages can be studied as subjects in education institutions in line with federal and republican legislation. Citizens have the right to choose freely the language of education and upbringing, to learn the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages and to receive general education in these languages. The Republic ensures these rights by creation of the required number of classes or groups. However, there are no language preferences and no compulsory study of Karelian for all students in the Republic. Yet, in the early 1990s there was a practice of adding a bonus to wages for knowledge of the titular language. Karelian is compulsory for study by all students in the areas of dense titular population. The new law on education (*Law of the Republic of Karelia... 29 April 2005*) has not changed the settings of language teaching.

This inability to introduce official status reflects, for example, the language attitudes of the population (see Klementyev et al. 2012). In the research among the non-Karelian population arranged in 2003–2004 the popular preferences of the possible state languages were listed as follows: 1) only Russian; 2) Russian and Finnish; 3) Finnish, Russian and Karelian; 4) Russian and Karelian. According to the research data, about one third of respondents believed that if Karelian becomes a state language, it would be desirable for those without knowledge of the language to learn it (Kovalyova 2006: 12–13).

THE STATUS OF STATE LANGUAGES AS A TOOL OF LANGUAGE
REVIVAL: DISCUSSION

Popular Mobilisation, Political Representation and the Threshold for National Demands

The regional language legislations are often not transparent on the goal(s) of language policies. Unlike some other contexts in different countries, protection of minority languages was not the main official justification for the official status of the languages. Nevertheless, the analysis of the processes around the adoption of the language laws in Finno-Ugric republics showed that at least there language revival was the first among the main reasons for status planning. It has to be specified here that neither most of the documents of national organisations nor the laws contain the term 'language revival', probably because it was associated with the situation of languages on the verge of extinction. The formula used instead in the republics' laws is borrowed from Russia's law and reads as "maintenance and development of languages". While expressing concerns about the language shift, ethnic elites did not dare to make stronger statements and relate the titular languages to the group of endangered languages because they were part of a political culture in which it was usual to hypocritically present things as being better than they actually were. Status planning was there to ensure state support for the titular languages. Yet, the policy of state support was challenged and balanced, on the one hand, by the argument about the equality of languages and non-discrimination, employed by the majority elites and supported by the population, and, on the other hand, by the privileged position of Russian as the state language of the whole country. In these circumstances, the level of institutionalisation of the elements of an official language in education and the work environment depended on a number of variables. First of all, what were the driving forces towards the language revival?

As the languages laws not only prescribe compulsory language use by authorities and their officials, but also influenced language use in communication with citizens and public services, the language attitudes of the population would have been a more important variable in the case of framing the policy by language law than in the case of symbolic and formal recognition by declaration or constitution. Public debate in the mass media was also important to reveal public opinion. Sociological research studies were arranged from time to time in the republics, however, mostly *after* the adoption of the language laws. The studies explored popular opinion on the linguistic issues in the public sphere. For example, Dmitry Gorenburg (2003: 235–240) measured support for cultural nationalism among the titular peoples by examining their language attitudes. Out of all Russia's republics such support appeared to be the lowest among the titular groups of the Finno-Ugric republics. According to his data, support for the single titular state language counted from 13 per cent among Karelians, up to 18 per cent among Udmurts, 23 per cent among Mari, and 26 per cent among both Komi and Mordvins. Gorenburg interprets these results as unwillingness to treat non-titular groups as "second-class citizens" (ibid.: 160, 237). According to his data, obligatory knowledge of the titular languages by all inhabitants was supported by 31 per cent of Mari and Mordvins, 34 per cent of Komi and Karelians, and 36 per cent of Udmurts; support for compulsory study of the titular languages in all schools was expressed by 36 per cent of Udmurts, 37 per cent of Mordvins, 42 per cent of Mari, 43 per cent of Komi and 52 per cent of

Karelians. Somewhat different data was presented by Russian researchers for the first half of 2000: 62.1 per cent of Mari, 31 per cent of Udmurts and 35.8 per cent of Komi are for compulsory teaching of their titular languages to all students, while among local Russians the figures are 19.4 per cent in Mari El, 3.4 per cent in Udmurtia and 13.3 per cent in Komi (Shabayev et al. 2009: 94). The results of such surveys on popular opinion were used both by authorities and interest groups to justify their positions. Nevertheless, even by the conditions of low popular support in Komi, Mari El and Mordovia, compulsory teaching of titular languages was included in the laws.

This is witness to the fact that rather than language attitudes and interests of the public, the elite settlement was reflected in the language laws. Except in the first relatively democratic elections in spring 1990, the popular influence on elites through elections was ever decreasing over the following years. Even in the early 1990s, not so much popular mobilisation but the activities of the elites and their consolidation mattered (Zamyatin 2013b: 363–365). Yet, the ethnic composition of the population was an important variable that influenced the makeup of parliaments. Even if ethnic mobilisation in the Finno-Ugric republics has never reached the stage of mass movement and the electorate never voted exclusively along ethnic lines, some correlation can be found between the ethnicity of elected candidates and the ethnic composition of the population, especially in the early 1990s. In no case is there a universal link between a deputy's ethnicity and his stance on ethnic or linguistic matters (Zamyatin 2013a: 148–151).

Nevertheless, the access of ethnic elites to power and their participation in the political process depended on the share of the titular group in the total population of a republic, which in its turn influenced the level of its representation in a respective legislative body and the ethnicity of top officials. As a part of the solution of nationalities issues the Soviet authorities were careful to reflect the ethnic composition of the republican populations in the Supreme Council, which was often even higher than the share of titular groups in the total population. However, the Supreme Councils were only quasi-representative bodies, while the real power was in the hands of the CPSU. As the data demonstrate, when, with the dissolution of the USSR, the system of national representation was abolished and titular groups began to be underrepresented in parliaments (with some exceptions, as in Mordovia) (see Table 1).

This trend shows that, with the decline of ethnic mobilisation, the populace voted less and less on the principle of ethnicity for the candidate of 'their nationality'. Further, at the beginning of the *perestroika* epoch the first secretaries of the CPSU regional committees at least in some ASSRs were of titular nationality. In the early 1990s the power shifted first to chairmen of the Supreme Councils and then to presidents or heads of the republics. Typically, these were the same people who had simply changed chairs, many of them CPSU functionaries in the past (for the data see Zamyatin 2013a: 141–142; 2013b). All in all, rather than the language attitudes of the population it was the aspirations of the ethnic elites that were behind the demands for state languages. Popular ethnic mobilisation had significance for the strength of the ethnic elites expressed at the level of their political representation. Those ethnic elites that were better represented could insist on the inclusion of stronger national demands.

Table 1. Ethnic representation in parliaments and among top officials.

Year of election...	Share of deputies of titular nationality in the parliament of the Republic (per cent) / Top official of titular nationality (CPSU secretary, Supreme Council Chairman or President) (Yes or No)				
... or census	Share of the titular group in the total population of the republic (per cent)				
Republic	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia	Karelia
1985 elected and appointed	37 per cent Yes	42 per cent Yes	>30 per cent No	42 per cent No	>30 per cent Yes
Population census 1989	23.3 per cent	43.3 per cent	32.5 per cent	30.9 per cent	10 per cent
1990 elections	31.6 per cent (1990)	30 per cent (1990)	34.9 per cent (1990)	26 per cent (1991)	13 per cent (1990)
	No (1989/90)	Yes (1991)	No (1991)	Yes (1990)	Yes (1989/90)
1993 elections	–	46.2% (1993)	–	–	–
	–	–	Yes (1993)	–	–
1995 elections	n/a	25.4 per cent (1996)	33 per cent (1995)	16 per cent (1995)	13 per cent (1994)
	No (1994)	Yes (1996)	Yes (1995)	No (1995)	Yes (1994)
2000 elections	n/a	37.3 per cent (2000)	38.6 per cent (2000)	11 per cent (2000)	6 per cent (1998)
	Yes (2000)	No (2000)	Yes (1998)	No (2000)	No (1998/02)
Population census 2002	25.2 per cent	42.9 per cent	31.9 per cent	29.3 per cent	9.2 per cent

The Timing and the Balance between Language Revival and Other Policy Goals

Ethnic elites had to advocate the adoption of language laws and negotiate with majority political elites. Language revival of titular languages could not be the sole or even the main issue of such negotiations because it was not in the interest of majority elites. So, the ethnic elites were forced to be flexible in advancing some demands and refusing others. As a result, language laws did not concentrate exclusively on language revival as their main goal and contained only some elements that enhanced revival, including language preferences and compulsory use, while other elements of official status, notably the parallel status of Russian, were built in to pursue other and often opposite goals. Many obstacles to the revival of titular languages emerged at the level of implementation. The configuration of the elements is unique for every republic and depends on the time at which the law was adopted. As both popular mobilisation and political representation were rapidly decreasing, the elites' ability to balance their demands with the time of adoption became the most important variable for the ensuring the legislative and institutional basis for state languages.

The language laws adopted on the rise of national movements in the period after the adoption of the USSR language law (Law of the USSR... 24 April 1990) and before Russia's language law (Law of the RSFSR... 25 October 1991) in the ASSRs with titular groups in the majority as are Chuvashia (Law of the Chuvash ASSR... 27 October 1990), Tyva (Law of the Tuvan ASSR... 14 December 1990), Kalmykia (Law of the Kalmyk ASSR... 30 January 1991) and Tatarstan (Law of the Republic of Tatarstan... 8 July 1992, adopted after Russia's language law) have quite strong norms. These laws typically include, among others, provisions on compulsory study of the titular languages by all

students in the republic, the functioning of the titular languages as the means of instruction, language preferences for some professions, and more. The later the language law was adopted, the more difficult it became for ethnic elites to bargain for stronger language demands, because the short period when Russian and ethnic elites had mutual interest to act jointly in the face of central authorities was over (see Zamyatin 2013a: 151–153; 2013b).

The language laws in the republics adopted after 1991 follow the pattern of Russia's language law in that they contain many declaratory statements but few prescriptive norms. In effect, they are reminiscent more of policy documents than legal acts. The language laws usually formulate the principles of language use of both state languages and other languages of the peoples of the republics but do not provide a list of domains for compulsory language use, in the same vague manner of Russia's language law. The wide scope of application is partly the reason why the structure of the laws only vaguely reflects the domains of languages use. The structure typically consists of chapters on general provisions, citizens' rights for language use, language use by authorities, language use by public and other institutions, languages of geographical objects, languages in international contacts, and responsibility for breaches of the language legislation. The scope of application of the laws of Komi and Mordovia are restricted only to the official status and official use of the state languages, but this does not make them more operational. Karelia is an interesting case where despite the efforts of quite mobilised national movement the titular language was not designated as a state language and adoption of the language law took a long time.

The regional political landscapes of the late Soviet period largely pre-determined the status of languages in the post-Soviet period. One of the arguments of the ethnic elites for official status for languages and the need of regulation was that there should be a language law, for example in Karelia, because there are language laws in other republics. At the same time, while the autonomous districts could not designate their state languages, some of them had language laws, albeit their languages could have only some official functions (see, for example, Charter of the Komi-Permiak Autonomous District, 19 December 1994; Zamyatin 2013a: 132–133). Among those regions titled after the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples, language laws were adopted in the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District (Law of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District... 4 December 2001) and in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (Law of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District... 5 April 2010). In the Nenets Autonomous District, the equivalent draft was presented to a session of the District Administration only in August 2012 (Draft Law of the Nenets Autonomous District... August 2012). Both in Karelia and autonomous districts the lack of status of a state language did not prevent the adoption of a language law and implementation of language revival. In these regions lawmakers could not boost the revival of titular languages through the mechanisms that imposed compulsory use of the state languages. Yet, Karelia's law contains some elements of official status and the compulsory teaching of Karelian was introduced at the municipal level. The absence of state language status was an obstacle but did not exclude language revival in this Republic.

Despite the difference in the status of titular languages between the republics and autonomous districts, as was pointed out above, a common Soviet inheritance was that the policy-based approach, and not the rights-based approach, was chosen by lawmak-

ers as a strategy to address language issues. Within the policy-based approach certain measures were planned in law as future activities. The analysis demonstrated that, formulating norms, lawmakers used the language of the third person plural, or the passive tense: something “is being done”, which should mean an obligatory rule. However, the implementer interpreted this in a different manner. This ambiguity gives rise to problems in enforcement and implementation. In fact, those implementing the law take these not as obligations, but almost as recommendations. In addition to which there are many norms with references redirecting the reader to legislation that does not exist.

The Raise and Demise of Language Revival: the Corridor of Opportunities in Establishing Institutions

In a situation in which delivery of revival projects and their necessary support depended on government officials, an important variable became the (in)ability of the leadership of national movements to cooperate with republican authorities. In Komi and Mari El, as in some other republics, national movements became strong enough, quickly enough, to lobby for the support of the regional governments for state languages, that is, foremost, for the titular languages. Despite the low proportion of ethnic Komi in the population, the strategy of the national movement’s leadership was directed at cooperation with the regional authorities and resulted in the early adoption of a quite strong language law. In Mari El a comparable share of ethnic Maris and Russians and, consequently, adequate proportional political representation enabled the leadership of the national movement to lobby for the adoption of a language law (Law of the Republic of Mari El... 26 October 1995; revised 19 September 2001), although adoption was slowed down due to disagreement about whether one or two Mari languages should be the state languages. The difference between the strategies of cooperation and confrontation in the long run was that in Komi many language provisions are still in force while in Mari El they have been to a great extent abolished. Nevertheless, in Komi and Mari El, as in Tatarstan and Chuvashia, the legislative basis for the functioning of the state languages was mainly created, whereas in Udmurtia, Mordovia and Karelia these processes were protracted.

In Mordovia and Udmurtia ethnic elites appeared to be relatively weak, which led to the late adoption of language laws (Law of the Republic of Mordovia... 24 April 1998; Law of the Udmurt Republic... 27 November 2001). The cases of Mordovia and Udmurtia show that in the republics where existing ethnic elites hoped for Soviet national quota systems, national movements largely failed during the period of rapid social transformation. In both republics the authorities managed to co-optate the collaborationist leaders and to mobilise them against the more radical segments of the movements. In Mordovia there was an early split in the leadership of the national movement. Yet, the regime consolidation from the mid-1990s was marked by the change in republican leadership in 1998 and included a language law in the elite pact. In Udmurtia regime consolidation took place in the conditions of the overall shift in Russia’s political regime in 2000–2001. The language law was adjusted to a changed political situation and did not prioritise support for the Udmurt language. As a consequence of the late adoption, the doctrine of the language laws in Udmurtia and Mordovia is a mixture of language

revivalist, and symbolist, ideas with prevalence of the latter. In order to reach a compromise, the ethnic elites were forced to refuse many initial demands, such as language preferences and compulsory language teaching. The study of draft laws in Udmurtia is a shining example of how the provisions became softer and softer in the later drafts, and later in time, and how the final texts of language laws contained more qualifications such as “if possible” or “if necessary”.

On the whole, the data reinforce the argument about the central role of ethnic elites as the driving force of status planning and establishes a direct link between ethnic representativeness and the adoption of language laws. Moreover, the data on ethnic representation (Table 1) correlate with the data on the establishment of institutions across the republics (see Table 2).

Table 2. Language requirements and language teaching according to language laws.

	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia	Karelia
Language law I	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004
Language preferences	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Language law II amended	2002, 2009	2001, 2008–2011	2010	2010	–
Language preferences	No	No	No	No	No
Language law I	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004
Native language instruction	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Compulsory state language	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Entering exams	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Language law II amended	2002, 2009	2001, 2008–2011	2010	2010	–
Native language instruction	No	No	Yes	No	No
Compulsory state language	Yes/No	No	Yes/No	No	No
Entering exams	No	No	No	No	No

Being in the minority, the ethnic elites had to involve other, both sociolinguistic and instrumental, ideas to support their claims. One complication that caused delays in advancing the legislative basis was the existence of more than one form of titular language, as in Mordovia, Mari El and Karelia. Otherwise, extra-linguistic variables played the central role in language planning. At the time of the adoption of the constitutions the matter of cost was not on the agenda because constitutional language provisions did not imply direct expenditures. At the time of adoption of language laws the issue

of costs came to the forefront. Michael Kirkwood (1989: 1) distinguishes between sociolinguistic and instrumental types of language planning, in which for the first diversity maintenance is important, while the second asks about price. The present analysis demonstrates that around the year 2000 language planning in the republics moved from a sociolinguistic to an instrumental model. In the 1990s regional authorities brought forward economic difficulties as an excuse for non-implementation of language provisions. Since the year 2000, the language revival itself has been questioned from the position of language rationalisation. This became possible because the representation of the ethnic elites among the regional ruling elites decreased dramatically even in those where they used to be in power (Mari El, Komi; see Zamyatin 2013b: 363–365). What makes the principal difference between the 1990s and the 2000s is the overall turn in Russia's nationalities policy and language policy. As a result, even previously strong provisions were removed and the language revival curtailed by amendments to the law in Mari El in 2001 and in Komi in 2002. Those few demands that still retained obligatoriness, such as compulsory teaching of titular state languages to all students, were actually aimed not so much at the expansion of language use but rather at raising language prestige and reinforcing identity. However, whether such measures can unequivocally raise prestige is problematic, especially in view of the given language attitudes of the majority population. The further problem is that prestige planning was not identified as a separate direction of language planning.

The next wave of amendments to the Finno-Ugric republics' education laws took place between 2004 and 2006, and the next wave of amendments to the language laws between 2008 and 2010. The latter amendments were caused by Russia's education reform that enforced the demand of the languages of upbringing and instruction to be defined by founder of the educational institution and not by regional education agencies (Zamyatin 2012b). In Komi the amendment to the language law was adopted in 2009, in Mari El in 2008, 2009 and 2011, and in Udmurtia and Mordovia in 2010. Apart from accommodating reform at the regional level, these were mainly minor changes. There are still no laws in the republics that list the domains of compulsory language use of the state languages in the manner of the Federal Law On the State Language of the Russian Federation (1 June 2005), which prescribes concrete domains for the compulsory functioning of Russian as the state language. Moreover, although the compulsory teaching of the republics' state languages has not been formally removed from the reformed legislation, this teaching is being *de facto* removed with gradual enforcement of new united federal state education standards. Another tendency is that teaching of state languages is a poor substitute for better-quality teaching of native languages (see Zamyatin 2012c: 95–97). The situation has improved in one respect: the new Federal Law On Education in the Russian Federation (29 December 2012) included the practice that those students who learned their native language and literature in school, can also take final exams in these subjects.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1990s the titular national organisations in Russia's republics demanded the institutionalisation of official status for titular languages in language laws and declared

that this action should have language revival as its main goal. These were ethnic elites who saw status planning as the way both to ensure their own interest in the instrumental use of languages and also to promote the titular languages among the population through their expansion in the public sphere. The regional authorities of Finno-Ugric republics have taken this demand into account in drafting language laws and identified language revival as one of the goals of their language policies. In the conditions of the virtual non-functionality of the mechanism for the protection of individual language rights, official status was probably central to what could have been done for the promotion of the *de facto* minority language in the long term, if it was possible to do anything at all in the minority situation.

While during the 1990s there was relative success in the gradual formation of the conditions in which the titular languages could function in the public sphere in the Finno-Ugric republics, from 2000 their expansion started to face obstacles, and soon most of the elements of compulsory use were removed. Today the dynamics in contemporary Russia's politics is defined by Russian national mobilisation. The *de jure* and *de facto* dominant position of Russian and the policy of its promotion presents a challenge to the state languages of the republics. In this context, language revival rhetoric is still used as a substitute for national rhetoric, although in practice the revival is largely curtailed. Nevertheless, the previous efforts to forward the demands in the area of language policy had already been embodied in the form of legally binding documents. Laws are still being implemented and the status of the state languages itself works as a social institution and a composition of rules to form a social reality, and the situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

The current analysis demonstrated that the authorities have spent some efforts in order to employ the mechanism of compulsory use for the expansion of titular languages. However, only a certain configuration of official status makes this mechanism effective and, perhaps, the most effective it could be when the *de facto* minority language is used as the sole official language. Yet, the co-official titular and Russian languages were established in all republics as a compromise among the regional elites. Official bilingualism has become an obstacle for the expansion of titular languages, because in practice it annulled the obligation to the use of titular languages alongside Russian. Language revival, and change in language practices in general, are not a matter of reaching a threshold with a critical mass of actions but are rather an extended process with its own direction and speed. The comparative study of the adoption of the language laws in the Finno-Ugric republics revealed that different configurations of the official status of the titular languages were achieved even among the same category of the republics' state languages due to a varying level of political representation of ethnic elites and their ability to bargain for better conditions in the elite pact. These configurations had evidently diverging impact on language practices. Making a catalogue of the various domains and institutions of official status according to the republics' language laws remains the subject of a separate study, one that would show the differences in the institutionalisation of the republics' titular languages. The language laws should be assessed closely to ascertain how they are actually being implemented against their own objectives and, further, implemented against measures prescribed through the targeted programs. Such a survey would provide further data on what impact the designation of official status has on minority language practices.

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NOTES AND REVIEWS

Gendered Rural Spaces. Studia Fennica. Ethnologica 12. Edited by Pia Olsson and Helena Ruotsala. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 2009, 158 pages.

This book consists of an introductory chapter and eight articles, which the authors have conducted within a common research network. While the authors acknowledge the countryside as space full of different meanings, their specific aim is to analyse the rural spaces as gendered. The introduction, by Pia Olsson and Helena Ruotsala, gives a brief reflective overview of the concepts 'rural' and 'countryside' and their positions in Finnish research history, and of the approaches to 'space' and 'place'. Olsson and Ruotsala also discuss contemporary processes changing the rural landscape as it is in some way integrated into the urban milieu, and point out that rural and urban spaces are not opposites but have rather been complementary in terms of 'feeding' each other.

While the countryside and peasant culture have indeed been traditional subjects of attention in ethnology, this new interest in rural spaces and residents approaches these subject matters significantly differently. Olsson and Ruotsala find that earlier research dealing with rural questions was simultaneously based on, and formulated by, gender ideals. Both the male and the female have been the subject in traditional research on peasant culture but the emphasis has been on the external consequences of gender (such as gendered division of work) and its more experiential consequences; symbolic meanings were not included in these discussions (p. 7). While the traditional viewpoint has been gender neutral, promoting the idea of

rural homogeneity, the intention of this volume's authors is to bringing the heterogeneous reality to the fore.

The first two articles provide the reader a historical perspective on the issues of gendered spaces. Ann-Catrin Östman analyses how peasantry was represented in the interdisciplinary series *Suomen kulttuurihistoria* (Finnish Cultural History) published in the 1930s. By exploring the aspects through which the peasants were presented in the series, Östman finds that in contrast to earlier accounts, a gender differentiated rural society was depicted. However, only the peasant men were empowered and ascribed with agency. Understandings of masculinity and individuality as a sign of manhood were invoked and employed in order to place the peasantry and peasant society in the realms of history. Peasant women were not seen as actors in local communities and public spaces, they were not related to working for the common good, but confined to domestic places and household and thus rendered invisible.

In 1985 a questionnaire, *The Status of a Woman*, was circulated in Finland. Pia Olsson analyses the written answers to this questionnaire with the aim of studying how the Second World War changed individual women's lives. In her focus are the differences women have experienced in mobility and use of space in relation to men in rural areas. Olsson is critical of the feminist research that has seen the connection between home, gender and sexuality mainly in positive terms and finds that in the responses women rarely describe home in an overtly positive light – in the reminiscences the home rather appears as an obstacle, as expressed through tightly scheduled work and hierarchical family rela-

tionships. Olsson finds that women's mobility in the Finnish rural context after the war followed the same patriarchal customs women had become accustomed to before the war. She detects no open criticism of the gender system in the analysed life histories but finds that they do carry a feminist meaning by making the inequality between men and women visible, even though they do not demand change.

In her paper Katariina Heikkilä considers how contemporary female entrepreneurs on farms re-interpret and reshape the rural space around them in order to live in the countryside. She shows how the traditional gender-related distribution of work is re-examined through female entrepreneurship by challenging other family members' customary habits and working roles. Even though the long distances and poor public transport that restricted women's mobility in the post-war period examined by Olsson can still be present today, the farming women have acquired many new resources with which to overcome these obstacles.

Understanding space as both physical and social, Helena Ruotsala examines the reindeer forest as a gendered space and enquires if there is space for women in it. Although traditionally the reindeer owners were usually male, the herding activities affected the whole family. However, Ruotsala points out that this additional work carried out by other family members has received little attention in earlier studies. Based on her insider's knowledge and experiences Ruotsala assures us that in practice the gendered division of work is often hard to spot. Nevertheless, the contribution of women has been statistically and publicly invisible. Reindeer herding is still regarded as a masculine occupation and the reindeer forest as a masculine space even though about a quarter of owners are women and women perform many tasks necessary in reindeer herding. Intriguingly, today women occupy a decisive position because for many families the employment of woman outside

the traditional herding family space is essential if the family is to continue herding.

Nancy Anne Konvalinka's and Mari Immonen's studies add an international dimension to the predominantly Finnish material analysed in the book. Konvalinka provides enlightening insight into gender-linked uses of land throughout the 20th century in a Spanish village and the effects of these uses on men's and women's positioning in the village's social space today. Gendered division of work lead to gendered uses of land – while the men had a direct relationship with the land, the women's relationship was necessarily through men. As a result, women were prevented from making direct use of their property. Young men face another problem resulting from this gendered use of land as it keeps them in the village and encourages women to continue studying and to seek work outside of the village. In her article Immonen considers interconnecting social issues related to the space and place of youth in a village in Mari El (Russia), and has a special interest in young women in this respect. The indigenous Mari identity is strongest in the countryside, although today the younger generation tends to see their future in the city. The young tend to equate life in the village with never ending chores quite similarly to the women in Olsson's material. Life in cities on the other hand offers clear separation between work and leisure time and amenities such as running water. This is why after completing their studies the young, and especially women tend to stay in the city.

The last two articles of the volume study spaces as perceived by forestry professionals. Tiina Suopajarvi is interested in how forestry workers who were children in the 1970s and 1980s depict the forest as experienced in childhood in their biographical narratives. She finds that when remembering early childhood, actions in the forest are described similarly regardless of the gender of the narrator. Gender became relevant dur-

ing working hours, when the forest was a gender-specific space. During the childhood of the studied professionals the prevailing norm was that boys went to the woods with fathers, while girls stayed at home with their mothers. As forestry work is still very male dominated, Suopajarvi concludes that women who have chosen to work in forestry have crossed not only the prevailing gender roles, but also a very thick line of the gendered agricultural model of labour.

Katri Kaunisto's article is the only one in this book specifically concentrated on the viewpoint of men. Considering the forestry workers' experiences of changes in forestry after the 1960s, she is interested in how the occupational changes such as mechanisation and vocational education have changed the values and image of the ideal forestry worker. Traditionally, practical skills have been more respected than theoretical knowledge. Kaunisto finds that transformations in work practice have made it possible to emphasise different masculinities, where different types of knowledge are respected. Although there has been no strict line between traditional and modern masculinity, the educated modern worker is a growing challenge to workers who represent traditional masculinity.

The authors of this volume use various sources to understand how both society and individual lives are structured by gender. Focusing on the level of individual and multi-vocal experiences, changing rural processes are analysed by looking at spaces and places as gendered. My minor criticism has to do with the fact that the focus of most articles is on women's points of view, I would have been curious to learn more on men's perspectives on changing rural spaces. In general, this book is a welcomed addition in the context of continuing interest in space and place and also for scholars interested in the processes of producing gender.

Piret Koosa

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics (JEF), the journal of the University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literary Museum, welcomes articles in the research areas of ethnology, folkloristics, museology, cultural and social anthropology. *JEF* is a peer-reviewed journal, issued two times per year.

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Bynum, Caroline Walker 1987. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1989. Authoring Lives. – *Journal of Folklore Research*. Vol. 26, No. 2: 123–149.

Radley, Alan 1990. Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past. – David Middleton, Derek Edwards (eds.). *Collective Remembering*. London: Sage Publications, 46–59.

The Royal Anthropological Institute. Report of the Strategic Review Working Group. – <http://www.therai.org.uk/rainews/StrategicReviewReport2003.html> (accessed August 20, 2008).

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Volume 7 | Number 1 | 2013

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ISSN 1736-6518 (print)
ISSN 2228-0987 (online)