# Folklore

*Electronic Journal of Folklore 51*

**Folklore**
Electronic Journal of Folklore
http://www.folklore.ee/folklore
Printed version
Vol. 51
2012

Folk Belief and Media Group
of the Estonian Literary Museum

Estonian Institute of Folklore

# Folklore

Electronic Journal of Folklore
Vol. 51

Edited by
Mare Kõiva & Andres Kuperjanov
Guest editor: Art Leete

Tartu 2012

Electronic version is supported by Estonian Science Foundation (grant no. 8137).
Printed version is supported by state programme projects EKKM09-168 and EKKM09-170.
This special issue was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT).

Indexed in EBSCO Publishing Humanities International Complete, Thomson Reuters Arts & Humanities Citation Index, MLA International Bibliography, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, Internationale Volkskundliche Bibliographie / International Folklore Bibliography / Bibliographie Internationale d'Ethnologie), DOAJ, C.E.E.O.L., ERIH (B)



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ISSN 1406-0957

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.Leete

# INTRODUCTION: DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES OF IDENTITY POLITICS

***Art Leete***

Identity is a concept that concentrates cultural researchers' thinking and discussions around a search for an explanation to human behaviour and ideas behind it. Identity appears to us as a contradictory idea that can be perceived in diachronic and synchronic perspectives simultaneously as fixed and vague, a core of one's self-understanding and an endless play of meanings, existential and stereotypical. Identity is related to a certain substantial sense of constancy but is seen in the course of an analytical effort as a fluid complex of discourses.

In a general methodological perspective, approaches to identity have changed considerably. Over a long period of time, different peoples' identity was seen as simple and collective. *The Other* appeared to European intellectuals as transparent (savages were treated as incapable of concealing their personality from observers) and unified (without differences between people – observing one individual was enough to enable conclusions concerning a whole group).

In general, earlier studies have concentrated on describing and interpreting determinants, some core values or key symbols of different groups' culture and identity (see, for example, Kroeber 1963 [1923]; Benedict 1947 [1934]; Mauss 2000 [1938]; Mead 1963). These early, essentially over-theorised efforts were the first steps in discussing the cultural individuality of *the Other*. Initial theoretical discussions about identity were made through strong statements, elaborating the topic by using clear and wide-ranging models. As an example of this methodological style, we can take a passage from A. Irving Hallowell:

> Personality is never completely reducible to individuality. A common culture implies, therefore, a common psychological reality, a common way of perceiving and understanding the world, and being motivated to act in it with relation to commonly sensed goals, values, and satisfactions. It is in this sense that culture is intrinsic to the human personality as well as a variable but ubiquitous feature of all the societies of mankind. (Hallowell 1971 [1955]: 36)

These strong and little-nuanced studies established the field where the identity of *the Other* was presented very broadly. The importance of these efforts was to introduce a question about a certain role of individual personality traits in identity, thus starting an inquiry into the hegemony of the collective understanding of *the Other* that previously prevailed.

Contemporary approaches to identity treat the concept as flexible and continually changing due to unstable political, social and ideological environments and the inner development of local communities (Turner 2006; Bazin & Selim 2006; Bennett 2007). Recent theories interpret identity as discourse (Bhabha 2000; Chun 2005; Doja 2006; Gannon 2006), plastic, variable, complex, reflexive (Cohen 1995; Ortner 2005; Luhrmann 2006), multi-local, contemporary (Marcus 1998; Portis-Winner 2002), close to the native point of view (Geertz 2001 [1973]; Marcus & Fischer 1999) and subjective (Derrida 2000).

In many cases people may choose the group to which they belong. Simultaneously, however, the political leadership of a state directs the shaping of particular conceptions of the self-image. Developing an alternative identity to such state-provided unanimity by smaller ethnic communities is considered to be a general process by Arjun Appadurai:

> Throughout the world, faced with the activities of states that are concerned with encompassing their ethnic diversities into fixed and closed sets of cultural categories to which individuals are often assigned forcibly, many groups are consciously mobilizing themselves according to identitarian criteria. (Appadurai 1997: 15)

Appadurai also points out that there is a lack of clarity on how the descriptions of the identities created for local ethnic communities in the official ideological discourse are supposed to be connected to specific people or groups (Appadurai 1997: 14). Contemporary research emphasises the need to consider the multiplicity of nationality and regionality, and to intertwine its approaches to culture with political, economic and social problems (Balzer & Petro & Robertson 2001: 219).

In the contemporary world, a number of new political, social and cultural developments have appeared that concern nearly all peoples. As Clifford Geertz puts it, it is still hard to determine these changes:

> A much more pluralistic pattern of relationships among the world's peoples seems to be emerging, but its form remains vague and irregular, scrappy, ominously indeterminate. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the fumblings of the Russia which has succeeded it [---] have brought in their wake a stream of obscure divisions and strange instabilities. (Geertz 2001: 219)

Multicultural developments in the conditions of increasing globalisation processes result, in some cases, not in the intensification of cultural homogeneity of the population, but in the actualisation or even rebirth of local identities, in a longing to be culturally distanced from the dominant population. The processes of ethnic differentiation exist both in Russia and in a number of other countries in Europe. The developments of linguistic separatism and multiculturalisation "have produced a sense of dispersion, of particularity, of complexity, and of uncenteredness" (Geertz 2001: 220). We concur with the claim that a comparative study of the processes of ethnic fragmentation and re-identification will allow the revelation of certain general phenomena in the ethno-cultural evolution of local communities, as well as an understanding of the reasons for the actualisation of local identities and revelation of the general mechanisms of ethno-cultural mobilisation at the level of distinct groups. It is also important to compare the re-identification processes that have emerged among the previously or historically defined 'ethnographic groups', which form a part of larger established (national) communities.

Identity is something changing and constructed, even inclining to be fixed (emerging as a result of a process of substantiating reflection), both in collective and individual perspectives. The politics of the identification effort may be collective and institutional but it may also appear on the level of ad-hoc individual self-organisational conceptualisation.

This collection of articles[1] is concentrated around the "Dynamic Perspectives of Identity Politics: Analysis of Dialogue and Conflict" (2008–2013) target-financed project of the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu. The purpose of the project is the research on different ethnic-cultural levels of identity by applying theoretical and methodological approaches drawn predominantly from ethnology and social anthropology. The goal is to study how and through which means an individual or a social group constructs, arguments and defends its own self-conception. In cultural studies, the politics of identity are of considerable importance, i.e., the social determination of their construction, the adjustment or contrast with established norms, accompanied by the possibility for a new construction (cf. Hall 1996; Rosaldo 1997; Rosaldo & Flores 1997).

The project proceeds from the premise that individuals and groups are characterised by a diversity of identities. In the social dimension, the appearance of borderline situations that accompany contemporary socio-political and cultural changes, as well as previous self-conceptions, may recede, or, conversely, strengthen in the fields of influence of both internal and external factors. Thus the wider purpose of this project is to analyse the mechanisms and catalysing factors of persistence or transformation of existing identities in the conditions of pressure from dominating cultural-political forces (e.g. the impact of increas-

ing cultural heritage tourism of both a local and international nature in search of undiscovered "exotic" others – cf. Picard & Robinson 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998).

According to our hypothesis, the current rise of local or ethnic identities, or the strengthening of ethnic ties inside the groups studied is considered to be natural by some of its members. Thus we interpret the concept of ethnicity in the framework of discourse (cf. Brubaker 1997; Calhoun 1997), and therefore we planned to analyse the discursive practices in flux between the markers of 'ethnic' and 'local' identities. In addition, performative aspects of identities and embodied practices in which different groups enact and (re)produce their identities, are taken into consideration. Performances both in traditional and more popular contemporary events continually reconstitute identities by rehearsing and transmitting meanings, by making conflicts or negotiations explicit in encounters between locals and *Others* (Edensor 2002: 69–102).

Considering the explosive changes in the socio-economic systems during the past couple of decades, previous identities have fallen under multi-faceted and contradictory pressures particularly in marginal localities and regions. Therefore it is of significant importance to analyse in greater detail the embodiment and shaping of identities in (both literally and metaphorically) borderline situations.

The scientific objectives of the target-financed project are related to the estimation of the role of ethnic institutions and their activists: an analysis of the programmes and ideologies of ethnic organisations, the efficiency of political representation at local and regional levels. The research team also aimed to study the dynamics of interaction with state and regional administrations, and to analyse the emergent relations inside the group as well as the different ideologies that influence the processes of actualisation or de-actualisation of local ethnic identities. In addition, the group intended to investigate how local communities recognise their potential in the context of dynamic changes, how they further their own interests, and how groups or individuals construct their self-image in changing circumstances. Our general objectives are approached through research that delves deeper into particular problems – e.g. studying the role of religion, ideology, politics, remembering, everyday life, social networks, and commodification in the multicultural context.

The research team of anthropologists and ethnologists that gathered together to carry out the target-financed project is part of the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory (CECT, 2008–2015). The CECT unites scholars from Tallinn University and the University of Tartu, representing various disciplines. The aim of the CECT is to develop a transdisciplinary methodology and theory in studying the concepts of identity and memory. The Centre of Excellence was

created with the purpose of achieving a qualitatively new level in Estonian cultural studies in researching the mechanisms of cultural dynamics operating among the diverse groups of multicultural societies and between different levels of society (CECT: online).

This collection of articles is a result of the attempt to move towards a collaborative interdisciplinary approach. Anthropologists and ethnologists together with colleagues from other CECT teams representing the disciplines of human geography, sociology, and folklore studies explore the challenges by co-authored research and propose interpretation models regarding the cultural development and identification processes of different ethnic groups, national minorities and regional groups, both at collective and individual levels.

Kirsti Jõesalu and Raili Nugin examine different artistic projects that aim to interpret late Soviet experience by Estonian artists and writers who were born during the 1970s. The authors analyse a specific way of understanding the Soviet reality characteristic of the generation of intellectuals who have personal memories of the period of their childhood or youth. As it appears, although this group shares a relatively limited experience of the Soviet period, it plays an important and quite nuanced role in their personal and shared age-group identity.

There is much in common in the ways in which different groups position themselves, and in the contemporary processes of their ethnic mobilisation. At the same time, particular groups are quite different in some other features. Kristin Kuutma, Elo-Hanna Seljamaa and Ergo-Hart Västrik study the Seto people, whose historical native territory situates them in the border areas of Russia and Estonia, with their contested aspirations for ethnic difference in state politics. A comparative analysis also covers the Votian people, who constitute a tiny indigenous minority in north-western Russia, and problems of the so-called Russian-speaking minority in Estonia. Although these groups are very different in size, their political status and public socio-cultural intentions vary greatly, and they all constitute minorities in their habitat. This article demonstrates the socio-political complexities that exist simultaneously in the same region, and explores dialogues between these communities and public institutions that dominate political and ideological discourse.

The Võro group in South Estonia has become more poignantly aware of their historical and local signifiers, which are applied by them in defining their position, particularly in the socio-cultural politics of various levels. Their (re) emergent identities in a larger national context provide a particularly complex testing ground for identity research in celebrated (as well as contested) phenomena of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The Võro have recently started negotiations to promote mutual ethnopolitical cooperation based on their local identities. In this volume, Ester Võsu and Helen Sooväli-Sepping investigate

the application of the elements of Võro culture in local tourism industry. Maarja Kaaristo and Risto Järv explore the concept of the local feeling of time in regard to tourism in Võru County and Hiiumaa Island, another Estonian region with a distinctive identity. This study reveals that at a grass-roots level, local peculiarities may be found in different local traditions and the specific emotional atmosphere in tradition-biased countryside.

Eva Toulouze and Liivo Niglas examine in their reflexive study the way of construction of one's cultural and religious identity in a dialogue between researchers and their key-informants. Toulouze and Niglas analyse in a really empathic way the situations that have revealed to them different aspects or fractions of the personal identity of Yuri Vella, a Forest Nenets reindeer herder, writer and indigenous activist living in the western Siberian forest tundra. The authors of this study demonstrate how details of fieldwork encounters shape our understanding and interpretation of somebody's personality. Although Toulouze and Niglas have extensive field experience in Yuri Vella's forest camp and communicate with Yuri on a regular basis, they must largely rely on their intuition and contextual knowledge in attempting to grasp conceptually Yuri's world-understanding.

The article by Toomas Gross about Protestant growth in rural Mexico, as well as the study by Art Leete and Piret Koosa dedicated to the development of Protestant missions in Komi Republic, Russia, both deal with tensions between the traditional religious identity (that in Mexico is based on Catholicism, and in Komi on Russian Orthodoxy) and spread of Protestant charismatic concept of the human being. In both cases, hegemonic religious models that have dominated in local societies for centuries, have been challenged by Pentecostal and charismatic Protestant infusions to previously mono-religious social landscapes. Conversion to Protestantism has severe personal and social consequences in these regions and active public and private debates have raised questions concerning the issues of being a proper person and following a proper faith in given social circumstances. Protestant growth has been experienced in these regions as a dramatic social development or culture shock and the ways in which public discourse and local people conceptualise ongoing changes are explored in these two articles.

This collection of papers is inspired by the idea of examining the concept of identity at various levels of dialogue between collective and individual agents, in different regional and social environments. At the same time, a collective collaborative and interdisciplinary approach and methodological examination has been initiated. In a way, it is an initial step in specific scholarly cooperation in the framework of the CECT. Although particular topics and conceptual frames of these articles differ a lot, in a certain way a step towards somehow shared theoretical ground has been made.

## NOTE

[1] This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and the Estonian Science Foundation (Grant No. 8335).

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.joesalu-nugin

# REPRODUCING IDENTITY THROUGH REMEMBERING: CULTURAL TEXTS ON THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD

*Kirsti Jõesalu, Raili Nugin*

**Abstract:** This article explores some of the ways in which memories of the Soviet past shape the identities and creative work of six Estonian intellectuals born in the 1970s. Based on analysis of the four cultural texts they have produced (an exhibition, a feature film, a novel and a documentary) and biographical interviews with them, it is argued that the authors' birth frame has had an impact on how they interpret the late Soviet period. They share discursive practices about this period: mutual interpretative principles, which validate their common experience in discourses. Their experience of living in the Soviet system is limited to their childhood years only.

Sharing a kind of reflexive nostalgia about the era, they depict the late Soviet period somewhat ironically, with a touch of cynicism (in their cultural texts as well as in the interviews). Even though they do not oppose the official public discourse of the rupture of Soviet Estonia, they tend to accentuate and value everyday experience, thus contributing to 'normalisation' discourse of the Soviet period in Estonian memory landscapes. Childhood experiences of the late Soviet period constitute an integral part of these intellectuals' identities. By reproducing their identity in their cultural texts, they have a potential to deepen the memory templates already existing in public memory discourse, and also to contribute to the addition of new discourses and influencing the identity of others in society.

**Keywords**: late Soviet period, cultural texts, biographical interviews, nostalgia, communicative memory, post-Soviet memory culture

This article aims to discuss in what ways memories of the Soviet past can shape the identities of intellectuals and their cultural texts. Our special interest is dedicated to six intellectuals born in Estonia in the 1970s and their cultural texts that deal with the Soviet past in one way or the other. We argue that the fact that people were born in a certain time frame (the 1970s) has influenced the way the Soviet past is understood and represented. People born during the same period can share similar discursive practices (Corsten 1999). Relying on biographical interviews of the authors of four different cultural texts, we offer one possible interpretation of Soviet memories. We aim to point out the templates and constructions that this generation uses in describing their childhood

and to show to what extent Soviet experience has a role in their identities. In our study we depart from social and cultural memory studies.

The focus of our article is to shed light on the interpretation of the late Soviet period, the 1960s–80s (defined by Yurchak as 'late socialism' in 2005: 31).[1] The analysed cultural texts have the potential to shape the cultural memory of this era in society in general (Erll 2008: 390 ff.). We will ask how these intellectuals reproduce in their cultural texts the facets of their identity that were shaped by their childhood in the Soviet Union. How do they use their experience of the Soviet past as a cultural resource (Nugin 2011)? Which are the dominant discursive practices among them (Corsten 1999: 260)? How do they express their memories and how do they relate to other forms of memory in society?

## 1. DISCONTINUITY AND NOSTALGIA – THE FEATURES OF ESTONIAN MEMORY CULTURE

Remembering is a process that is individual as well as collective, being influenced by personal experience and public discourses about the past through different media. In this article, cultural memory is understood in a broader sense as an umbrella term for different phenomena. In German cultural memory theory, distinction between *cultural* and *communication* memories is common. The leading authors of the theory, Jan and Aleida Assmann, suggest that *cultural memory* consists of texts of 'high' culture that have lasted through time and create a framework for communication across the abyss of time (Assmann J. 1995; Assmann A. 1999, 2006). *Communicative memory,* on the other hand, is, according to the Assmanns, based on the memory that is passed on in everyday communication and stories that are told in informal environments. This memory type dates no more than three generations back, and it is not older than one hundred years: as long as living generations can remember the past (see more on distinction between communicative and cultural memory in J. Assmann 1995; 2008: 110–113).

Our article deals with cultural texts on late socialism, which, according to the Assmanns' approach could be analysed only as a part of communicative memory as the time lag is too recent (less than one hundred years). Among others, Astrid Erll (2005: 112 ff.) has problematised chronological distinction between cultural and communicative memory (see also Welzer 2002, 2008). Additionally to the problem of time horizon, the question of 'high' and everyday culture arises here, especially when dealing with events from recent history that are already covered by cultural texts, but also communicated by those still alive with personal memories of these times. Erll has suggested that in

this case the same historical context is treated as an object of both cultural and communicative memory, yet two different modes of remembering are used (Erll 2005: 115).

When dealing with contemporary texts, distinguishing the border between *cultural* and *communicative* memory can become complicated. Hence, in the following analysis we use the term *cultural memory* (while speaking about specific texts), which also includes *communicative* memory. We will point out that late socialism could be analysed in the framework of *cultural* as well as *communicative* memory.

In our definition, texts are not just written texts; we expand the definition and analyse also films, exhibitions and other forms of cultural production.

The questions of memory have often been related to the notion of generational consciousness (Misztal 2003; Corsten 1999; Mannheim 1993 [1952]). Being born in a certain period limits people to "a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them to a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action" (Mannheim 1993 [1952]: 36). In other words, experiencing similar social conditions, events and environment in their socialising years influences the way that those born in a certain period organise their past and future. Thus, as pointed out by Michael Corsten (1999: 258–260), people in the same generation tend to create what he calls "discursive practices" – a semantic order by which time is organised. Those "discursive practices" are certain interpretative principles, which validate mutual experience in discourses (Corsten 1999: 261; Misztal 2003: 62; Weisbrod 2007: 22). Memory can also guide certain practices and enable people to understand the world by serving as a "meaning-making apparatus" (Schwartz 2000: 17, cited in Misztal 2003: 13). Different generations may consider different aspects of events in history important to be remembered and discursive practices shaped by one's age may also influence the way in which these events are remembered (Misztal 2003: 12–13, 83–91).

In the following, we will point out two interconnected categories in Estonian memory discourse: (a) discontinuity and (b) nostalgia. In our analysis section, we will demonstrate how our informants are influenced by both of these discourses. We will attempt to look into how the experienced memory expressed in biographical interviews and cultural texts are interlinked.

### 1.1. On discontinuity

In Estonian post-Soviet memory studies, life writing and 'grand narratives' of 'Great History' have occupied a prominent position (topics like the World War II and Stalinist repressions, see, e.g., Aarelaid 2006; Anepaio 2003; Kõresaar 2005; Hinrikus 2005; Kõresaar & Kuutma & Lauk 2009, Kõresaar 2011). In the current article we will look beyond the questions of Great History, bringing in remembering of the everyday and using other sources in addition to life writing.

On the memory policy level (history books, official statements and politicians' speeches), the Soviet era in post-Soviet Estonia is interpreted in the framework of the discourse of rupture (Kõresaar 2005; Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming; Jõesalu 2012). Ene Kõresaar has used the notion 'prolonged rupture', in which the meaning of the Stalinist era is attributed to the entire Soviet period in Estonia (from 1940 to the end of the 1980s) (Kõresaar 2005: 151). Until the beginning of the 21st century, the late Soviet era (1960s–80s) was included in the discourse of 'rupture' in Estonian society. This discourse itself had developed at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s in the anti-Soviet spirit of 'taking back Estonia's history' and was used by politicians to legitimate their everyday politics (restoring the previous republic) (Kõresaar 2005). In this case, rupture is seen as an interruption and deterioration of an idealised independence era (Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming).

This perception of rupture was mostly based on the experience of people born in the 1920s. From the beginning of the 21st century those born during the Soviet period, especially in the 1940s–50s, started to contribute to the process of remembering. From that time on, interest in verbalising the experience of 'late socialism' increased remarkably (see Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming). People born during and after World War II tended to treat the Soviet period in the frame of 'normalisation' discourse, by bringing up in their memoires the experiences of their everyday lives and leaving public ideology aside. Normalisation discource itself is very heterogeneous, and is one of the discourses that is represented by those born during late socialism, who perceive their Soviet childhood as an exotic experience, comparing it with the experience of post-Soviet generations (e.g. in Grünberg 2008).

Different discourses on the Soviet period – especially the discourse of rupture and discourse of normality – coexist in Estonian post-Soviet memory culture (Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming). Those discourses describe the Soviet experience on different levels and through different temporal horizons (Giesen 2004)[2]. In the current paper, we are concentrating on the experience of individuals born during late socialism, in the 1970s, who have added their meaning to memory discourse since the beginning of the new century. Unlike earlier generations,

who communicated their memories mainly through biographical texts, those born in the 1970s tend to use other memory mediums. In the analysis section we try to examine what their position is in terms of the previously described different discourses.

### 1.2. On Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a category that is closely related to the discourse of rupture. Taking into consideration the treatment of the Soviet era in the framework of rupture, nostalgia towards this era is often politicised and considered a threat to democracy (see, e.g., Masso 2010; Laar 2008). When using the concept of nostalgia in our analysis, we rely mainly on the works of anthropologist Daphne Berdhal (2010). In Berdahl's interpretation, nostalgia is a heterogeneous phenomenon.[3] Analysing the former GDR, she has pointed out that nostalgia (in its German specific form *Ostalgie*)[4] can be treated as a counter-memory to dominant discourses of the past, and also a way to give the present its meaning. Berdhal has also suggested that one form of this nostalgia can be characterised through "cynicism, irony and parody" (Berdhal 2010: 131).

In addition to Berdahl's concept we will also use the notion of *reflexive* nostalgia. Svetlana Boym (2002), when studying Soviet nostalgia, has differentiated between *restorative* and *reflexive* nostalgia. The former is defined as nostalgia that recalls memories of the patriotic past and shapes a future based on those memories. This type of nostalgia is used to ideologise and mystify the past on a national and/or social level (legitimising current projects through past examples). *Reflexive* nostalgia, on the other hand, is a more general longing for the past, which also contributes to the meaning-making of the present.

In contemporary Estonia, Soviet nostalgia is stigmatised on the memory policy level, as it is perceived as *restorative* nostalgia. However, in other spheres – especially in the sphere of entertainment – interpretations are much more ambivalent and not necessarily *restorative*. As we will show later, even though in their biographical interviews our informants associate nostalgia with something negative and not their own (assigning its traits to earlier generations and stigmatising its manifestation), nostalgia in its different forms is not missing from their cultural texts and interviews altogether. The nostalgia in their texts is more playful, and, as pointed out by Berdahl, sometimes cynical and ironic (see also Grünberg 2008; Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming).

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

People born in the 1970s make an interesting object of research since they spent their childhood in late Soviet society and their transition years to adulthood coincided with the turbulent times in society when social structures were rearranged. Their coming of age took place simultaneously with the building of the new society (from socialism to liberal capitalism).[5]

Our purpose was to see if those born in the 1970s share a certain understanding of the Soviet past and how this is reproduced in cultural texts. By choosing texts from different cultural fields we hoped to be able to make more generalisations, searching for similar mnemonic templates in different cultural forms. In addition, we chose to interview the authors of the texts to get a broader base for our argument. The interviews provided such rich and interesting material that instead of being complementary, it turned out to be crucial in our dataset.

By selecting cultural texts, our aim was to choose the media that have the possibility to become a powerful "media of cultural memory" (Erll 2008: 390). The chosen texts use the 'experimental mode' in narrating. According to Astrid Erll, experimental modes are constituted by literary forms that represent the past as a recent, lived-through experience (ibid.). Here, the intermediality of the texts became crucial. Texts narrating similar topics constitute inter-medial dynamics and those texts support each other. Cultural texts hereby are understood in a broader sense, including written texts as well as films, exhibitions and the like, as all these cultural texts with their generalised aesthetic formulations are always part of general *cultural* memory (Erll 2008; A. Assmann 2006: 207). As Astrid Erll has put it: "Remembered events are transmedial phenomena, that is, their representation is not tied to one specific medium." (Erll 2008: 392) This applies also to our case: late socialism is the main playground in every chosen cultural text. These texts reproduce this particular period of the Soviet era, providing a scheme of interpretations for the memory community, this way also influencing the shaping of individual autobiographic memories (Erll 2008).

The cultural texts analysed are the following: (a) a design exhibition called *Things in My Life* (2000–2001), curated by Kai Lobjakas (1975) and Karin Paulus (1975); (b) the feature film *Touched by the Unknown* (2005), scenario by Urmas Vadi (1977), directed by Jaak Kilmi (1973); (c) a documentary called *Disco and Atomic War* (2009), written and directed by Jaak Kilmi and Kiur Aarma (1974); and (d) the novel *A While* (2009) by Jan Kaus (1971). The interval between publishing the texts is almost ten years, and during this decade the meaning of 'mature socialism' underwent several changes. When analysing the texts, we have tried to consider this temporal aspect.

The authors of the texts were born between 1971 and 1977[6] and with one exception, they were all born in Tallinn, the Estonian capital (although Kai moved to a Tallinn satellite town shortly before primary school, her childhood experiences are still very much connected to the capital). Urmas was born and raised in Tartu (the second largest city in Estonia). We find these circumstances important in the Estonian context. Firstly, all the authors have an urban background, which can differ to a certain extent from a rural childhood during the Soviet period.[7] Another significant factor for those living in Tallinn and its outskirts is Finnish television, which provided the possibility to see how the capitalist world 'actually lived' and how it contradicted Soviet propaganda's idea of what it was like.

The interviews were conducted in July and August 2010, mainly at public places (cafés) in Tallinn and Tartu (Urmas), one interview (Kai and Karin) took place at one of the researcher's homes. We grouped the interviewees according to the cultural texts they had produced, i.e., the curators of the exhibition (Kai and Karin) were interviewed together as were the authors of the documentary (Jaak and Kiur), whereas Jan and Urmas were interviewed separately. The interview started off with questions about the authors' biographies and eventually led to their creative works, with specific questions about interpreting the chosen texts. The interviews lasted for two hours.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then read several times and coded by the authors separately. During the next stage of the analysis, the codes were compared and discussed, complementing and unifying each other's codes. The codes were then used to form inductive categories that related to interpretation of the late Soviet era. Then the texts were reread to compare them with the created categories. In our paper, we use the interviewees' first names when referring to their biographics; when discussing the cultural texts, we use their surnames.

In the following, four cultural texts are analysed through schematic narrative templates[8] (Wertsch 2002: 60–62) that seemed important to the authors in their biographies as well as in their creative work.

## 3. ANALYSIS: REMEMBERING THE SOVIET PERIOD AND REPRODUCING IT IN TEXTS

### 3.1. Things in Life and Things on Stage: Exhibition *Things in My Life* (2000–2001)

When interpreting late socialism, one of the mutual topics that keeps re-emerging in the interviews and cultural texts is concentration on material environment. When reminiscing about their childhood and adolescence, material environment becomes meaningful for our informants in terms of space as well as artefacts. Life story researchers have shown that things have an explanatory function in life stories (see Kirchenblatt-Gimblett 1989; Kõresaar 1998; Mohrmann 1991). This claim finds support in all of our interviews, as our informants thematised material culture in interpreting their identity as youngsters as well as today. For instance, Karin and Kai in their biographical interview pointed out that the scarcity of goods during their childhood caused a desire for things:

> Karin: But this is important, these things are so important – that you'll get yourself foreign clothes of some sort, get yourself a shirt or trousers. I remember that I got myself culottes, probably from some shop that accepted vouchers[9], and then I went swimming and they were stolen from me. I rushed home … This was a real tragedy; I remember it so well. You just valued those things. This materialism ...
>
> Kai: Yes, it made you value things. There's nothing to do, some desires were kind of left unsatisfied and …

In a similar vein, Kiur points out the absence of things as one of the main characteristics of the Soviet period and, similarly to Kai and Karin, mentions the desires which originate from his childhood:

> The absence of things tends to be more significant than their presence and because of that … People, who kind of haven't had things, once they get them later in life, start procuring them, then they overdo it. [---] And there [in the Soviet era], if one knew well enough Nadya or somebody else who was selling there (and locals did know), then you could get from under the counter – these were rationed goods, ok – little cheesecakes covered in chocolate and these cocoa crème fraiche cupcakes – this has resulted in a lifelong fixation on this stuff. I couldn't afford them back then and now I buy six pieces and eat them in a row. (Kiur)

The first cultural text that this paper concentrates on is the *Things in My Life* exhibition, which opened first in Tartu and then in Tallinn.[10] It is also chronologically the first cultural text among those analysed. The exhibition presented things designed during the Soviet period: the physical world that surrounded those born in the 1970s. The museumification of Soviet everyday life had not taken place before the new millennium (unlike in Germany, see Berdahl 2010: 54)[11]. Susan Gille has suggested that for the outburst of nostalgia a conviction is needed that the previous era is gone never to return. In the GDR, radical changes were made right away and therefore nostalgia emerged there earlier than in other former socialist republics (Gille 2010: 282). Nostalgia was present in Estonian society in the 1990s as well, but this was a restorative nostalgia towards the pre-World War II republic, in which the Soviet period was "cut off" (Kõresaar 2005).

The curators of the exhibition, Kai and Karin, imply that up to that time Estonian exhibiting culture had concentrated on unique design. Therefore, little attention had been paid to everyday design, let alone to Soviet everyday design. Hence, the authors raised two topics – first, artefacts of everyday life and second, everyday life as such during that era. Explaining the meaning behind the title of the exhibition, Kai points out that this is their own story, that the things presented at the exhibition are very meaningful for them:

> For us it was also like a broadening of the picture, something that you had always seen in exhibitions … that this unique art was valued, you had been in the middle of this. But that this everyday environment … I think that we searched for a little bit … this came … I flicked through some journals and thought how to express myself [laughs]. And then it clicked. Well it seemed like a big bite, and then this title – *Things in My Life* – provided a means for backing off; you can start out from yourself, from two persons, you can start out together. (Kai)

In 2000, when the exhibition opened at the Estonian National Museum (ENM), the different experiences in the Soviet era – the repressions of the 1940s and 1950s and the subsequent 'peaceful' decades – were not differentiated in public discourse. The cultural texts as mentioned above, along with the rest of public memory culture generally reproduced the discourse of rupture. As the exhibition is a temporary phenomenon by nature, we concentrate in our analysis on the reception at that time, photographs of the exhibition (there was no catalogue) and workplans.[12] The exhibition displayed things that had surrounded most of the visitors in their homes as well as in public spaces during the Soviet period. The curators pointed out that they wished to value things from the Soviet era:

"[---] to show that in spite of ideology the design of the Soviet period is interesting and relevant to date" (Karin).

The curators themselves saw the exhibition as an impulse for other cultural texts dealing with everyday Soviet life, which were produced later on, at the beginning of the 21st century, especially in other museums. Within this framework, Karin expresses her pride and points out that they were the first to exhibit the lamp called *Old Thomas*[13], which today is seen as a symbol of the commodification of nostalgia and marketed as a symbol of everyday Soviet life.

In the article that the curators published during the exhibition, there is an explicitly expressed wish to bring the Soviet period back to public memory culture, polemising with those who have left this particular material culture behind:

> An arrogant and disgusting attitude towards things emanating from the socialist era of scarce possibilities as well as juxtaposition to supposed design 'classics' is at times downright unjust. The material outcomes of modernist ideology, suited so well to the socialist order, are at times of poor quality and shoddy material, but once they are separated from their context, their strong formal side has to be acknowledged. (Lobjakas & Paulus 2000: 9)

In their biographical interview, Kai and Karin stressed that they wished to oppose the dominant treatment of the post-Soviet period in 20th century design and architectural history, the treatment that supported the discourse of rupture and in which pre-war Estonian things were especially valued. At the same time they admit that the cultural codes they had used in exhibiting artefacts were understandable mainly to people of their own age, since the codes were based on the mutual discursive practices (Corsten 1999) among those born in the late Soviet period.

> For folks of our own age it seemed cool, but for people who were forced to consume these things, [for them it was different] one gets angry and another one says, well, that you don't know how to approach it as an object to be shown at an exhibition, that leaves you kind of baffled. (Kai)

For older generations, the museumification of everyday Soviet life caused amazement and, at times, even distaste. Thus, an acknowledged art historian Helena Kuma (b. 1921) published an open letter after visiting the exhibition. In the letter, she questioned the entire concept of the exhibition:

> The fact that the exhibition does not include first-rate Soviet industrial art creates the impression that this was deliberate, and only random and

> in part dubious objects or direct copies of Finnish design are on display. (Kuma 2001)[14]

Even half a decade later, in 2006, visitors commented on another exhibition at the ENM about the food culture of the Soviet period, expressing their disapproval of the museumification of Soviet everyday experience (see, e.g., "grandmother from Pärnu County", guestbook of the ENM). Berdahl (2010: 59) has suggested that these kinds of archival practices that historicise the present can have quite an uncanny effect on the people who actually live in a similar environment. Our informants, however, had distanced themselves from the Soviet-period material environment – they had created their own new homes in non-Soviet surroundings. This distancing also creates preconditions for nostalgia. Zsuzsa Gille has stressed that a time-lag is needed for the emergence of nostalgia, and, besides, some improvement in everyday life is necessary to alienate oneself from the past and to speak about it within a mutually shared framework (Gille 2010: 282).

A similar attitude towards things can also be traced among our other informants and their cultural texts. Through this mutual understanding of the material environment a certain distinction is drawn between the Soviet and post-Soviet worlds as well as between different generations: what they subjectively perceive as previous and subsequent. This is perhaps most explicitly expressed in the novel by Jan Kaus. One of its main characters Eda has found her son's broken toy in her pocket and is pondering on the art exhibition that she had recently visited. The latter was about things and the meaning of things in the past and today:

> There is a generation growing up that has lost the ability to value things. This was an evaluation and, despite its outward politeness, a rather tough evaluation that separated generations from each other. Yet, Eda was not sure if this was what the artist wanted to say. The artist had been raised in Scandinavia. Eda, however, in a state where her peers did not leave broken legs of toy soldiers or dolls lying around, but did everything they could so that no leg would ever come off. (Kaus 2009: 41–42)

Another informant, Urmas, sees it even more dramatically, by describing Soviet identity through materiality and seeing the essence of this identity in procuring things. After our interview with him had ended and the dictaphone was switched off, Urmas announced that there was something important about Soviet time he yet had to tell us, and sitting back at the table he said practically in one breath:

> In short, it seems to me that I must also tell you about things of the Soviet time. It seems to me that – they say nowadays that all the people are very mammon-centred and so on, that they accumulate stuff, but it seems to me that it was way worse during the Soviet time. There was this same deficit back then, if something was lying around or available or there was a queue of some sort, then you had to take your place in this queue, no matter whether it was kvass or frankfurters or colour televisions. If there was some kind of a queue and it seemed that these things were not needed, they were nevertheless hoarded. [---] This kind of cult of things was absolutely total back then. And then things were stocked up, too. My grandmother had a wardrobe half full of sugar and flour, which was also scarce at a certain time. And buckwheat. Nobody knew what might start happening and if things would get even worse. My mother had stocked up pillowcases and doilies, like there are two sons and so they could both get something for their 'trousseau'. A line of thought that is totally absurd at present time. Most of these things were thrown away, there was nothing to do with them, but one had to hoard all the time. It is kind of like Imbi and Ärni stuff, this Soviet-era hoarding.

In the extract cited above, Urmas mixes together different stockpiling strategies – the need to stockpile food by those who had experienced scarcity during the war, and intergenerational traditional stockpiling of 'dowry chests', characterising them as a kind of 'gathering' through the characters known in Estonian contemporary literature – Imbi and Ärni[15]. It is also meaningful that things as a subject had emerged in his interview before discussing several topics of identity. Yet, he felt it important to come back to the topic of the material world from this 'procuring' perspective.

The visual side of the Soviet material environment is also strongly represented in the two films we chose. In the documentary *Disco and Atomic War*, more stress is laid on recreation of the lost space – especially the microcosm of one district in Tallinn – Õismäe. In the feature film *Touched by the Unknown*, visual details and artefacts, for example, clothing styles and interior design, become more prominent. This is part of the intention to play games with time, as will be shown in the following section.

### 3.2. Games with Time – Film *Touched by the Unknown*

The feature film *Touched by the Unknown*[16] is dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of Estonian Television (ETV) and depicts life in television studios and beyond during late socialism, approximately at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. Urmas Vadi was asked to write a script and Jaak Kilmi was invited to direct the film. As Jaak pointed out:

> But all in all … it doesn't actually talk about the ESSR [Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic] very much. It is something like … like some kind of travesty, that these, well, the sixties, that there is such a … more like an era of jazz, in principle, without any kind of real everyday aspect or political aspect.

Urmas told us in the interview that even though the era was set by order, he was also fascinated by it;[17] otherwise he would not have taken the job. However, he stressed that for him the plot is always more important than the environment in which the story takes place. The film is a slapstick comedy with minor hints about historical events and characters. The latter are only loosely tied to their prototypes, since Urmas is fond of playing around with things:

> Generally, to play out people's biographies…I have dealt with this previously, and probably will deal with it also in the future, but this is only one side of what I write. […]
>
> I don't remember exactly … but in one philosophy lecture … […] the simplified idea was that a person is a sum of all that he/she has accomplished and done in their entire life, everything that you've done ten years ago and this all together is one life, and for me it seemed like an especially horrid thought, that everything is like it is, nothing can be changed and we live and exist … and then I have been playing with the idea that actually you can change anything. That all people and documents can be written over and again. (Urmas)

Therefore, the entire scenario is built up playfully, emotions and situations have been exaggerated and, as Urmas himself put it, the text is 'baroque'. It is about a period in which none of the authors (neither the scenarist nor the director) have lived and their attitude towards this period is creative (to say the least).[18] It is noteworthy that the restrictive side of the TV creating process (like censors) was not touched upon at all, and this has also attracted the critics' attention. Andres Laasik (2005) suggested in a review that instead of dealing with the political side of the era, the authors brought contemporary satire to the screen in the form of the 1960s ETV environment, since they had not been

adults during the repressive Soviet period. Thus, Laasik (born in 1960) introduced the notion of generation: the birth date of the authors influences their attitude towards the Soviet period. This generational aspect was also touched upon by Urmas in our interview:

> When ETV gave me an award, I attended the ceremony. There were no people of my age, so I quickly accepted this glass [the reward], stepped down from the stage and thought to myself: I have to get out of here as soon as I can.

Indeed, in the reception of the film, opinions were voiced that depicting famous TV-legends comically was insulting.[19] As we will explore below, Vadi's playful treatment of characters and circumstances is rather cynical and ironic. See also Berdahl 2010: 130–133.

One of the central themes around which Urmas plays in the film is the notion of time. Time and its perception during the Soviet period are special in his treatment. Urmas is more than free in his mixing of different eras: even though the scene is set in the late 1960s, there are several hints at other eras: for instance, the aliens talk about Bill Gates and his Windows operating system. Instead of the contemporary First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party (ECP) Johannes Käbin[20], his successor from the future, Karl Vaino[21], is presented in the film. This time mixing characterises Urmas's writing as a playful author, but there seems to be more to it. As stated, the course of time in the Soviet period is constructed as special, or at least different from contemporary society.

We were able to trace two main ways of depicting the time of the Soviet era among our respondents: *time standing still* and *structured time*, which are also present in the film. The category of *time standing still* is mainly constructed via the notion that nothing ever happens. When expressing their attitude towards working culture during the Soviet period, our informants rely on a common (negative) template that has recently spread about working life at that time. According to this, the pressure to be productive at work was not prevailing, so people did not do much at their workplaces and imitated work rather than actually worked.[22] Most of the important decisions in the film are made in a smoky café where people sit (and drink alcohol) throughout their workdays. The waitress is depicted with a bored face, spending her time turning over the cheese on the sandwiches (time stands still even for the food, so when cheese gets too dry on the sandwich, it should be turned over). In his biographical interview Urmas recalls his own working experience in his early years as a blue-collar worker, suggesting that a significant amount of time was spent in the smoking room. Even though he did not smoke, he learned to play checkers at that time.[23] This notion of negligent work experience is also reflected by other informants in

their interviews. For instance, Kiur describes his childhood playground where some construction blocks had been left lying around for years:

> Then we had this playground that we called the blocks [of concrete used in pre-fabricated buildings]. They were heaped into pyramids. In a former paddock. Obviously somebody had planned to build a house there, but had failed. A person dropped something from her/his hand, and there it stayed.

In addition to this negative stereotype of the Soviet working life, other informants supported Urmas's notion that there was enough time and the pace of time was slow. When talking about his childhood, Jan also indicated that there was not much one could do during the Soviet period: just collect chewing gum wrappers and play with tin soldiers. Karin described her childhood as calm and peaceful, appropriate for her poetic nature. One could go on with such examples. It is debatable whether their depiction of the Soviet era as slow and negligent owes some merit to the fact that during childhood time seems to pass slower. Time in this context is compared with the present, which is often perceived as fast, fractured and practical (Leccardi 2005). In any case, the informants described the Soviet era as the period where *time* was not a resource (but rather, social relations were). Things were often left undone, forgotten, abandoned, houses were left unbuilt.

The second category, *structured* or shared time, is also expressed in the film as well as in the interviews with other informants. In the film, time was structured by the TV shows that were loved by all. The figurativeness of this was drawn to the extreme – the film was interspersed with scenes in which virtually everyone left whatever they were doing and ran to sit in front of the TV. The lack of diversity in media production meant that people listened to the same programmes in media channels. This also expresses itself in several aspects in the interviews. One of the aspects of the Soviet period was that the structure of the programmes in those scarce media channels was similar throughout the years – the same broadcasts took place at the same hour for decades. Therefore, it is characteristic that the respondents rather remember what was on the radio during the time they left home or were driving in a car rather than what time it was:

> Kiur: Dad would take me to school through snowdrifts in winter, and in the morning we would always listen to joke minutes, public radio had them after it had been declared that the 22nd regime of electricity consumption was in force that day or something like that, there on the car radio. There were these joke minutes, these were the brightest moments of the morning, because mornings were generally dark and cold and it sucked.[24]

> Jaak: Did you listen to jokes in the car? I took off then, school started at 8, jokes were on at 7:50 and then I took off.

In a similar vein, Kai remembers that they left for the countryside on Saturdays during a certain comedy broadcast on the radio. This notion of structure was indeed part of everyday Soviet life. However, the fact that this template comes up every now and then in the interviews may be influenced by the fact that it was the time of the informants' childhood. Childhood and school years consist of routines: time is structured by school time, hobby classes and vacations. In this sense, children today are not different from those born in the 1970s. The difference lies in the perception of time. Another aspect in the powerful structuring of time by audiovisual media was that there were certain shows that were important for people. A lot of what was broadcasted was not appreciated, but if something was worth watching, people organised their time accordingly (this is also evident from these quotes: all informants refer to comedy broadcasts). These factors indicate that TV and radio contributed to shared understanding and perception of time, probably during the Soviet era, but definitely they are significant symbols for this specific group about remembering the organisation of time. Time was shared – everyone remembers where he or she usually was during certain radio broadcasts, but also that nothing changed on the radio or in society in general. This is in contrast to fractured time perception now.

This phenomenon is also expressed in the cultural texts of the others. Jan, in his novel *A While*, describes the TV shows that were broadcasted every New Year's Eve; in their exhibition, Karin and Kai show the standardised items that were similar in virtually every home; in their documentary, Jaak and Kiur describe the unifying effect of Finnish TV – it was important for all the family to see *Dallas* and introduce it to relatives outside Tallinn.

### 3.3. Non-ideological everydayness: Novel *A While* (2009)

The novel *A While* by Jan Kaus (1971)[25] focuses on two lives – Eda's and Joosep's. To use the author's own interpretation:

> Well, it has always interested me, this, well, how to poeticise some very important things, the same … When dreams do not come true, is dignified life still possible, a kind of reserved happiness and this started to interest me. (Jan)

Both Eda and Joosep had some dreams in their youth that failed to come true. In a way, this is a book about remembering and memory:[26] both characters look back in time and ponder on the things that have happened, rather than

are happening. The chapters have a rhythm, Eda's and Joosep's memories are presented separately, one following the other in every chapter. They had a love affair in the past and both reveal their versions of it. In addition, and what is crucial for our analysis, they contemplate their childhood during the Soviet period, their parents, the milieu of their childhood and the hometown (Tallinn) of their youth (remembrances of home-made food or romantic cityscapes). The author presents the time and space of their childhood and adolescence as lost (p. 22: "All these things are lost somewhere, or just lost."). There is a certain distinction between 'now' and 'then', the latter being a source of longing or nostalgia.

Coming back to the question of through what templates the late Soviet period is understood, we would argue that Joosep and Eda (and thus, in a way, Jan) represent those contributing to the discourse of 'normality', or those depicting the era as an exotic childhood experience. For them, the Soviet period is not "the interruption and deterioration of the harmonious national development" (Kõresaar 2005), but an environment where they spent their common childhood. The aforementioned is definitely not the *restorative* nostalgia according to Boym's (2002) definition, but, rather, the *reflexive* one: it helps us to understand the identity of the characters; it serves as the "meaning-making apparatus" (Misztal 2003: 13). However, the 'dark side' of the Soviet era coexists with the bright one in the story. Here and there, the author glances into the inhuman face of Soviet repressions through the stories of Joosep's uncle and grandfather.[27] To summarise, in spite of some threats that the characters sense (expulsion from school after a party where alcohol was consumed), the repressive side of Soviet society is laid on the shoulders of their parents' and grandparents' generations. This disposition is very much connected to the time frame within which the authors of those cultural texts were born – the era of late socialism, where the repressive side of the Soviet system did not affect their lives directly. As Jan himself put it:

> Well, childhood, as usual, is covered with powdered sugar. […] I don't have this depression about the Soviet period, it didn't reach me. My childhood is rather grey. I don't have any colourful impressions – neither negative nor positive.

Yet, Jan was the only one of the six interviewees (he was also the oldest) who actually had had a personal experience of repression and interrogation by the KGB, for owning graffiti paints[28]. He admits that he has vague memories of this episode but claims that, being naïve and young, he did not grasp the seriousness of the situation. Our informants just did not function in the adult world, and ignored the 'bad' sides because their parents had to deal with them:

> Karin: […] like … you accept these circumstances. Whether you have Brezhnev there or not, you didn't take notice of it.
>
> Kai: But you didn't have to accept the circumstances yourself, it was your mother and father who had to accept them. It was like … I think, it didn't raise a problem in a child.
>
> Karin: It always exists, but in a sense you, you have been taught this pattern of behaviour, whereby you skip border zones for instance […] In everyday life, you have some ways of functioning. Islands of private life, you go to the woods and enjoy picking berries.

Another reason for not depicting the system as a repressive and occupational regime was probably that the parents, lacking the experience of an independent republic themselves ('the golden age'), did not want to 'tune' their children against the system because describing the Soviet system as restrictive could bring problems. Their parents had mostly spent their youths in the thaw or stagnation time, when one's course of life was not usually affected by repressions. Urmas mentions keeping silent about the past issues in intergenerational communication:

> Yes, it was not talked about. I guess people were still afraid. Who knows what some kid says somewhere in school, probably it's for the best this way. Nothing of the sort, like once upon a time there was the Republic of Estonia, our own currency, or anything like that. […] In short, they didn't talk and this was out of fear. What's the point of telling a small 10-year-old boy, he wouldn't understand anyway. […] I lived at the end of the Soviet period when the whole thing wasn't that tough and brutal and terrifying … […] I would like to know further what this time was like. And at the same time I cannot help it that for me, it wasn't the time of executions and deportations. In this sense it was a colourful dumb time where many things were possible.

However, as most of the interviewees admitted, the tacit attitude towards the state and, thence, also to Russians, was negative. Yet, it was unspoken and unspecified. While this situation was also common in other families, Jaak had a different experience:

> As concerns the worldview of a child back then, a lot of it was shaped by my father, who was a passive dissident. He despised Soviet power with every cell in his body. This attitude is very easily adopted by a child. I always took it very tragically when a Russian athlete made it to the podium.

He spoke about how he outlined the flags of Soviet-friendly states in his scrapbook with 'poop' colour and how he, with other boys at school, filled the eyes of Lenin's sculpture with green candies. He also refused to join the pioneer organisation, but was persuaded to reconsider his decision. He joined the organisation a few months after his classmates had. While his hatred for Soviet powers was sincere, it was still the hatred of a child, who translated this into his language of 'good/evil': outlining the socialist states' flags with ugly colours or being disappointed at the outcome of sporting events. In everyday life, he still enjoyed living in a new block-house district called Õismäe and expresses nostalgia for this period.

To conclude, for the characters of the book, and our authors, memories of the Soviet period are childhood memories, which are nostalgic for personal reasons. During their adolescence and transition to adulthood, when our informants started to take independent decisions about their adult lives, the system was in the midst of its most turbulent changes. For Eda and Joosep, these changes raised hopes for their future lives, but the hopes gradually petered out for several reasons, which was mainly something to do with their personal lives. Yet, the 'now' in the book, the independent state, is covered with the same veil of disappointment and bitterness. Although this distinction between the hopeless present and the hopeful and nostalgic past is vivid in the book, it is not something we could track down in our interviews. The interviewees shared a certain nostalgic attitude towards their childhoods and some of the values that were dominant at that time and are now lost, but there was no longing for its ideological side or attempts to legitimise the Soviet system.

### 3.4. Making of a generation? Ironic understanding of history – Documentary *Disco and Atomic War* (2009)

In the documentary *Disco and Atomic War* the central role is played by Finnish television (FTV) and its impact on the course of the Cold War and on those born in the 1970s. The film presents chapters in recent Estonian history in a carnivalesque key (Bahktin 1993). The authors – Jaak Kilmi (1973) and Kiur Aarma (1974) – point out in their interview that the film is indeed playful, but it is also based on the personal experience of the two authors.

> This film is purely born of self-cognition. All things have been kind of derived from personal mythology. (Jaak)

The film unites two interconnected narratives, one of them being the history of FTV[29] in the context of Cold War discourse. In this sense, it is closely tied to the dominant official memory discourse in the Soviet period. In order to exemplify this, abundant authentic archival film material is used: shots of the Soviet invasion in Prague in 1968, of parades held on May 1st, the head of the party laying wreaths at war memorials. In addition, several expert interviews are used to support the treatment of history offered in the film. The framing narrative tells the story of FTV as *soft power* that has beaten Soviet ideology. In the film, the French erotic film *Emmanuelle* is presented as the final victorious medium winning the Cold War. The scene showing its debut on FTV is followed by a scene presenting Estonians singing about freedom in a night song festival[30] in 1988.

Another narrative in the film – the one that is closely tied to the personal experiences of our informants – has the entertaining side of television as its focus. The film shows how the broadcasts and films shown on FTV were part of children's/youngster's everyday lives. For the informants grown up in northern Estonia, FTV is part of their shared experience, also forming a category that is used to distinguish themselves primarily from younger generations:

> There are some things [distinguishing those born in the 1970s from the others]. I do talk with Finns [in Finnish].[31] I define myself as a Pikku Kakkonen[32]-person through Finnish children programmes. I owe my Finnish to Finnish children shows. Even today, I am a Finnophile deep down. (Karin)

Or, as Jan has put it, the "real" Christmas feeling during the Soviet time was mediated through FTV, something that is lost in the contemporary world.

> Definitely this Finnish Television was important in my childhood. I have thought about the Christmas feeling … During the last ten years I have been trying to recreate this feeling, but it does not work, perhaps because I do not see this Christmas calendar [show] on Finnish television. (Jan)

As mentioned above, original historical material is incorporated into the documentary, and this integration of photographic (authentic photographs, bleak colours, black-and-white photographs) and filmic media creates an *effet de réel* (Erll 2008: 394). Binding a fictional story with facts is not a technique characteristic only of this film. In this respect, Urmas Vadi's *Touched by the Unknown* can be pointed out as well, with historical people acting in a real space (television, Tallinn), though the plot is fictional. In addition, in Jan Kaus's *A While* the urban space of Tallinn is described in detail and the book is very documental, though the characters and the plot are semi-fictional. In *Disco*

*and Atomic War* actual events are intertwined with fictional characters, who are presented through convincing voices speaking in the first person. It is noteworthy that sometimes it becomes difficult even for the authors to make a distinction between the fictional actuality and the 'actual' actuality, indicating that for them fantasy has transformed into memory at some point:

> Jaak: We had to build up most characters in our heads, use this clay that was sent to us.[33] By people, by nice people who took the effort to write to us [about their memories]. We had to fill these holes [that emerged] dramaturgically, by making up humorous things. Like the episode where boys were talking to foreign cars via their electronic watches.[34]
>
> Kiur: It was one of my classmates who did this.
>
> Jaak: Was it indeed? I remember the contrary … I thought that I made it up. No, I do remember that after we had finished the film, somebody came and told us that he used to do this. OK, at least it was not sent to us along with memories.

One of the authors has explained this usage of different audio-visual materials as a form of carnivalism. Kilmi has argued in an interview to a cultural magazine that, 'consuming' FTV can be explored as a carnivalistic rebellion against the system (Teder 2009; on carnevalistic rebellion see also Paju & Võsu 2008).

The film can also be located in space. The authors use a number of pictures and archival shots of one of the residential districts of Tallinn – Õismäe, where both authors grew up. In the reception, the film has also been interpreted as a documentary about Õismäe (Keil 2009)[35]. Jaak himself indicates that this can be one of the possible keys to interpreting the film. He dedicates the first minutes of his biographical interview to Õismäe, bringing out the special position of the residential district in Soviet society: "Of course, it felt proud to live there. Like, the small elite of the ESSR lived in Õismäe," showing us the pictures his father had taken over the decades from their apartment window (the same photos were also used in the film). The world shown in the film, however, is lost: while reminiscing about this lost time, Jaak acknowledges that the space has been lost with it. The lived space of the late Soviet period – childhood Tallinn[36] – is gradually evaporating. It has been either rebuilt, 'built in' or just torn down.

> I have kind of come to understand that there is no escape from Õismäe. *Disco and Atomic War* was also very much a film about Õismäe, it just has to be let back into the consciousness, but then through the humour prism, through jolly dislocation. [---] For me, Õismäe [now] is like a joke. In addition, it is so ugly, slummified, all the balconies have been rebuilt,

> buildings are covered with corrugated metal sheets or EPS. And mainly elderly Russian pensioners live there. It is not a stimulating place – in no way. (Jaak)

Similar reflexive nostalgia towards lost space can also be explored in Jan's interview, where he describes how his immediate surroundings have changed over time. He has also used his childhood spatial environment in his books. For instance, in *A While* an entire chapter is dedicated to Tallinn and what it used to be like. In contrast to Jaak and Kiur's 'elite' district, for Jan the lost space is represented by a slurb.

> Actually I feel sorry that this Tallinn of my childhood is practically disappearing, all this tearing down [---] On the city side of the railway, there were several beautiful functionalist structures built in the 1930s. There was one communal sauna where we used to go with the entire family. There was another building that had a huge picture of Brezhnev on the wall ... This was torn down and ... The surroundings changed to the point of becoming unrecognisable. (Jan)

In addition to this, the openness of the slurbs and suburbs that has disappeared is pointed out. The children of today are perceived as no longer playing in backyards; the environment enabling social interaction is lost ("backyards, all of them that have been closed up today" (Karin)).

The film also aims to depict the experiences of this generation in Soviet Estonia, thus giving the childhood experience of the authors a broader meaning. Jaak Kilmi has stated that they didn't want to make a documentary only about Finnish television, but much more – about their generation against the backdrop of this television (Teder 2009). In addition to FTV, the First Secretary of the ECP, Karl Vaino, who appears at the parade on May 1, but also at a song festival (on rituals, see also Grünberg 2008), is an important figure in this film. His frequent appearance could be interpreted as a hint at the Soviet ideology, which in a way shaped the childhood of those born in the 1970s. He has become the symbol of this ideology and is described in the film by Kilmi and Aarma as the "symbol of silly life in Soviet Estonia".[37]

Even though, judging by the interviews, the impact of kindred spirits and relatives on one's identity is considered important, the mutual experience of those born in the 1970s is also considered essential in distinguishing them from those born later on. In addition to the mutual media consumption, another aspect can be elicited from the interviews: the ironic attitude towards the past as well as present. For instance, Kai expresses her condemnation of the new

wave of nationalism that arose at the beginning of the 21st century. In this sense the experience of the Soviet period has given to our informants the ability not to get carried away by different ideological outbursts.

> When they were erecting the monument of liberty[38], I remember talking with somebody about it, and then this generational topic came up, those who designed it, they designed *such* a thing, they are *a generation back* from us [emphasis added]. I do not know what the age difference between us is, maybe five or ten years. This is surprising that they do *such* a thing, this has moved around in such a circle. Damn it. Where was this coming from? (Kai)

Thus, once again, we can come back to ironic and cynical nostalgia. In the case of this particular documentary, it may even be hidden: the documentary format, archival shots and expert interviews represent the 'serious' discourse, that which supports the official memory policy, the discourse of rupture. At the same time, the staged scenes are at times comic, the characters vivid and even caricatural. In other words, irony is mixed with the 'grand narrative'. As we will show in our concluding section, this can be one of the discursive practices that is characteristic of those born in the 1970s.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: PAST IN THE MAKING?

Reception plays a vital role in a cultural text becoming part of *cultural memory*. Reception is the context in which the text is produced. In our case, the context is a gradually growing boom of nostalgia (2000–2010) for the late Soviet period. As Ann Rigney (2008: 347) has stated, cultural texts draw attention to certain topics (in our case, the Soviet era) by offering a good surrounding story, even without a prior interest in the subject. Texts that are more spellbinding have the potential to influence cultural memory more, in contrast with those that aim for a more realistic picture (like, for instance, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; ibid.). Cultural texts can deal with topics and eras that the official memory discourse is reluctant to take up. Even though in our case it is difficult to predict what the position of our texts could be in the future, we believe that the texts have potential to have a broader impact on memory culture. In addition, as these authors are active in the cultural field and have continued producing cultural texts, we assume that their biographical background and construction of the Soviet past influences their other texts as well. In this sense, these specific

texts can be treated as examples of their reproduction of the Soviet past and the conclusions can be drawn on a broader cultural ground.

We have already briefly indicated the possible impact of the analysed exhibition. After this one, several others have been opened dealing with the presentation of everyday Soviet life. The question of whether these exhibitions were inspired (and to what extent) by the *Things in My Life* is debatable. Yet, they were the first. Kai has been active in curating other exhibitions that are based on Soviet design. In 2011, she was a curator of an exhibition that presented the design of lamps from one factory during the late Soviet era. In 2012 an international exhibition, *Modernisation. Baltic Art, Architecture and Design in the 1960s-1970s*, opened at the Estonian Museum for Applied Art and Design, where the Estonian part was curated by Kai.

Reception of the exhibitions, however, no longer brought up the topic of ideology. Karin is teaching the history of design at the Estonian Academy of Art and has been active as a contributor to several cultural periodicals; recently she published a book about the history of design, with the subtitle 'Things in my life' (Paulus 2011).

Today, the feature film *Touched by the Unknown* is not perhaps a film very widely known or often shown on TV. However, Urmas Vadi as a playwright and writer is creatively active. In his last book *Letters to Aunt Anne* (2010), he also brought up the topic of childhood during the late Soviet period, treating it along similar lines to the templates we have pointed out in our analysis. Hence, we must observe Vadi's potential role in creating *cultural memory* in a broader context, taking into account his creation in its entirety.

Jan Kaus's novel *A While* probably has a limited audience of intellectual elites. However, it was one of the four nominees for the 2009 annual Cultural Endowment of Estonia award (the most prominent literature award in Estonia) and thus one of the influential books in contemporary Estonian literature. Jan is a well-known figure in cultural life apart from being a writer. He was the chairman of the Estonian Writers' Union (2004–2007) and also an editor and contributor to the most influential cultural newspaper *Sirp*, as well as being a well-known translator. Therefore, his attitude towards late Soviet society is something that could possibly have a wider audience than just the readers of his book.

The documentary *Disco and Atomic War*, in contrast, has the widest audience among the selected cultural texts. In addition to Estonian film festivals, it has been presented internationally and has won several awards in Europe. Yet, its impact is hard to estimate, since much of its reception probably depends on how the experience of the audience coincides with that of the film authors. The

irony and cynicism presented might be hard to grasp for an outsider. Thus, it probably still helps to deepen the discursive practices among those who share the same templates, while having a different impact on those who do not share them. Jaak and Kiur continue to produce films together. Commenting on their recent film, released in 2011 (*Tallinn Spiced Sprats: the Canned Tales*), Jaak Kilmi, in his interview to a daily newspaper commenting on the film, mentioned the ambition to bring in the generational prism of his age group as well as living in Õismäe (Laasik 2011). This indicates that the biographical base we have presented continues to have an impact on their creative work.

As our analysis has shown, the border between *cultural* and *communicative memory* is vague. The potential to live through the abyss of time, as the Assmans have indicated, is unknown in all the texts. Yet, they are part of contemporary 'high' culture, as they are produced within the framework of an official cultural establishment (they are either presented in official state museums, ordered by national television or are award-winning texts). At the same time, they reproduce the discursive practices that are part of the authors' lives and are closely related to their everyday life discourses, i.e., *communicative memory*. In other words, the border between the two is shifting and blurry. However, in terms of analytical purposes it may still be useful to distinguish them over a longer time perspective. As indicated above, the texts 'speak' in the language of *communicative memory* with those sharing the same experience. For future generations, though (if these texts continue to be part of *cultural memory* or these authors continue reproducing their late Soviet experience), the *communicative* part will gradually fade away and the texts shift to the category of cultural memory where they can be reinterpreted by generations to come.

The discursive practices that we have attempted to detect among our informants can be (to a certain extent) interpreted as generational. Generational consciousness is a sensible topic, and it is noteworthy that not all our informants were eager to draw clear generational lines and admit that understanding the past depends on their birth date. Yet, following the reception and critique of the texts, certain understandings of the past emerge that are contextual and seem to be age-specific. In addition, on the basis of the life stories and their self-reflexive interpretations one can assume that the absence of harsh repressive experience due to their age and the era (late Soviet period) had an impact on their perspective on the interpretation of the era.

In the following, we will briefly go over the main templates that we find to characterise these authors' works as well as biographical narratives. The absence of repressive experience and growing up in an environment where the issues of the past (especially those connected to the pre-war independence

and its loss) were rarely communicated, is something that we believe has contributed to the informants' support for 'normalisation' discourse on the Soviet era. They mainly concentrate on everyday experience, and at times add a jolly accent of irony and cynicism. At the same time, they do not seem to actively oppose the general public narrative of rupture and disdain for Soviet ideology, and at times even contribute to it.

This also means that the nostalgia that is vivid in the authors' cultural texts as well as in their interviews can have many faces that do not necessarily contradict each other (cf. Kõresaar 2008: 761, several nostalgias can coexist). Thus, nostalgia for the Soviet era does not mean yearning for Soviet order (*restorative* nostalgia in Boym's sense). Rather, our informants express a certain *reflexive* nostalgia: a longing for the calm and structured childhood with certain characteristics that are lost in the contemporary world. Even the absence of things is sometimes interpreted in a positive light: people valued things more and thus avoided the carelessness of the contemporary consumer society. While some things are missed for the value that has been lost, others are missed because of their absurdity. The latter nostalgia is expressed in cynical and ironic form. The presentation of such things does not necessarily mean that these things are valued deep down; however, they represent a certain type of humour that can sometimes be understood only by those sharing the experiences gained from that time.

Remembering the past makes us what we are today. As we have shown in the current paper, the late Soviet experiences of their childhood are an integral part of those intellectuals' identities. By reproducing those discursive practices that form the base of their identity, they have the potential to deepen the memory templates already existing in public memory discourse, and also contribute to adding new ones and influencing the identity of the others in society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The preparation of the article was supported by the Estonian Science Foundation grants No. 8190 and 9130, and by the European Union through its European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT).

## NOTES

[1] On the meaning of 'late' or 'mature' socialism in Estonian memory culture see Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013 (forthcoming); Jõesalu 2010.

[2] "In a common attempt to remember the past, social groups can and frequently will encounter differences of temporal horizon or differences in focusing on special events as turning points of history. Events that have a key importance for the collective memory of one group may be ignored or omitted in the collective memory of others and even if both agree to attribute crucial importance to a particular event they still can greatly diverge in their interpretation of it." (Giesen 2004, p. 32).

[3] For a deeper analysis of nostalgia in Estonian post-Soviet memory culture, see Ene Kõresaar (Kõresaar 2008).

[4] *Ostalgie* – nostalgia for the East ('Ost' in German), the notion is used when speaking about nostalgia processes in the former GDR.

[5] As one of the authors has closely studied self-understanding in the 1970s, we can use the interviews conducted with the people born in the same timeframe as backdrop data to position the cultural texts and the interviews with their authors on a broader scale (Nugin 2011).

[6] In terms of self-reflexive analysis, we find it important to mention that we share the birth frame of the informants, being both born in the mid-1970s.

[7] A rural background was thematised in the interviews only by Urmas, who spoke about his living and working experience in the countryside. However, the perspective on rural contexts is still the one of an urban child.

[8] The notion of template is used in different disciplines and its use overlaps in practice. In this article we depart from memory studies, relying on the work of James Wertsch (Wertsch 2002).

[9] In the Soviet period Karin's father worked as a seaman. Part of the salary was paid in vouchers and for these they could obtain some goods from special shops.

[10] The exhibition was first presented in Tartu (December 2000 to February 2001) at the Estonian National Museum. Kai and Karin filled in the application to exhibit it at the National Museum, since they found that it would be 'safer' to present it in Tartu than in the capital, in front of the cultural elite. The exhibition in Tallinn stayed open from April to June, 2001, and it took place at the Museum of Applied Art, at which Kai works to this day.

[11] Before this exhibition, no exhibition had focused on everyday Soviet life. However, some exhibitions may have had hints of it among other things. Such an example is the exhibition about spirit smuggling in Estonia through ages exhibited in one of the county museums in 1998–99. After the exhibition that we have dealt with here, several others dedicated to everyday Soviet life followed, staged at the Estonian National Museum in 2004, 2006 and 2007 (Jõesalu & Kõresaar forthcoming). At the end of the decade life in the Soviet era was also presented in other places, representing the 'lost'

and exotic side of the everyday (e.g. an exhibition in Rotermann quarter in Tallinn: Soviet Life, www.rotermannikvartal.ee).

[12] One of the authors visited the exhibition. However, it is hard to build up an analysis on experience dating back a decade. In addition, no notes were taken. Artefacts were exhibited mainly on shelves. In the exhibition hall, the so-called coffee corners were built using Soviet-period furniture.

[13] A small bed lamp in the shape of a lantern with the symbol of Old Thomas. Old Thomas is a weather vane that was put on top of the spire of Tallinn Town Hall in 1530.

[14] From the same art historian, the curators got a personal disappointed note saying that the things exhibited were too ugly. Misinterpretation of the past is an accusation that has also hit other authors; Astrid Lepa (b. 1924), for instance, felt insulted by the way Urmas Vadi had treated the past in the film *Touched by the Unknown*.

[15] The characters are taken from the book *Rehepapp* (Old Barny), in which the author Andrus Kivirähk (b. 1970) aims to describe Estonian rural community under the domination of the Baltic-German gentry, though the exact time period is not explicitly stated. Some of the characters in the book are taken from Estonian mythology. Imbi and Ärni represent a couple who go around with two large bags, trying to steal everything they can, regardless of whether they need these things or not (Kivirähk 2000).

[16] The action of the film takes place in 1969. The main character Mati Tilba works in ETV in minor assisting roles, but everything seems to go wrong in his work as well as his private life. Mati works together with a TV legend Valdo Pant (a historical character, most beloved by his contemporaries, his main show was about the Great Patriotic War). Suddenly, the lives of those in ETV are interrupted by an alien from Mars, who comes to explore why the characters in a famous children's show (Tipp and Täpp) look similar to the inhabitants of Mars. The alien chooses Mati Tilba as his partner on Earth and lives in his head. When Valdo Pant takes too many pills with alcohol and becomes paralysed, Mati Tilba takes his place and with the help of the alien becomes another beloved figure in TV shows. He then changes his name and becomes Mati Talvik. The latter is also a historical character and a famous leader of TV talkshows, whose most popular years on TV were after Valdo Pant had died.

[17] Some of Vadi's other texts also deal with late Soviet period, e.g. *Human*, *Play* and *Georg* (Vadi 2008).

[18] In the short documentary about making the film, Jaak Kilmi starts his interview with the words: "I was born in 1973. I remember nothing."

[19] For instance, in the interview in the documentary about making the film, Astrid Lepa (born 1924) expressed her disappointment. Other cultural texts dealing with the Soviet period playfully have received similar receptions (e.g. Grünberg 2008).

[20] First Secretary 1950–1978.

[21] First Secretary 1978–1988.

[22] This can be another source of generational distinction. Those who were born earlier and had active working lives during the Soviet period do not reflect this category in their life writing. On the contrary, they rather value their work contribution highly and oppose the notion of little work (see Jõesalu 2005).

[23] It is significant that Urmas presents his working experience in the frame of the Soviet era. Considering his birth date, it should have been at the beginning of the 1990s, in other words, after the Soviet Union had collapsed. This mixing of eras (attributing some traits or events that happened after the Soviet Union to late socialism) can sometimes be seen by other respondents.

[24] During the 1990s, it was quite common in life writing to describe the Soviet period as a cold and dark era. Kiur characterises this period as a dark time in another context in the interview as well: "February 24 of the same year [Independence Day in 1988] was rather dark, you see, it was a very cold day, and then there had been prohibitions and warnings [against attending a public meeting demanding the restoration of the independent Estonian republic]."

[25] Eda had been a promising young painter, Joosep studied theology. They met in a band where Eda was a solo singer and Joosep a dancer. Their affair was broken by Eda's unexpected pregnancy and Joosep's reluctance to accept the decision to have a child. Eda had an abortion and after Joosep was gone, she had an affair for years with a married man. She got pregnant again and gave birth to her son Jakob, making a conscious decision to become a single parent. Her life seemed to have reached a dead end, with a shaky relationship and no steady job (she was gradually loosing her interest in painting). Joosep ended up as a taxi driver as was his father, pondering on his lost life while driving around in the city. While most of the novel is built up in a somewhat pessimistic tone, the last part changes – it offers the reader what looks like a prologue: Eda has given up the idea of becoming an artist and has become a midwife. She helps Joosep and his new wife to give birth to their first child. Eda herself has ended her relationship with the married man and is living together with another member of the band in which she met Joosep. While they both admit to themselves that they had been the only true loves in their lives, they have found a way to their own quiet happiness.

[26] The importance of remembering has been brought up in the reception, too. For instance, Johanna Ross (2010) states that both characters mainly deal with remembering and are yearning for the past.

[27] It is noteworthy, though, that the chapter entitled *Package*, where Joosep's grandfather's story is told, was criticised in its reception, as it seemed to the reviewer to be artificial and not concomitant with the overall tone of the book. The reviewer, Johanna Ross (b. 1985), pointed out: "Actually the book is not missing [--] dark, confusing, secretive and baleful groping in the past, which is brought in, as usual, by elderly generations. While mother's recollections melt organically into the story, the chapter entitled *Package* – grandfather's story on the tape – seems to be a violent and clichéd addition (Ross 2010). The aspect that the author does not depict convincingly the repressive side of the Soviet past (rupture discourse) allows one to speculate that it is not an organic side of the author's identity either.

[28] One of the roles of the KGB was also to guard over 'public order', and graffiti symbolised the Western way of life, which did not fit in the Soviet public space.

[29] Finnish Television here refers to different Finnish channels.

[30] The Night Song Festival is a series of events in which people gather at the Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn and sing patriotic songs throughout the night to show their political commitment.

[31] Estonian and Finnish belong to the Finno-Ugric language group and are similar to a certain extent. Thus, those watching FTV picked up the language by watching TV.

[32] A Finnish children's show.

[33] Before writing the script, the authors made an appeal for recollections about Finnish Television in everyday life, the announcement for which was published in the daily *Postimees* in 2006. See: http://ooper.postimees.ee/100306/esileht/meedia/194508.php.

[34] An allusion to the film *Knight Rider*, in which the main character gave orders to his car via an apparatus fastened to his wrist like a watch.

[35] Andres Keil, the author of the review, also grew up in Õismäe.

[36] The topic of *lost space* did not emerge in Urmas's interview when discussing Tartu. Yet, he described rural space in a somewhat similar manner, talking about times when there was a vivacious social life as opposed to the abandoned rurality of today.

[37] "And so, here's our generation marching in front of the cameras, with paper flowers and Estonian folk costumes." "Here [The Song Festival in 1985] our generation runs to the stage with flowers to Karl Vaino."

[38] A statue that was erected after long discussions in 2009. The draft that won the competition was held by several intellectual circles as too conservative and old fashioned, since it was similarly designed to the statues built in the 1930s, during the right wing dictatorial regime in Estonia. The statue is in the shape of large cross. The four authors of the draft, however, were born in the 1980s.

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.kuutma-seljamaa-vastrik

# MINORITY IDENTITIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RIGHTS IN POST-SOVIET SETTINGS[1]

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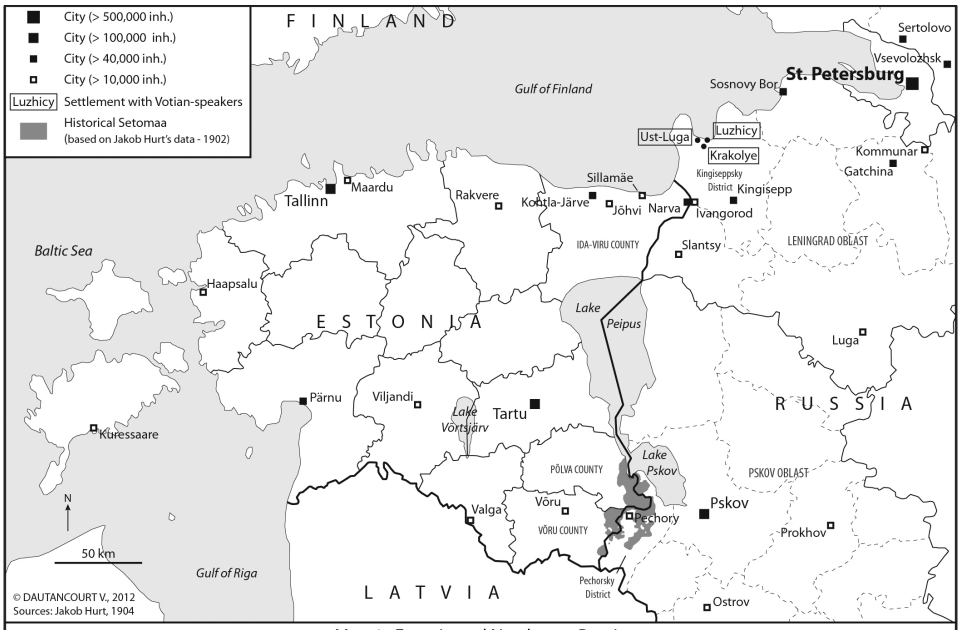
**Abstract:** This article looks at the emergent policies and legal constraints shaping identity constructions within and for minority groups in Estonia and in northwest Russia, in order to investigate the processes of 'minority-building' and emergent state policies through cultural entanglements. The case studies discussed comprise legal regulations and measures for the promotion of minority identities in Estonia with special focus on Estonian Russians, the country's biggest and most diverse minority; the Seto, their cultural heritage construction and the question of intangible rights in the border zone between Estonia and Russia; and the Votians and the process of claiming a minority status in Russia in the context of recent socio-economic developments. These three studies enable us to explore the reverberations of Soviet nationality policy as well as new hybrid policies, strategies and self-conceptions emerging in a particular region. This collaborative article proposes a supplement to the study of identity constructions in the post-Soviet setting of minority-buildings that are inherently interdependent and complementary for understanding the possible developments in this sphere.

**Keywords:** identity construction, minority-building, state policies, cultural heritage, post-Soviet

Social theorist Zygmunt Bauman has stated that identity is "a hopelessly ambiguous idea and a double-edged sword" (Bauman 2004: 76). It is a concept that is hotly contested, being at the same time a socially necessary convention. Identity is inherently related to yearning for (communal) belonging that emerges under the condition of insecurity – it is a struggle against dissolution and fragmentation that "comes to life only in the tumult of battle" (ibid.: 77). The oppositions that battle under the current condition of "liquid modernity"[2] concern the belonging by primordial assignment and belonging by choice. In the following analysis of the identity battles in two contemporary post-Soviet states we do not consider the former belonging as a given one, but rather detect the enabling moments for the latter in the framework of collective interaction with the state.

The current article proposes to look at the emergent policies and legal constraints shaping identity constructions within and for minority groups in Estonia and in northwest Russia. Our aim is to analyse these issues from particular perspectives that illuminate the processes of 'minority-building' in that geo-political region, while observing these developments through the lens of 'culture' when analysing state policies. We discuss here three case studies: legal regulations and measures for the promotion of minority identities in Estonia with special focus on Estonian Russians, the country's biggest and most diverse minority; the Seto, their cultural heritage construction and the question of intangible rights in the border zone between Estonia and Russia; the Votians and the process of claiming a minority status in Russia in the context of recent socio-economic developments. Thus, the following analysis does not intend to cover all details or varieties of minority construction in Russia, but focuses more on Estonia and the related border-region or the 'imagined' outreach defined by language and cultural affinities. Moreover, case studies selected for this article enable us to explore the reverberations of Soviet nationality policy as well as new hybrid policies, strategies and self-conceptions emerging in diverse, yet interconnected post-Soviet settings. The current collaborative article pulls together research results of three different projects[3], but we hope that our juxtaposing analysis sheds additional light on emerging dovetailing issues that allow a broadening of the insight into the construction of minority identities in this particular region, when taking into account the geopolitical and historical circumstance at hand. Even if these three cases may appear incommensurable in proportion and political significance, they nevertheless all add important nuances to the comprehensive picture of the post-Soviet setting of minority-building that is inherently interdependent and complementary for understanding the possible developments in this sphere.

It could be argued that the prevailing understanding of nationality/ethnicity in the region under scrutiny in our contribution has its historical roots in the specifics of Soviet nationalities policy as well as the preceding imperial "institutionalisations of difference" (Werth 2009), but it is also supported by the more general ideology of nationalism that imagines the 'naturalness' of nations (cf. Handler 1994). The Soviet approach distanced itself from earlier imperial confessional categorisations of the population and focused on ethnicity or descent, equating it with nationality, culture and language, and the idea of an 'ethnic homeland'. This conception of bounded ethnic/national groups has inevitably shaped both the majority and minority understandings of the *Self* and the *Other* in Estonia as well as in Russia. While the state creates material and political incentives for minorities to become organised around their language and cultural heritage, this very means of claim-making simultaneously



Map 1 : Estonia and Northwest Russia

restricts minorities' abilities to participate in political processes and, furthermore, secures the position of the state-bearing ethnic/national groups. Minority policies and legislations in Estonia today are, for the most part, targeted at Russians and seek to define their place within the Estonian society, which simultaneously complicates the position of other (emergent) minorities like the Seto. The position of the latter finds particular significance in the question of national borders with Russia, an issue that continues to be unresolved two decades into independence, yet both the Seto and the Votians remain relatively marginal from the perspective of the Estonian and Russian state, respectively.

According to Giorgio Agamben, the nation state makes "nativity or birth […] the foundation of its own sovereignty" (cf. Agamben 2000: 20). But while demanding cohesiveness, national identity empowers itself by drawing and policing boundaries between 'us' and 'them', whereas other, 'smaller' identities need to seek endorsement from state-authorised institutions that confirm the superiority of 'national identity' (Bauman 2004: 22). The current study looks at the emergent interactions with the state in the context of identity construction: does the state incite a dialogue, or does it impose its own monologue; does the state insist upon, or create, or preclude a public representational partner.

Therefore the following three analyses investigate the models for communication or contestation of identity employed in relationship with the state: the

role of institutional representation, the question of cultural autonomy (and its historical baggage), and the creation of spaces where different minority identities can be created, recreated, displayed and negotiated by means of various kinds of performances. The question of language cuts through these case studies, whereas its significance as an identity marker appears to be different for different agents in the region.

## SOVIET NATIONALITIES POLICY: PROMOTION AND SUPPRESSION OF DIFFERENCE

The dissolution of the Soviet Union along ethnic lines and the preceding emergence of nationalist movements in many parts of the Eastern Bloc drew scholars' attention to ways in which the Soviet regime had boosted self-understandings grounded in ethnicity (e.g. Slezkine 1994a; Brubaker 1996) or oscillated continuously between promoting ethnic identities and encouraging assimilation (Gorenburg 2006; see also Simonsen 1999 and Blitstein 2006). Yet both approaches agree that Soviet nationalities policy, stemming from particular Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideas about ethnic groups and processes, represented a curious mixture of and tension between celebration and suppression of ethnic particularities. Moreover, it took shape in close and long-term cooperation between scholars and policymakers (e.g. Slezkine 1994b; Hirsch 2005).

The Soviet nationalities policy[4] came to regard *ethnoses* as communities of people established historically on a given territory and characterised by relatively steady shared cultural features, language, and psychological traits, as well as by an ethnic self-consciousness expressed in the practices of self-naming. This meant that membership of an ethnos was based on descent while borders between ethnoses were imagined to be real and essentially territorial, containing entities that had an objective reality to them. The term *nationality* (*natsional'nost*) resembled that of *ethnos* for both words signified ethnic affiliation and were used to distinguish ethnic communities from each other. From 1932 onward, each individual was assigned an official nationality, recorded in one's internal passport – the so-called "fifth line" – and became part of the person's legal status, shaping both education and career prospects (Simonsen 1999).[5] *A nation*, in turn, was regarded as the main type of ethnic community at the stage of capitalism and socialism, but would arguably cease to exist, as socialism would be transformed into communism. According to Stalin's influential definition, a nation was "a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up

manifested in a community of culture" (cited and discussed in Slezkine 1994a: 415–416).

In the 1920s-30s in particular, Soviet ethnographers collaborated with the country's leaders to identify ethnic groups, decide over their territory as well as status within the ethno-federalist system (worthy of a union republic, autonomous republic or a smaller autonomous district) (Hirsch 2005). During this period of indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*), the communist party used ethno-territorial recognition, promotion of native officials and the boosting of native literary languages in an effort to facilitate the modernisation of groups deemed to be backward, which in turn was expected to speed up the revolutionary process. However, the indigenisation policy did not concern all ethnic groups of the former Russian Empire. For example, several minority groups (including the Votians) were regarded too marginal for independent agency in this process, being united with bigger, linguistically close groups. Thus this policy entailed favouring some groups at the expense of suppressing or even not recognising others. Yet, these nation-building policies came to a rather abrupt end in the mid-1930s, when Soviet policies shifted towards creating the homogeneity needed for the functioning and development of a modern society (cf. Blitstein 2006: 290). In practice, this meant increasing the role of the Russian language and that of Russians: pushed into the background during the indigenisation campaign, they were now trusted with the omnipresent and transparent status of representatives of modernity. However, though this modernisation arguably went beyond nationality and ethnic particularities, in many cases it was perceived as Russificiation by the objects of these policies. Gorenburg argues that despite shifts over time in one direction or another, affirmative action like native language education went hand in hand with the promotion of Russian as the language of interethnic communication, which contributed to processes of linguistic assimilation and reidentification as well as ethnic reidentification (Gorenburg 2006: 276–277).

## DISCOURSES OF INCLUSIVITY AND EXCLUSIVITY IN POST-SOVIET ESTONIA

In the Estonian SSR, this oscillation between particularisation and homogenisation contributed to the division of the permanent population and society into Estonians and Russian-speakers. While the system of ethno-federalism nurtured Estonians' sense of Estonia as a country of and for the Estonian nationality, this sense of ownership was undermined by a constant in- and outflow of immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union.[6] As a result, Estonia's ethnic

composition and population underwent drastic changes during the Soviet era: while the 1934 census recorded 51 national groups, the last Soviet census in 1989 registered 121 nationalities; the population was up from 1.12 million to 1.56 million (Hallik 2010: 9). Individuals of various nationalities from other parts of the Soviet Union, who settled in Estonia, were usually integrated into the Russian-language societal culture that had come to existence after the war and paralleled cultural, educational and other institutions operated in Estonian, the language of the titular nationality. There was also an ethno-linguistic division of labour, linked to settlement patterns with Estonians prevailing in the agricultural countryside and Russians and Russian-speakers in the north-eastern industrial region.

Hence, the permanent population of the Estonian SSR was multinational, but first and foremost Estonian and Russian or Russian-speaking. This same division lingers on twenty years into independence, attesting to the formative impact of Soviet nationalities policy on imagining and managing ethnicities, nations, majorities and minorities in post-Soviet settings. While under Soviet conditions the fate of the Estonian language became equated with that of the Estonian nation, language has since been further intertwined with statehood to the point that according to the preamble of the Estonian constitution, the very *raison d'être* of the Republic of Estonia is to grant the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture through ages (Constitution of the Republic of Estonia). Who counts as a member of this nation is, however, highly contestable. Estonia's population is currently 1.34 million, of which self-identifying Estonians comprise 69% (924,600), Russians 25% (335,000), Ukrainians 2% (26,800), and Belarusians 1% (13,400). The remaining 2% of the population (26,800) includes representatives of at least 117 nationalities since the Estonian state presents itself as a home to over 120 nationalities.[7]

This discourse of multiplicity and inclusivity stands in stark contrast with the daily division of society into Estonians and Russian-speakers, a term that is immensely multi-layered and hence difficult to pin down. The rationale behind it is to acknowledge that not everybody who speaks Russian is ethnically Russian, i.e., of Russian descent. At the same time it serves as a synonym for 'non-Estonian', lumping as it does all Estonia's ethno-linguistic *Others* together. By doing this, the term 'Russian-speaker' recreates and maintains the language-based division of society and, moreover, downplays and conceals the fact that the vast majority of Russian-speakers would in fact define themselves as ethnic Russians. It also suggests that language is an ethnic trait, not about communication but being: because 'Estonian' is an ethnonym, Russian-speakers remain Russian-speakers even after they become citizens of Estonia and even if they are fluent in Estonian. As such, 'Russian-speaker' comes across as an

imagined *Other* of the Estonian majority, which is not to say that it lacks empirical content or validity altogether. Rather, as will be argued below, it is a category for othering that can be operationalised and hence summons what it claims to be describing.

Moreover, representing Estonia as a home to over 120 nationalities tends to be confined to festive occasions showcasing Estonian statehood and democratic traditions.[8] When Estonia reclaimed independence in 1991 as the legal successor of the pre-war Republic of Estonia, it restricted its *demos* to rightful citizens or individuals who had been or were descended from pre-war citizens of Estonia.[9] While this *jus sanguinis* approach to citizenship itself was not tied to ethnicity, it had the effect of excluding the majority of Soviet-era settlers and their descendants, who towards the end of the Soviet era constituted one third of Estonia's population of 1.56 million (Sakkeus 1999: 322). Another significant outcome of legal restorationism for minorities was that it enabled in 1993 a return to the 1925 Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities, which was initiated by Baltic-German parliamentarians and was, indeed, innovative for its time. Though the majority politicians and representatives of minorities alike use the existence of the Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities (*Rahvusvähemuste kultuurautonoomia seadus*) to emphasise Estonia's democratic traditions and make claims of various kinds, it is not fully functional and, given that it has been around for nearly two decades already, is presumably not intended to be 'in working order'. However, like any facade, it does important work. In connection with Estonian Russians, it is significant that the law provides a legal basis for distinguishing between historical or indigenous 'national minorities' (Russians, Jews, Germans, Swedes) and minority individuals who lack "longstanding, firm and lasting ties with Estonia". Individual Russians living in Estonia could fall into either category, Old Believers representing the one extreme and Soviet-era immigrants with undetermined citizenship the other. While different representatives of Russians in Estonia have twice tried to apply for a right to start the process required to establish the status of cultural autonomy, the Ministry of Culture rejected both of them after consulting selected Russian cultural organisations, claiming that the applicants were not representatives of Estonian Russians as a community. This illustrates how the Law on Cultural Autonomy allows the state to strategically bestow representative authority on selected minority organisations in order to deny greater autonomy to the minority as a whole.

## ESTONIAN INTEGRATION POLICY: IDENTITIES PRESERVED AND MADE

The national integration policy formulated in the late 1990s and implemented since 2000[10] seeks to tie these different fears, aspirations and expectations together through an approach, which similarly to Soviet nationalities policy combines homogenisation or unification (citizenship, Estonian language) with the celebration of ethnic/national differences. First, Estonian integration policy seeks to support the unification of the public sphere on the basis of the Estonian language and citizenship *as well as* the maintenance of ethnic differences in the private sphere by providing minorities with means to develop and preserve their ethnic cultures. Second, it claims that only Estonians as the majority have the right to a societal culture operated in their native language and that the relationship of the Estonian culture to the state is qualitatively different from that of minority cultures. Group rights of the minorities are restricted to cultural rights, meaning that "opportunities have been created for ethnic minorities and for new immigrants living in Estonia to learn their mother tongue and culture, practice their culture, and preserve and present their ethno-linguistic identity".[11]

It could therefore be argued that the Estonian integration policy operates with different, even contradictory notions of identity: belonging by virtue of descent and choice. The state identity is regarded in social constructivist terms as a project of becoming for it needs to be strengthened, developed, reinforced and in some cases (Mätlik 2008: 11) it is admitted to be something that still needs to emerge and take shape. Ethnic belonging, on the other hand, is taken for granted and treated as something that is always there, preceding the individual, who is born into a national category. According to this view, the population consists of a specific number of ethnic groups, all of which correspond to more or less the same criteria: language, culture, ethnic homeland. This dual approach evokes parallels with Soviet nationalities policy and brings to mind nationalist notions of nations "as natural objects or things in the real world" (Handler 1994: 29). This shows, furthermore, how minority and majority identities are constituted mutually, as the entitativity and abundance of minority groups in Estonia supports claims for the distinctiveness of Estonian national identity and *vice versa*.

Rather than merely providing minorities with the means to *preserve* and *develop* their language and culture, the post-Soviet Estonian state has invested in *minority-building*. There are currently over 300 cultural societies and other organisations of different ethnic nationalities, including over 60 organisations that claim to represent Russians in Estonia. While their stated goal is usually to preserve, develop and represent a particular national culture in Estonia and

thereby contribute to integration in Estonia, most of them could be described as dance or music ensembles, choirs or amateur theatres targeted at particular age groups.[12] Most of them also receive funding from the Ministry of Culture, for which they have to apply on a regular basis. This strategy for institutionalising minority identities is based on the idea of pre-existing subjects and reinforces notions that equate ethnicity with inherited nationality, language and selected cultural traits. The strategy also encourages and relies on individual ethnic entrepreneurship, which raises important questions regarding one's authority to speak on behalf of a whole nationality as well as regarding the power of the state to pick its partners.

Perhaps most importantly, this system determines the rules and criteria that individuals self-identifying with particular descent have to comply with in order to qualify for and receive official recognition as an ethnic minority. By setting the standards for acceptable minority identities, the state simultaneously assigns a particular role to non-Estonians within Estonian society and restricts their activities to the private sphere. In this way the state frames minorities as collective bearers of inherited national cultures and discourages them from becoming organised around socio-political issues or making claims that would contradict the state's nationalising policies. While this privatisation of ethnicity has no implications on most ethnic groups in Estonia, it restricts the claim-making opportunities of Russians and Russian-speakers. A striking example of this is the reform of Russian-language secondary education in Estonia, as a result of which 60% of subjects are to be taught in Estonian by the autumn of 2012. According to a nationalist reading of the bilingual school system, sending non-Russian children to a Russian school amounts to Russification and is thus condemnable, while schools with Estonian as the language of instruction are neutral to the extent that Estonian is the state language.

Estonia's strategic choice to balance the boosting of similarity and difference confirms the point made by Craig Calhoun that instead of treating essentialism and constructionism as opposites, it is "important to see a field for possible strategies for confronting issues of identity" (Calhoun 1994: 17). Moreover, the renewed popularity of the Soviet Victory Day among Russians and Russian-speakers in Tallinn suggests that identification processes are in fundamental ways beyond the control of state-funded programmes and policies. The visibility of May 9th celebrations in the capital started to grow around 2005, which is also when Russia restored its tradition of grand Victory Day military parades on the Red Square in Moscow. While it would be easy to frame the commemoration of Victory Day in post-Soviet Estonia as an expression of loyalty to Russia or nostalgia for the Soviet era, such an interpretation would comply with the nationalist definition of culture that denies the minorities' public participation

in society as well as coevalness with their Estonian fellow countrywomen and -men. Many inhabitants of Tallinn, who protested against the relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument in spring 2007, protested against the *way* it was done rather than the decision to move it to a cemetery. This meant that they also protested against the way they were being treated and communicated within their own home country or country of permanent residency.

The moving of the monument to the cemetery of defence forces has opened up a new space where different minority identities in Estonia, Russian-speaker being one of them, can be created, recreated, displayed and negotiated by means of various kinds of performances. Victory Day in particular brings people together at regular intervals to carry out specific practices that have acquired a recognisable and repeatable form over the last years: community emerges, as Dorothy Noyes has put it, from re-enactment, formalisation and consensus (Noyes 1995). There are, no doubt, actors who use Victory Day celebrations to pursue their own political agenda or that of particular political forces in Russia, but these, too, are strategies for confronting identities and their outcomes emergent rather than predetermined.

## CONSTRUCTIONS OF SETO IDENTITY AND RIGHTS

The current study addresses inherently the issue of constructing rights, rights to identity and rights to culture. If in the case of Estonian Russians the state is decisively involved in the process of 'minority-building' (and privatisation of ethnicity) in the framework of a state-driven integration agenda, then the Seto case presents the process of 'minority-building' driven from within, in the format of a public claim for separate/distinct ethnic identity.

At the same time Seto identity politics and the performance of Seto identity actively recognises the significance of the cultural aspect; it is instrumental in their claim for and performance of difference inside the nation state. Cultural identities are produced in a wider discourse of political rights; they manifest a reaction to the political and administrative authority of homogenisation of the nation state. The community's self-representational ideals reflect how people situate and establish themselves in a wider global context, but also the state politics of heritage management. Cultural heritage is a seminal element in signifying difference, its construction and identification is always an act of politics and power, depending on who defines it, and who is in control of conceptualising its stewardship. On the other hand, when regarding the perspective of the state, the implementation of the framework of 'culture' stands out as a prominent preference. 'Culture' is endorsed at the state level for its capacity to

provide a relief in potential conflict situations; as pointed out by Anna Tsing, it serves the state as an alternative to politics that might complicate the state's authority (cf. Tsing 1993).

The Seto are a small ethnic group of roughly 8–10,000 inhabiting the border zone between southeast Estonia and northwest Russia. Their identity construction emanates from a combination of versatile liminalities, rising from the geographical placement. Today most of the Seto live in Estonia, but the Seto region (Setomaa) is divided between Võru and Põlva counties of southeast Estonia, and the Pechorsky administrative district of northwest Russia. The social and political changes of the 20th century have caused the Seto to move outside their historic region, mainly to cities. A complex interplay of continuous social and political marginalisation on the one hand, and an active idolisation of Seto cultural heritage on the other, define their cultural expression. Those powerful external constraints have produced significant internal response, revealed in the sentient traditionalisation of Seto culture, which empowers particular groups, rhetoric and interests. In Estonia, the Seto have functioned for about a century as the imaginary 'cultural reservoir' of pre-industrial practices and lifestyles, nurtured by the interaction of ethnographic research with heritage production and cultural policy making, with discursive impact on local communities and their cultural expression.

The construction of Seto ethnic identity reverberates the different phases of the Estonian nation state ambivalently through the past century. Based on the scholarly research of linguistic ties, which was also prominent in the late-nineteenth-century Estonian nation-building process, the Seto claim individual Finno-Ugric descent.[13] Though today they carry a two-dimensional Seto-Estonian identity (cf. Jääts 1998), their 'Setoness' becomes manifest in their usage of the Seto language[14], their skills in and understanding of the traditional singing style, their maintenance of communal and family traditions, and the veneration of their passed ancestors. Their cultural practices defined by rural lifestyle stem from communal land farming and the Russian Orthodox Church, which contrasts to the farming methods and predominant Protestant Lutheranism in Estonia, at least from the historical perspective. Their present social status considered, the Seto seem to be integrated into the general prevailing Estonian framework, although their territorial and sociopolitical integration with Estonia (and foreseeable enculturation) took effect only in the 1920s.[15] The linguistic and cultural historians of the time found fascination with their distinct cultural expression, whereas the Seto remained at the same time stigmatised by their primitive communal farming and alien Orthodox religious practices, recreational customs or prevalent illiteracy in the eyes of the general public. On the other hand, they inhabited the border region

with Russia, which deemed the integration of this region to the overall framework of the Republic of Estonia as a task of acute political interest. At the time, the question of cultural autonomy did not arise at all, due to the marginal and stigmatised status of the Seto, as well as their total lack of individual agency in the national framework.

Following World War II, political circumstances changed for the Seto along with the rest of Estonia under the Soviet regime, although their marginalisation, assimilation, and celebration found its extremes at different times due to the circumstances of ongoing modernisation and urbanisation (Hagu 1999; Jääts 1998). The political situation of the dismantling of the Soviet Union and of reclaiming independent Estonia eventually severed the Seto region between separate states by the gradually established political border of the 1990s.[16] Since part of the Seto district has been officially annexed to Russia – which leaves Petseri[17], the historical centre of the region, inaccessible behind the border – the painful constraints of the mainstream *realpolitik* made the Seto increasingly conscious of their regional, historical and cultural identity (cf. Jääts 1998; V. Sarv 1997; Raun 1991). The Seto are Estonian citizens, but have declared through their local representative body of the Seto Congress that they are "first and foremost Seto" (VI Seto Kongress). In the context of the Seto movement[18] and in its struggle for outside socio-political recognition and cultural survival, all distinct elements of Seto heritage have gained vital importance.

## POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS OF MINORITY BUILDING

In escalated efforts to emend and reinstate the political border between Estonia and Russia, the Seto remained demoted as political objects in state politics. However, through that aggravating process they arose as political subjects, observant of their individual regional and cultural agendas (cf. Hagu 1995; Õ. Sarv 1997). In 1993, the Seto convened a representative body, the Third Seto Congress[19], to voice their rights and interests, and address the disruption of, and communication with, that part of Setomaa that remained on the other side of the concretely materialising border. The congress resolution document stipulated that "[a] treaty should be concluded between the Republic of Estonia and the Russian Federation on the issue of protection of economic, cultural, religious and political rights of the indigenous population [of Setomaa]" (Seto Kongress 1994: 121). Separate resolutions were also adopted concerning the rights of the Seto language, culture, and education (ibid.: 124–125). This representative organisation of the local and diaspora Seto communities holds the highest advisory power on Seto matters, and elects an executive body, the Board

of Elders. Although they have no independent political position in the nation state framework, the government has recognised their representative capacity at certain moments. For example, when a group of Seto activists with political merit[20] sought a legislative act to attain cultural autonomy, the Ministry of Culture required a relevant decision from the Seto Congress. This body has not reached a consensus yet on the matter, but has adopted resolutions on founding the Seto National Park. Actually, for the political activists of the Seto community, the decision on how or to what extent they should or could declare their distinct identity in the public sphere and political arena has been neither easy nor unanimous; this is an issue of constant contestation, negotiation and debate.

In 2000, the census of the Republic of Estonia denied the Seto the right that they had campaigned for – to register separately. This eventually found a resolution at the Sixth Seto Congress, in 2002, which proclaimed the Seto a separate people, 'a nation' (see Õ. Sarv 2008). This declaration stated that the Seto are an indigenous people who have lived in their lands since "time immemorial", without ever being aggressive towards their neighbours, nor do they seek trouble in the future: "The Seto expect all other nations to acknowledge the Seto right to live as a nation in their indigenous homeland and to speak their own language." (VI Seto Kongress) Despite the prevailing denouncement of extremist claims, the most painful problem continues to be the severance of their historical region by the establishment of the political border in 1994, which meant cutting off families on both sides, denial of access to land ownership, visa restrictions for visiting the capital of Petseri, or the adjacent Seto graveyards. The recent Seto Congresses have considered it "treacherous" to accept the political demarcation line set by the Russian Federation (e.g. Vananurm 2002: 139), and declare it the basis for the violation of human rights.[21] The Ninth Seto Congress, in 2008, made an official appeal to the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia to denunciate the current Border Treaty, which violates the property rights and human rights of the Seto: "The citizens of the Republic of Estonia are denied free access to and movement in their indigenous home." (Seto Kongress)

Russia, in turn, has taken a different course of action. Even though the number of the resident population of Seto origin in the present borders of the Russian Federation is remarkably small (a few hundred), the Seto were officially registered as a numerically small indigenous people in Russia in 2010. Though understandably marginal, the Seto ethnicity functions as a player (or rather pawn) to serve the cause of a more sophisticated international politics.

The border problem indicates how national development, economic and political interests overrule local concerns and human rights. The Estonian state does not register the Seto as a separate ethnic group,[22] though their indigenous

cultural interests are recognised to a certain extent. Because of the political complications in the 1990s, and due to active Seto lobbying[23], the government established a separate commission to address "the Seto problems" in 1996 and launched a programme of Setomaa Regional Development, mainly engaged with economic issues. There is a similar state-funded programme for culture, the Setumaa Cultural Programme, initiated in 2003 as "a national programme aiming to support the cultural activity of Setu people, who have a unique language and cultural heritage and live in four parishes of southeast Estonia" (State programmes). It is basically a funding project, operated from the Ministry of Culture with the help of a board that comprises, however, only four representatives from Setomaa out of its ten members. The issue of cultural autonomy remains on the agenda, though debated. This is tacitly related to territorial unification and cooperation, officially in the confines of the nation state, but with an aspiration to transform the violation of Seto rights for cultural selfhood. At the moment, the Seto region of four Seto municipalities is divided between two administrative units in southeast Estonia that are governed by non-Seto centres and neighbours. In order to further, and manage, Seto matters, a local cooperative NGO, the Union of Setomaa Rural Municipalities (*Setomaa Valdade Liit*) was founded in 2005. For the activists of this grassroots organisation, the questions of cultural autonomy and the setting up of a national park remain a top priority (cf. Timmo 2006; Hõrn & Alumäe 2004). Even though this organisation performs the important task of facilitating collaboration for the Seto across administrative borders[24] and furthering local culture, they often remain neglected in areas where state interests are concerned. For example, the Seto advocate native-language classes and protest against planned administrative reform, which, for economic reasons, plans to ignore the Seto requests to form a unified Seto administrative region.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL RIGHTS

In the last decade, the Seto have developed significant cultural and political activism, seeking an outlet at both national and international levels with the intention of providing means and support for the advancement of autonomous recognition: firstly, particularly via the Finno-Ugrian affiliation and the Finno-Ugrian World Congress, and, secondly, the UNESCO programmes on state-level policies regarding intangible cultural heritage. In the context of international recognition, Finno-Ugrian affiliation appears to be of particular significance. The Seto participate in a regional grassroots organisation, the Finno-Ugrian World Congress, where they have a separate delegation of representatives alongside

the Estonian delegation. The World Congress is the representative body of Finno-Ugric peoples, established in 1992, and the Seto seek full membership in their Consultative Committee[25]. Finno-Ugrian affiliation is important and instrumental for the Seto in their perception of cultural selfhood and management of cultural politics. This is inherently connected with the constant configuration of identity for a community that needs to define its fleeting selfhood, related to the cultural framework and the problematising of cultural rights in the multidimensional identification process. This is signified by the frequently voiced question "who are we" (*kiä' mi' olõ?*), to position the Seto identity in Estonian, European, and Finno-Ugric cultural space (see M. Sarv 2009). In addition to this, the Seto have employed UNESCO programmes, particularly on state-level policies, which relate to intangible cultural heritage. Their first initiative was to gain acknowledgement as a national park or culture-nature reserve under UNESCO protection (see Rahvuspark). Later they launched a more successful project in the framework of intangible cultural heritage to secure legal commitment and safeguarding from the Estonian state. With the determined objective of gaining national and international acknowledgement, the Seto community leaders took action to define and promote their intangible cultural heritage in correspondence within the UNESCO guidelines (cf. Kuutma 2009). Cultural heritage functions for the Seto as an operational asset in negotiating affirmative action at the state level, while activities that identify viable elements of cultural practice for the survival of Seto heritage have found celebratory recognition in the UNESCO framework. This selective public acknowledgement of cultural practices affects local Seto politicians, especially when they argue with the state – and particularly at the regional (non-Seto) administrative level – that UNESCO recognition renders them authority to demand a unified Seto district.

The Seto in this study represent an identity construction defined by language, lifestyle and religious practices, while the constraints of the border zone have developed their regional, historical and cultural identity into demands for political ethnic recognition. For the Seto as a community, cultural rights appear to take precedence in the public contestation of human rights. Although the border region constraints are painful, the public dispute over political rights has given priority to cultural issues. They have endorsed cultural politics to achieve resolution in the ongoing marginalisation, while their historical experience does not favour demands for political rights.

## VOTIANS: A PROBLEMATIC CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Another case of 'minority building' driven from within is revealed when analysing recent processes related to institutionalisation of cultural rights and (re)construction of ethnic identity among the Votians, a Finno-Ugric minority group[26] in northwest Russia, Leningrad Oblast, close to the Estonian-Russian border. The present-day socio-political situation in Russia provides certain prescribed forms for cultural activism under state control. The Votian case illuminates the endeavours of a marginalised minority group to achieve recognition under heavy pressure of economic development in their indigenous territory.

Although today one of the marginalised minority groups of northwest Russia, researchers have regarded the Votians as the oldest known indigenous group of the region. As a distinct tribe the Votians appeared in the arena of written history in the 11th century AD, apparently giving their name to one of the administrative units of the former Novgorod Republic (see Kirkinen 1991), which has allowed researchers to see the Votians as more important players in medieval regional politics than indicated by their current situation. Their language, beliefs and customs have been studied since the scholarly community of early ethnographers, linguists and geographers discovered this minority group at the end of the 18th century. The Votians have particularly attracted the attention of Finnish and Estonian researchers, who searched for aspects of past culture they presumed to have disappeared in their home countries but were still observable among kindred peoples. Therefore Votian folk culture, like that of the Seto, has for researchers served as a window to peep into the ancient past of the 'more developed' peoples (cf. Anttonen 2005: 172–175). There is also another side to this coin: systematic fieldtrips of Estonian linguists and folklorists to Votian villages since World War II have ultimately supported Votian self-identification as a separate ethnic group.

Similarly to the Setos, rural lifestyles and the Russian Orthodox Church defined the folk culture of the Votians. Their sources of livelihood were based on communal land farming and cattle breeding, which in coastal areas was combined with collective fishing, ship-building and navigation (cf. Talve 1981). It was St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, which provided the Votians with new possibilities of livelihood related to marine trade and transportation. The vicinity of the metropolis, however, eased assimilation, which went hand in hand with modernisation. Marginalisation was accelerated during the Soviet era when the Votians were not listed as subjects of the indigenisation policy. The cataclysms of World War II brought mass deportations to Finland and to various regions of the Soviet Union (cf. Markus & Rozhanskiy 2011: 15–16). During

the post-war period inhabitants of the region had to give up their traditional means of livelihood because of restrictions in the border zone. The territory of former Votian villages was gradually depopulated and only the developments related to the construction of the Ust-Luga multifunctional seaport since the early 1990s have brought new investments and jobs to the region.

Numeric data about the Votians date back to the middle of the 19th century demography statistics, which counted 5,184 Votians in 37 villages in St. Petersburg Province (Oranienbaum and Yamburg uyezds), where they lived together with Ingrians[27], Finns and Russians (von Köppen 1867). The "ethnographic groups" described were perceived as bounded entities that can be divided into indigenous groups, formed in a certain period, and migrant groups who reached the region later (cf. Handler 1994: 29). Nevertheless, P. von Köppen's listings reveal that most of these villages had mixed populations, whereas later data about inter-ethnic marriages indicate that borders between the Votians and the others were not hermetic. There are descriptions from the early 20th century according to which inhabitants of those villages rarely identified themselves as Votians, but often labelled themselves willingly as Ingrians (relying on their non-Russian language) or Russians (according to the common Orthodox creed), when asked (cf. Tsvetkov 2009).

The ethnic history of the Votians can be described as the story of marginalisation, where socio-economic circumstances have supported assimilation with majority groups. In the context of Soviet indigenisation policies of the 1920s-30s, the Votians requirement for a literary language and an autonomous territory of their own was considered marginal. For a short period of time Votian children were partly taught in Ingrian, which evidently raised the status of the Ingrian language in the local multilingual environment (cf. Markus & Rozhanskiy 2011: 14). From 1926 the Votes were excluded from the Soviet censuses as an autonomous ethnicity, while their domestic passports inscribed them either as "Russian" or "Ingrian" (*izhor*).

All later statistics and researchers' estimations of the numbers of Votians have indicated a continuous decrease in population (e.g. Ernits 1996). This has not meant so much physical extermination or deportations but the process of assimilation, because those who earlier identified themselves as Votian have voluntarily ceased to do so by taking over other identifications that are more prestigious or convenient. Their stigmatisation after World War II led even to conscious concealment and repudiation of their ethnic origin. Parents ceased to teach their native language to children, which meant that the use of Votian gradually diminished, and in the early 1990s the community of Votian speakers consisted of a few dozen elderly people in three villages (cf. Heinsoo 1992).

## ETHNIC REVIVAL AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF IDENTITY

Despite these processes of ethnic and linguistic re-identification, in the late 1990s a Votian ethnic revival emerged in Luzhicy (Luutsa), one of the last villages where Votian was spoken as the vernacular language. The revival manifested itself in various cultural activities including, for example, the foundation of a grassroots Votian Museum, revitalisation of local village feasts as the foremost manifestation of ethnic revival and performance of identity, presentation of the Votian national flag, coat of arms and anthem, launch of Internet homepages dedicated to 'Votian affairs', and the publication of a small-scale local newspaper (cf. Västrik & Võsu 2010; Heinsoo & Kuusk 2011). The museum and the village feast have mobilised a group of cultural activists from nearby urban centres as well as from the village. These people, altogether 15–20 in number, come from diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds. Some of them have Votian roots, but only few of them have the (passive) knowledge of Votian, which means that the common language of communication within the group is Russian. Notwithstanding this, the vernacular language has an important symbolic meaning in this revival. For example, a children's folklore group from the Krakolye Basic School has performed songs and poems in Votian in the programme of the Luzhicy village feast, and classes in native language and cultural history were organised at the local school for some years.

A small number of ethnic activists have tried to rehabilitate this voiceless, repressed and unacknowledged minority group by taking the initiative and proposing various cultural activities. They have contested the official representation of history in regional museums and promoted their own alternative interpretations of Votian cultural heritage, opposed to the non-recognition policy of the state. In a decade the activists have considerably advanced the Votian identity of their fellow villagers, changed the general attitude towards their (parents') legacy and achieved the (re)introduction of the Votian ethnonym. Votians also reappeared as an autonomous ethnicity in the pan-Russian census in 2002, when actually no more than 73 people declared themselves as belonging to this ethnic group (Perepis 2002).[28]

Since 2005 the activities of the revival movement have been channelled through the Society of Votian Culture NGO. One of the society's most recent efforts was the process of claiming status among 'numerically small indigenous peoples' (*korennye malochislennye narody*) for the Votians. This status was introduced by Federal Law in 2000, in order to support minorities with a population of less than 50,000 in the Russian North, Siberia and Far East who "live in the traditional territory of their ancestors and maintain their traditional

lifestyle, management and trade" (see Federal'nyi zakon 2000). The Votians were inserted into this list in October 2008, after a proposal articulated by the authorities of Leningrad oblast.

The upsurge of Votian ethnic identity in the mid-1990s can be seen as a reaction to the rapid changes in the economic infrastructure of the region. Ethnic revival coincided with endeavours to construct a multipurpose merchant seaport of Ust-Luga next to Luzhicy village. Construction work started in 1995 and since then seven colossal terminals have been opened, providing jobs for more than 2,000 people. According to the official construction plan publicised in November 2007, the intention was to replace the small villages of Krakolye and Luzhicy (altogether ca. 250 permanent inhabitants) with a modern town of 35,000 future port workers and their families. This project created severe protest among the local inhabitants and Russian academic institutions, who underlined the prospective negative effect on the self-esteem of the Votians, their community and heritage (MariUver 2008). For example, in the meeting with the local administration on November 12, 2007, representatives of the Society of Votian Culture pointed out that the construction of the new town would endanger the "last compact territory of the Votians with their heritage sites and natural environment" (Kuznecova 2008: 3). At the meeting with the representatives of the seaport, the society proposed the idea of creating "a historical-ethnographic reserve (an ecological park)", which would "allow the persistence of the Votians henceforward" (ibid.).

After this meeting the representatives of the port affirmed that houses in Luzhicy and Krakolye villages would not be removed and, even more, the architecture of the future town would introduce "elements of Ingrian and Votian culture that would give to the new town an original touch" (AllNW 2008). The spokesperson of the seaport confirmed the plan to construct a museum of local history in the future port workers' town. In the same press release, however, the director of the Ust-Luga Company questioned the very existence of the Votians as a distinct ethnic group, announcing that they do not have official status in the list of indigenous peoples of Russia, and claiming: "Thus, *de jure,* such a minority does not exist." (ibid.)

The Votian activists in turn sought help on the issue from academics and managed by March 2008 to secure official certifications from three top institutions in Moscow and St. Petersburg (the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Museum of Ethnography, and the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; see Prilozhenie 2008). These letters, signed by the highest administrative authorities, proved the existence of the Votians as a distinct ethnic group and testified to the research on them by Russian scholars. The Society of Votian Culture forwarded the confirmation

letters to the provincial government from where these were addressed to the Government of the Russian Federation. As a result, on October 13, 2008, the President of Russia granted the Votians the official status of a 'small indigenous people' by decree (Postanovleniye 2008).

Thus we may contend that in the case of the Votians, the process of ethnic and cultural identification has been related to the recognition of threats from outside. This development reflects citizen activism in redefining heritage, which should be seen in the wider context of ethnic revival in the Russian Federation (see Shabaev & Sharapov 2011). The recreation of ethnic identity has been practiced and employed by grass-roots institutions and highlights the performative and interpretive nature of the process of identity creation. The community of researchers has also played an important role in the process of conscious minority-building by enabling cultural activists to use scholarly interpretation to further their agenda. However, the indigenous minority having official status does not guarantee stability and the avoidance of further marginalisation as support is confined mainly to the rhetoric of government authorities.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the presented three cases focused on the emergent practices and performances of minority identities, while acknowledging the scholarly critique problematising the analytical value of the identity concept (cf. Brubaker & Cooper 2000). The production and management of ethnic identities are negotiated in the discursive context of interrelations and oppositions, and they reflect power plays in the region and beyond, e.g. the Finno-Ugric movement or relevant UNESCO cultural programmes. These may provide minorities with an international framework that lends an opportunity to find a representational forum that transcends local limitations. Identity concerns are born "out of the crisis of belonging" (Bauman 2004: 22), often in response to societal changes and legal constraints that make minorities conscious of their position as well as political and cultural agendas. At the same time, universal rights and policy documents acquire meaning by being applied in local variation, where they may find agency in different aspects. Thus communities should be investigated as interrelated particularities – different circumstances make them perceive and employ rights differently. By turning an investigative eye to the claimed universality of rights, we should admit and recognise an enabling resolve in pluralist approaches (cf. Messer 1997). It seems important not only to elucidate negative experience and the violation of rights but to define and investigate moments of empowerment, real instances of achieving subjective agency in

identity politics. We have traced some enabling moments of "confronting issues of identity" (Calhoun 1994) where the deemed objects of national/ethnic politics may manage to become subjects with agency. By exploring notions, management and application of national and ethnic identities, our analyses have shown the majority and minorities to be mutually constitutive.

The post-Soviet Estonian state invokes ethnic identities by creating incentives for minorities to become organised around their cultural heritage, while at the same time constraining ethnic difference to the private sphere and marginalisation. Estonian Russians as the largest minority nationality in Estonia occupy a betwixt and between position, which both increases and reduces the opportunities of other minorities: partially in an effort to prevent non-Russian minorities from self-identifying as Russian-speakers or Russians, the state has established means for supporting a plethora of different ethno-national identities, but the same fear also keeps it from encouraging minorities' active participation in the shaping of Estonian public sphere, which is imagined as the privilege of the titular nationality. These tensions are captured in the struggles of the Seto over native-language education and border disputes as well as in the term 'Russian-speaker', which both reinforces and undermines the link of ethnicity to language and by extension also to ethnonyms, territory and descent – the core elements of the Soviet concept of nationality/ethnicity play a significant role in the self-understanding of all three groups discussed in this article. Language and territorial issues cut through the three studies here on a different level, but point out significant aspects of identity-building. For the Seto, the claim for a distinct language is a relatively new political asset that is played out inside the community but remains nearly totally ignored at the state level where language issues are contextualised largely by the Estonian–Russian controversies. The Votian circumstance testifies to the role of language mainly on the symbolic plane as a signifier of historical indigeneity and sedentary residence, even if the modern population has shifted its language use. All three case studies indicate that the state's recognition of minorities is selective, subject to changes over time and, moreover, that the state can impact the identity processes of a group by favouring particular activists and groups over others. This concerns another feature in minority construction that we have observed, namely representative organisations of minority groups. The state can strategically favour an established and representative body in negotiations of specific matters, while at the same time creating a situation in which it rivals other organisations for resources as well as attention.

The case of the Seto and the Votians in particular illustrates how minorities look for external, inter- and transnational support to renegotiate their status and opportunities at home. For example, the Finno-Ugrian movement and different

initiatives by UNESCO provide minorities with opportunities for advancing local agendas. Estonian Russians, most of them Soviet-era settlers and their descendants, lack (at least seemingly) neutral external supporters of this kind, especially since Russia's policies for co-nationals "in the near abroad" can be easily interpreted from the perspective of the Estonian state as an attempt to undermine Estonia's efforts to integrate local Russians.

For the Seto and the Votians, the question of cultural rights is predominant, while political rights through self-determination have shaped their identity construction and appear strongly intertwined in the past decades. Some of these transcend the state; some seek interaction with the state with purposeful agendas. Cultural heritage functions as an operational asset in negotiating for affirmative action at the state level. One may conclude that the previous agendas of cultural researchers to preserve repertoires or retain cultural practices have now been replaced by grassroots politics that enable activists to voice concerns for human rights via targeted actions in cultural rights. External constraints enable and produce internal responses that empower particular groups, rhetoric and interests and particular internal actors.

## NOTES

[1] Research for this article was partly funded by the Estonian Science Foundation grants No. 7795, 9190 and 9271, and the European Union through its European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT).

[2] According to Bauman it is the continuation of modernity that is defined by fluidity of social frameworks and institutions; these are times of increasing mobility, characterised by feelings of uncertainty (Bauman 2000).

[3] For analytic purposes and for the sake of argument, this study addresses the level of politics played out. Individual research projects have involved the collection of various data, including interviews, participant observation, surveys of policy documents, media coverage, archival material, etc., which have been carried out between 2006 and 2011.

[4] The following discussion of ethnoses, nationality and nations draws on Bromley 1974; Bromley 1980; Dragadze 1980; Kozlov 1974 unless otherwise stated. For a discussion of Soviet (ethnographers') concepts of ethnicity and nationality from a Western perspective, see, e.g., Shanin 1986; Verdery 1988; Comaroff 1991.

[5] A practice discontinued in the Russian Federation in 1997 (Arel 2003).

[6] Between 1946 and 1991 this flow involved nearly 2.9 million people in Estonia, which means that only every fifth migrant stayed for a shorter or longer period of time (Sakkeus 1999: 320).

[7] See the web portal Etnoweb initiated by the Estonian Ministry of Culture (Etnoweb web portal).

[8] Cf. Eesti 90, website of the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia.

[9] The Citizenship Act came into force in 1992, just before the first parliamentary elections in the newly independent country, securing a fully Estonian *Riigikogu* (Parliament). Though many people have become naturalised citizens since, over 7% of Estonia's permanent residents have not determined their citizenship and over 8% are citizens of Russia. The rate of naturalisation slowed down in the mid-2000s and after April 2007 in particular.

[10] The state programme "Integration in Estonian society in 2000–2007" was followed by a strategic plan "Estonian Integration Strategy 2008–2013".

[11] Eesti lõimumiskava 2008–2013, p. 20.

[12] See the Etnoweb web portal for details.

[13] This is officially stated by the Seto Congress, concurring with the claim by scholars of Seto origin (Seto Kongress 1994: 115). Finno-Ugrian affiliation is based on linguistic ties, historically defined by language research. This language family joins Estonians, Finns, Hungarians, dispersed groups in northern Russia (including the Votians) and Siberia, as well as the Sámi.

[14] Similarly to Estonian, the Seto language falls into the Finnic group of the Finno-Ugric language family. Academic linguists have declared Seto to be a dialect of Estonian (being mutually understandable particularly for those in neighbouring southern Estonia), although modern Seto activists contest this vehemently.

[15] In the tsarist Russian Empire they formed a linguistically distinct rural population who followed the Orthodox creed in the margins of Pskov province, outside of the confines of the Baltic provinces. For details on Seto history, see, e.g., Raun 1991; Hagu 1999.

[16] The debated issue was the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty, which had determined the interwar period borders of Estonia, covering part of the present Pechorsky district.

[17] Pechory in Russian, a trading and monastery town.

[18] A socio-cultural movement to gain recognition and amplify Seto identity with complex cultural and territorial interests, cf. Jääts 1998.

[19] The first two Seto congresses were held in the 1920s, initiated by Estonian cultural activists for educational purposes (cf. Hõrn 2008).

[20] Their leader has sat in the Estonian Parliament (see *Poliitika* and *Järvelilli Reinu...*).

[21] Estonia gave up its territorial claims against Russia as a prerequisite for joining the European Union in 2004.

[22] The reason may be both the intention to retain the claim of identified 'historical minorities', or the incapacity of the community to reach a consensus.

[23] Noteworthily supported by Estonian politicians campaigning for the restoration of pre-WWII Estonian borders.

[24] And expanding their activities into the neighbouring municipalities and Seto-linked cultural institutions in Russia.

[25] The coordinating body that acts in conformity with the rules of international law and the principles of the United Nations Organization. See The Consultative Committee.

[26] The Votian language belongs to the Finnic group of Finno-Ugric languages (cf. footnotes 11 and 12). Thus we are dealing here with close linguistic proximity to Estonian, in contrast to its difference from Russian.

[27] Another larger Finnic minority group in the region.

[28] This number was questioned by the expert linguists because the census results indicated the number of Votian speakers to be ten times bigger (774), which would apparently be a mistake (see Heinsoo & Kuusk 2011: 176; Markus & Rozhanskiy 2011: 16). According to the pan-Russian census of 2010, the number of Votians was 64 and the number of Votian-speakers 68 (Perepis 2010).

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.vosu-soovali

# SMOKING OUT LOCAL TRADITIONS? IDENTITY AND HERITAGE PRODUCTION IN SOUTHEAST ESTONIAN RURAL TOURISM ENTERPRISES

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**Abstract:** In this paper we explore the current process of the smoke sauna's transformation from a tradition into heritage in the context of rural tourism in Võru County, southeast Estonia. We examine the multiple meanings and values that the smoke carries from the tourism entrepreneur's perspective and the possible connections between the smoke sauna and personally interpreted cultural identity. Our theoretical approach handles heritage production as a selective process conducted by tourism entrepreneurs, in which personal memories, stories and material settings are displayed or performed in order to make them experienceable for the public. The results of the analysis of the fieldwork material indicate that three major directorial attitudes towards local tradition and heritage exist, expressed in the materiality of sauna settings, whereas entrepreneurs' interpretations of the intangible dimensions of the smoke sauna are more varied as they are based on emotional and personally significant meanings rather than shared cultural values.

**Keywords:** smoke sauna, heritage, identity, rural tourism, commodification

## INTRODUCTION

'Tradition' and 'heritage' are both concepts referring to something from the past that is considered valuable from the present perspective. Tradition refers more to the continuity and change of cultural knowledge or material objects in time, whereas heritage indicates certain knowledge or materiality as a cultural property often used in the process of identity politics (Lowenthal 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Glassie 2003; Bronner 2011). The shift from tradition to heritage in cultural research is not merely rhetorical but also ideological, emerging from the global cultural politics and neoliberal consumption economy of our times. Heritage has increasingly become an economic and political resource in the global as well as local processes of "heritagization" (Bendix 2009) and "commodification of memories" (Ronström 2005). We agree that the concept of heritage carries an ideological burden; yet, as Eda Veeroja, one of

our informants, a tourism entrepreneur and teacher of tourism management, has stressed – one's relationship to heritage is always personal, even though heritage serves as a basis for not only individual but also collective identity (Veeroja 2011: 22).

The smoke sauna as a traditional form of bathing still persists in southeast Estonia. The peripheral location of this cultural region supports the sustainability of cultural traditions characteristic of the Võru and Setu people who live there. However, during the last decades the cultural knowledge related to the smoke sauna (above all, traditional customs and beliefs) has diminished among locals. Therefore the smoke sauna in the imaginary historical Võrumaa, the core of which is today the current administrative district Võru County[1], is claimed to be in need of safeguarding as an intangible heritage item of the region by a group of local 'guardians of tradition'[2]. However, since the end of the 1990s, in addition to private use, making smoke sauna has also become a service provided by several tourism enterprises in Võru County. Regarding this broader background, our interest in the present study is focused on rural tourism entrepreneurs, who provide smoke sauna as a service in their enterprises, and their individual interpretations of this practice as a tradition and heritage.

Ethnologist Ullrich Kockel claims: "The heritage boom of recent decades may have camouflaged an erosion of European cultural traditions, hiding it behind the smokescreen of 'culture as a resource', a strategy that uses cultural fixation to commodify identity as heritage." (Kockel 2007: 98) According to his view, the major problem for cultural traditions when transformed into heritage lies in their significant removal from "their historical purpose and appropriate context – such as to attract tourism" (ibid.: 96). In the official discourse the smoke sauna is acknowledged as an economic resource, which benefits from local heritage and may likewise function as a cultural identity marker of the region. The tourism development strategy of Võru County characterises the smoke sauna both as an example of local architectural heritage and as a "spiritually and physically purifying ritual", which is related to historical traditions, authenticity and the multisensory experience of local culture.[3]

Yet, the commodification of traditions and heritage in tourism is not just a macro-level process directed towards the external promotion of regional cultural identity (cf. Ray 1998). Commodification might also help local people to preserve certain cultural traditions and "to maintain a meaningful local or ethnic identity, which they might have otherwise lost" (Cohen 1988: 382). We suggest that commodification may lead to the realisation of cultural creativity by tourism entrepreneurs through "the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices or forms" (cf. Liep 2001: 2). This, in turn, may increase the entrepreneurs' reflexivity in how they perform and display their

interpretations of local cultural traditions. Like other materialised and embodied forms of culture, the smoke sauna thereby becomes a marker of personally interpreted cultural identity, an expression of one's participation in culture, which combines traditions with creativity, often in the form of *bricolage* (cf. Leeds-Hurwitz 1993).

Holding the constructivist view, we see heritage as "a set of values and meanings", including emotions, memory, knowledge and experiences, which may become manifestations of one's cultural identity (Smith 2006: 56). However, the symbolic dimension of heritage needs materiality through which certain meanings and values can be displayed, either in the form of architecture, artefacts or landscapes (Ashworth & Graham 2005; O'Keefe 2007; Cosgrove 2008), or embodied practices and performances (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Kapchan 2003; Woods 2011), in which one's cultural self is expressed and perceived by others.

We support the view that heritage and identity are produced and re-produced in the process of interpersonal communication, even though the ways of (re) production at collective and individual levels may differ (cf. Cohen 1993; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). As a set of meanings, heritage may become "marked out by identity", and identity, in turn, is produced and exchanged through social interaction, various forms of media and likewise through consumption (Graham & Howard 2008: 2). However, even within a single cultural group, "heritages and identities should be considered as plurals" as they have multiple producers and "multiple objectives are involved in their creation, management and communication" (ibid.: 1–2).

With this in mind, we can see heritage and identity production analogous to theatre directing, because both involve a selection of elements from the cultural repertoire in order to create meaningful performances or displays for the public (cf. Taylor 2003). In the tourism sector the production is conducted by entrepreneurs, who may apply different strategies of stage management and direction in order to create environments and experiences different from everyday life (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Fischer-Lichte 2004; Edensor 2009). The production process may use personal memories, stories, and materialities, which are woven with collective narratives and symbols and displayed or performed in order to make individual interpretations experienceable for the public (Dicks 2004: 119–134). The experiential dimension is important also from the entrepreneur's perspective as the "experiential authenticity" (Di Domenico & Miller 2012: 286–288) of the service involves individual definitions and creative understandings of one's identity and belonging.

In our article we are interested in how the smoke sauna as a cultural tradition might, but also might *not*, become consciously heritagised by tourism

entrepreneurs as cultural agents and how different dialectics emerge from the tradition-heritage-identity interplay in individual interpretations. We aim to explore the diversity of individual interpretations of the smoke sauna service and how the awareness of the cultural identity value of this traditional practice is expressed in the architecture of their saunas, different modes of service mediation and self-identification. In the present study we do not provide an extended comparative analysis of how tourism entrepreneurs relate to and use other elements of the local cultural heritage as possible markers of their cultural identity in their businesses.

In the next section we give a condensed overview of how the smoke sauna practice in Estonia has transformed from a tradition to heritage and tourism attraction during the 20th-21st centuries by introducing the enterprises studied and the methodology used for this study, and also provide an analysis of the empirical material from Võru County. First we examine the entrepreneurs' relationship to the smoke sauna tradition and heritage expressed in the materiality of sauna buildings. In the second part of the analysis we explore how entrepreneurs mediate their service in different discourses and performances and how they perceive the cultural and personal values of the smoke sauna heritage in their lives and lifestyles. The article concludes with a discussion of the results in the light of theoretical ideas proposed in the introduction.

## THE SMOKE SAUNA IN SOUTHEAST ESTONIA: FROM LOCAL TRADITION TO TOURISM EXPERIENCE

In every culture there is a certain range of symbolic practices, objects and sites which, from generation to generation, have served as markers of cultural identity and continuity (Leeds-Hurwitz 1993). Indeed, meanings and values of such markers are not independent of temporal changes and the political and economic situation in society. For instance, in Finland, the sauna practice has a long history as a symbol of Finnishness both in and outside of Finland[4] (Edelsward 1991; Leimu 2002), whereas in Estonia, in spite of symbolically rich cultural knowledge related to the sauna, it has not been explicitly connected to national or regional identities (Habicht 2008 [1972]).

Estonian ethnologist Tamara Habicht describes the sauna as a place for sweat bathing, which is common to most of the Baltic-Finnic peoples and Russians (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 9–13).[5] Even though Finnish and Estonian bathhouses are architecturally different (e.g. the sauna room in the former is much higher) (Talve 1960: 20–26; Vuolle-Apiala 1993), the basic sauna ritual is similar (see Leimu 2002: 72–73; Habicht 2008 [1972]: 179).[6]

The smoke sauna (‘*suitsusaun*’) is an early type of bathhouse in which the fireplace has no chimney. Such saunas were common in the southern and western parts of Estonia and on the islands, with small regional differences in architecture and the additional functions. After World War II people started to convert smoke saunas into clean, i.e., chimneyed saunas. In addition, public saunas were built in the kolkhozes for rural labourers. People in towns could use public saunas; also, there were saunas in the countryside built for the employees of local enterprises. In the 1960s new trends were introduced – the so-called ‘Finnish sauna’[7] and sauna as a place for social events and feasting rather than bathing became popular for private as well as public purposes. During the last decade the smoke sauna as a rare romantic bathhouse from the rural past has come to be appreciated again both by urban tourists and by the younger generation of rural dwellers who decide to renovate or build a smoke sauna.

In the following we provide a brief overview of the characteristics of the smoke sauna in Estonia, which distinguish it from other types of saunas. When the rocks in the vaporising stove (‘*keris*’) are heated, the smoke from the burning wood circulates in the room before escaping through the door left ajar during heating, or through a small vent inside the wall close to the ceiling (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 178). The smoke blackens the room with soot, which is not dirt but a form of charcoal that has the effect of resisting bacteria (Hirvisalo 1949: 3–4, ref. in Habicht 2008 [1972]: 11). Therefore the smoke sauna was considered the most sanitary room in the household, where women gave birth, illnesses were healed and meat was smoked. The smoke sauna was also shared between the families of the village. In addition to several practical functions, the smoke sauna was also related to varied consecrating beliefs, ritual and magic customs (e.g. traditional greetings and whisking charms, whisking of newborn children, etc.) (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 179).

The process of heating the smoke sauna may last 4–6 hours or longer, depending on the size of the room and the outside temperature. After that the sauna needs to ‘mature’ for about 1 hour before it can be used for bathing. (In comparison, the process of heating the chimneyed sauna may take around 1.5–2 hours depending on the size, outside temperature and the expected heat.[8]) Unlike in the modern chimneyed sauna, no firewood is added once the stones are heated – they can retain the heat for hours. By the time that the sauna is ready for use, the smoke has disappeared from the room; yet, the unique aroma is still there. Before bathers enter the sauna, the embers are usually removed and the surfaces for sitting are cleaned. Bathers sit on an elevated platform (‘*lava*’) specially constructed for that purpose – as the warm air rises and the upper part of the room is hotter – and throw some water on the heated stones to

produce hot steam-laden air (‘*leil*’) in order to promote sweating. Smoke sauna users claim that the sweat in this type of sauna is much smoother, more humid and more enjoyable than in the chimneyed sauna, not to mention the sauna with electric heating. Bathers may use whisks made of birch twigs[9] in order to beat their bodies as a form of bathing that scrubs off the dead skin and, in addition, stimulates blood circulation under the skin.

As the sauna was mainly built from timber (logs, planks, shingle roof) and there was no chimney, the building was situated outside the main farmyard near a water body as a fire precaution (Talve 1960: 4; Habicht 2008 [1972]: 14). Using a pond, lake or river near the sauna for cooling is a relatively recent custom. According to Habicht, until the second half of the 19th century the smoke sauna used to be a one-room handcrafted round-log bathhouse, whereas during the 20th century a sauna with a separate small room for changing became common. The typical south Estonian smoke sauna was built on foundation stones and had shingle or board roofing. Beginning in the late 19th century, the dirt floor was covered with boards and a small window was installed. The oldest vaporising stoves were built from open pieces of rough granite. From the end of the 19th century stoves had a brick casing, the stove itself was usually in the corner of the sauna room next to the entrance, with the hearth facing the door. In the 20th century the hearth was moved into the changing room to make the heating more comfortable. The sauna stones (‘*kerisekivid*’) were carefully chosen in order to produce the right steam (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 14–67).

In the 1960s most of the smoke saunas in Estonia were situated in the territory of historical Võrumaa (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 53–54). In the same decade, and also later on, many smoke saunas were converted into chimneyed saunas because the former were considered anachronisms in the process of the modernisation of rural life.[10] Even though people’s living conditions have changed during the last four decades and the number of smoke saunas has diminished considerably[11], the tradition is still alive among older inhabitants in southeast Estonia and has been re-discovered by the younger generation. However, today many people have a chimneyed sauna in addition to the smoke sauna, because heating the former takes less time. For those families who have maintained the tradition from generation to generation, the identity value of the smoke sauna is often tacitly approved. During the last decade several old smoke saunas have been renovated or new ones built. Establishing such a sauna today can be considered a conscious choice, creating “the idealized, even romanticized bathhouse of yesterday” (Lockwood 1977: 82). The owners of smoke saunas are often newly settled inhabitants, for whom it might be a conscious choice to manifest their cultural identity by relating to local cultural traditions.[12]

Thus, historically, taking the smoke sauna has been an important traditional bathing practice for Estonians, particularly in the southeastern regions. However, the smoke sauna as a valuable tradition and a possible marker of regional identity was recognised in public discourse only in the 2000s. In comparison, different developments in rural areas and the urbanisation process in Finland (see Leimu 2010) had already led to the revival of the smoke sauna by local enthusiasts in the 1970s-1980s.[13] Today both Finland and Estonia comply with the logic of global consumer capitalism and regional development policies, which have transformed the sauna as a symbol of national or regional identity into a commodity. This is especially true of tourism, which encourages locals to re-interpret regional traditions as resources for both self-identification and a means for place promotion (cf. Ray 1998).

In 2010, the website promoting tourism in Võru County[14] did not explicitly relate the smoke sauna service to local heritage but marketed it under the category of 'experience tourism'. Nevertheless, it was claimed to be a traditional practice of the region. The introductory text on the website said that a significant number of smoke saunas had been preserved or were still in use. In addition, community values of the smoke sauna were stressed. For tourists used to modern bathing, the smell of the smoke and the 'smooth' steam were mentioned as important components of the smoke sauna experience and they were encouraged to pre-plan using this service well ahead and not to be afraid of getting dirty in the smoke sauna. Another online article introducing regional intangible heritage in Estonia admits that currently smoke saunas have acquired a new role as "providers of exotic experiences in heritage tourism" and, accordingly, tourism enterprises have an important role in promoting heritage through the introduction of sauna customs.[15]

To conclude, during the 20th and 21st centuries smoke sauna culture in southeast Estonia has changed considerably in relation to the socio-political and cultural transformations. In public discourses this traditional form of bathing that was once practiced purely for its own value has now acquired a heritage value and thereby also become a potential symbol of local cultural identity as well as a regional specificity in tourism.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In our study we focus on an in-depth synchronic analysis of the smoke sauna as a rural tourism service in Võru County, using the comparative case study analysis as a general methodological approach. We selected the enterprises under study from the official tourism website of Võru County in the summer

of 2010, choosing nine out of twelve enterprises listed, according to what kind of information about the smoke sauna building and service was available online. Six enterprises are situated in historical Võrumaa and three in historical Setumaa (we included the latter derived from the contemporary administrative division, analogously with the tourism website).

We drew on short-term ethnographic fieldwork trips (between June 2010 and July 2011), examining how the saunas and their settings were involved in creating the heritage experience, and conducting semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs (in seven cases) and with employees[16] (in two cases) on the premises of the enterprises. Additionally, we used informal conversations and, in some cases, also participant observation and sensory ethnography (including taking a smoke sauna at four enterprises; in three of them repeatedly). We also took photographs on site and used sources available on the Internet. In agreement with the informants we use their and their enterprises' real names in our study. For the sake of confidentiality, we consulted the people involved with the final results of this paper.

The interview questions were divided into four major categories: (1) smoke sauna architecture; (2) the use of the smoke sauna in the entrepreneur's or employee's own family; (3) the main characteristics of the smoke sauna as a service for tourists; (4) connections between the smoke sauna and culture in Võru County (in three cases from Setumaa we specified the question, asking about connections to Setu culture). We did not use the notions of 'heritage' and 'identity' in interviews, except when mentioning local initiatives related to the safeguarding of UNESCO intangible heritage. For interview analysis we used the categorical analysis of themes (Gillham 2005), which evolved from the transcribed materials in light of our research questions and theoretical framework.

All our informants originate from Võru County, even though their relationship to the current place of residence and tourism business varies. Here we briefly introduce the enterprises and our informants in order to contextualise the cases in the following analysis. Suhka Farm in Haanja municipality has had a smoke sauna from the beginning of the 1900s. It belongs to the host Väle's (b. 1959) family and the sauna is shared with tourists. The hostess Merike (b. 1954) comes from the same municipality and returned here after having lived in Tallinn. The hosts of Mooska Farm, likewise in Haanja, bought the place and moved there at the beginning of the 1990s, yet they both come from Võru County. Their smoke sauna originates from the end of the 1800s; it was bought from Setumaa and renovated by the family in 2006–2007. The hostess Eda (b. 1962) considers mediating local heritage to small groups as the key element of their family's lifestyle business (they do not provide accommodation).

Two other enterprises in Rõuge municipality do not explicitly market heritage related services. Sepa (Blacksmith's) Farm belongs to a professional blacksmith Peeter (b. 1969), who was born in Võru County and bought this farmstead in 2000. Soon after that he rebuilt a smoke sauna from an old two-chambered storage house transferred from the neighbouring Põlva County (the territory of historical Võrumaa). He has been involved in tourism, which is his additional source of income, since the beginning of the 2000s. The host Erki (b. 1978) has inherited Nogo Farm and recently started establishing Saunamaa (Sauna Land) there. He is a sauna enthusiast who currently lives and works in Tallinn and runs the enterprise from a distance. He plans to create a theme park comprising approximately twenty saunas of different cultural origin (in 2011 the enterprise had seven saunas). His smoke sauna was bought from Põltsamaa municipality in Jõgeva County (approximately 130 km from Rõuge) and originates from the end of the 1900s (renovated in 2010); in addition, a replica of a traditional cave sauna was built in 2009.

Uhtjärve Ürgoru Nõiariik (the Sorcerer's Kingdom in the Primeval Valley of Lake Uhtjärv; hereafter Nõiariik) in Urvaste municipality is a rural theme park, which is based on local nature, folklore of local and foreign origin as well as literary fairy tales, and stories about sorcerers invented by the host.[17] A spacious new smoke sauna was built in 2004 and the tourism enterprise was established in 2006 by a couple who come from Võru County and bought this place after years of city life. We talked to an employee called Aare (born 1966, originating from the municipality). Tuhka Farm in the neighbourhood (Antsla municipality) belongs to a family who took possession of the place in 1985 (the farmstead originates from 1885). The owners have their roots in the villages nearby. We interviewed the hostess Ene O. (b. 1961). Since 1999 the farm has been part of the local network of tourism enterprises called Metsamoori Perepark (the Wood Crone's Family Park). Tourism is seasonal here and both hosts are engaged in paid labour.

The last three enterprises are situated in the territory of historical Setumaa. Jõeveere Farm (Vastseliina municipality) has a history dating back to 1866 and a smoke sauna from the beginning of the 1900s. The farm once belonged to the host's family. Our informant was the host's wife Ene D. (b. 1952). The owners have been engaged in tourism activities as a source of additional income since the end of the 1990s. Vetevana (Water Spirit) Farm in Misso municipality was bought as a summer cottage by the host Feliks (b. 1927) at the end of the 1960s. Later on he settled there and started with tourism services in the 1990s. The smoke sauna was built in 2007. Setomaa Turismitalo (Setomaa Tourist Farmstead[18]) in Meremäe municipality also has a spacious new smoke sauna established in 2006. The enterprise is marketed as a place offering a diverse

experience of Setu cultural heritage; one of the hostess's specialities is local dishes. The hostess was born and lives in Tallinn and conducts business with the help of several employees. We talked with one of them, Siret (b. 1985), who was born in Meremäe.

Using the production perspective as a general interpretive framework for our analysis, our focus is on the cultural repertoire and personal interpretations that entrepreneurs as cultural agents use to create experienceable environments and to mediate the service to tourists. In the first part of the analysis we examine three different types of relationship to traditions and heritage expressed in the sauna settings as regards their origins and the ways these saunas have been maintained, renovated or built (cf. Kannike 2009). In the second part we focus on the ways the smoke sauna is mediated to tourists, examining the experience value and the need to communicate practical knowledge, discourses and performances used in the mediation of smoke sauna culture, and the methods entrepreneurs use to connect their service to cultural heritage and individual identity.

## SETTINGS CREATED FOR SMOKE SAUNA EXPERIENCES

Each sauna with its architecture and surrounding environment can be considered as a specific setting for certain actions and experiences that express the owner's individuality as well as attitude towards cultural heritage. In the tourism enterprises we visited the smoke saunas were set away from the main house as they were in the past. However, today such a location has not only a practical purpose but can also be associated with affording privacy for tourists' sauna experience. All tourism enterprises, except for one, had a water body next to the sauna and the seasonal variety of the sauna experience could be enjoyed by clients both in summer and in winter (by cooling down in an ice hole). Whereas in the past the beauty of the landscape did not have any aesthetic importance, in the tourism enterprises well-maintained surroundings please the eye and express the owners' values of contemporary country living. We realised that the influence of nature and the countryside, though not the setting of the traditional agricultural farm, is a necessary pre-attunement and an important part of the smoke sauna experience (cf. Võsu & Rattus & Jääts 2013).

**The smoke sauna as an inherited local tradition**

Under this category we focus on the entrepreneurs (Jõeveere, Tuhka and Suhka farms) who are the owners of inherited local heritage, thereby directly making use of the existing architectural repertoire with minor contemporary supplements. The three smoke saunas have been in family possession and use, except in the case of Tuhka Farm, as was described in the introduction. However, all three enterprises also accommodate a 'Finnish sauna', as it can be heated up in less time, and a bathroom with a shower in their dwellings.

Merike and Väle from Suhka Farm said that for them the smoke sauna first served a practical function, as they lacked the washing facilities when they were constructing the main building of their tourism farm in the late 1990s. For Ene D. on Jõeveere Farm the quality of materials used to build the sauna, its facilities (e.g. stones for the vaporising stove) and the honesty of the hosts providing the service were of crucial importance. She stressed that an entrepreneur should heat and prepare the sauna for tourists as if it were made for themselves: "If you want to have a proper sauna, everything needs to be clean. You shouldn't think, 'Oh, he's a tourist. What can he get from it?'"

All three smoke saunas date back to the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th centuries. The basic log construction of the smoke saunas and the original traditional appearance has been kept to the extent that saunas have been renovated only in case of need, such as changing or mending the regionally traditional shingle roof, rebuilding the vaporising stove, renewing the sweating bench and wooden floor planks. Still, significant changes have been carried out for safety and amenity reasons: transforming the proportions of the sweat room and dressing room, rebuilding the base for the vaporising stove from firebricks and bringing the hearth of the stove to the dressing room in order to make the heating process more comfortable and safe. The entrepreneurs have installed electricity inside the sauna as it would be too dangerous to leave clients bathing with burning candles or oil lamps.

The smoke sauna space on Suhka Farm has been enlarged by extending the roof and building a small changing room. On Tuhka Farm the old sauna was rebuilt, because the original bathing room was too large in comparison to the dressing room; additionally, it took a long time to heat. Furthermore, after a small fire accident the sauna was inspected by the rescue service and the owners were asked to install non-flammable plates above the vaporising stove and a fire extinguisher is now set next to the main entrance. The hostess Ene O. considers it an unnecessary precaution, because heating the smoke sauna is under the owner's control, whereas the clients of the 'Finnish sauna' have a chance to add firewood throughout the bathing process, which makes it much more likely to overheat.

***Figure 1.*** *The renovated smoke sauna on Tuhka Farm, Karula municipality. Photo by Helen Sooväli-Sepping 2010.*

Ene D. stresses that when they started with the tourism activity on Jõeveere Farm, nobody in the region offered this service and other tourism entrepreneurs (e.g. those organising hikes and canoeing) brought clients to their sauna. At that time, there were only a few tourists who dared to experience the smoke sauna. She believes that their sauna became a kind of model and inspiration for other entrepreneurs, who have now erected their own smoke saunas in their enterprises. A similar story was told by Merike – in the 1990s several local entrepreneurs were sceptical of how they dared to offer something so "old and outdated" as the smoke sauna to clients. Moreover, one of the obstacles was the official hygiene regulation for rural tourism enterprises, which declared that a smoke sauna should have conditions equivalent to a bathroom in a hotel. Therefore, they had to build a standard Finnish sauna with showers in their main building. However, in the 2000s Merike witnessed the increasing popularity of the smoke sauna among other entrepreneurs as well as customers: "Today completely new smoke saunas have been built because the old saunas were demolished some time ago. Now the smoke sauna is highly valued. Old saunas are bought at a very salty price."

## Adapting local traditions and creating individually experienced heritage

The entrepreneurs belonging to this category share the same strategy of using the existing cultural repertoire - old buildings - through giving them a new function by employing their knowledge and taste. Because of the creative combination of old and new, they may be called bricoleurs in the strictest sense of the word. The owners of Mooska, Saunamaa and Sepa farms have bought old smoke saunas and storage houses from villages both nearby and afar, giving them either a fresher look or a new function. The buildings were transported to the farms and the owners renovated and rebuilt them either by themselves or asked for assistance from local builders. Eda from Mooska told us how they recalled family saunas from their own childhood, consulted with several experts, attended the old buildings renovation workshop, studied professional literature and visited other local smoke sauna owners to finally create their own understanding of how a smoke sauna should be built. Similarly, Peeter came up with the idea to rebuild an old storehouse, because it was the cheapest way to get an old-style sauna with two rooms (one for bathing and one for relaxing) meeting contemporary needs:

> It is fairly easy to build a smoke sauna compared to the common one (Finnish sauna). You only need walls and a stove and a roof on the top. […] I made a smoke sauna for myself because I thought it was an attractive thing in tourism as well. I use the smoke sauna because it is the only one I have.

In the same vein, the family of Mooska farm combined their sauna environment from an old storehouse and an old smoke sauna.

Erki from Saunamaa was determined to recreate an archaic sauna atmosphere following the idea that the more primitive, the more real it was (see Gaynor 1986, ref. in Edelsward 1991). For that very reason he has built a cave sauna representing a 'true to history' replica of Estonians' first saunas[19]. The other smoke sauna in the enterprise looks intentionally archaic because of the use of traditional natural materials – old logs are insulated with moss, the foundation is constructed from loose granite stones, a roof made of planks is customary for this region. Indoors the traditional style is combined with a contemporary rustic design by building a massive granite stone wall between the dressing room and the bathing room. Erki admits that he laid a proper wooden plank floor instead of the traditional earth floor because "you have to think about the tourists as well […] not every client would come here". Still, there is no electricity, only candle light, and water from a cauldron or water

***Figure 2.*** *The renovated and rebuilt smoke sauna (on the right) with accompanying house for changing and resting (on the left) on Mooska Farm, Haanja municipality. Photo by Ester Võsu 2010.*

butt in his smoke sauna, in order to offer clients "something genuine". Erki admits that he enjoys both smoke saunas for their authenticity.

The stories of the entrepreneurs about how carefully the sauna buildings have been selected and renovated illuminate their understanding of the importance of historical authenticity in experiencing sauna. For example, the main logs of the three smoke saunas are original, except a few lowest ones, which needed to be replaced. Mooska hostess Eda explained that she had chosen to purchase this particular sauna mainly because of the logs, which had a "typical architecture"; she also said that the logs were "black way up to the smoke line". The roof is of equal importance. The residents of Mooska have drawn ideas from Nordic, not Estonian vernacular architecture, and installed a turf roof on top of their smoke sauna. Eda explained the use of a turf roof was for practical reasons:

> What kind of roof would you use today? You wouldn't use asbestos cement plates, would you? A tin roof even less so. It is not a secret that split-board or shingle roofs are inflammable. So there is not much left.

In conclusion we can say that these sauna owners have rebuilt their saunas using the principles of bricolage so that the buildings would meet the contem-

porary needs of the family and tourists (widening the dressing room, changing the place of the heating stove, installing electricity, etc.). So, the principles of historical authenticity are not applied indoors.

### Creating new saunas in an archaic style: heritage as a theme

The third group of saunas includes recently built smoke saunas, which aim to create the impression of an archaic rustic style through the materials used (Vetevana, Setomaa Tourist Farmstead and Nõiariik). These saunas have been constructed of round logs and with dovetail notch quoins (an old architectural element in Estonia). Producing archaic elements of local cultural heritage seems to be a fundamental component with which the large sauna owners commodify their saunas. The owners' families do not commonly use these saunas and they are built considering tourists' needs. All the three farms, in addition, accommodate a Finnish sauna, Nõiariik even two of them. None of the owners originally comes from the farmstead where they run their businesses, and two of them do not live on the premises. Their relationship with local traditions and heritage is newly established according to personal imaginations and interpretations, and the saunas with their surroundings can be considered as themed heritage settings.

***Figure 3.*** *The newly built smoke sauna in Nõiariik (Sorcerer's Kingdom in the Primeval Valley of Lake Uhtjärv), Urvaste municipality. Photo by Helen Sooväli-Sepping 2010.*

All these saunas were erected in the second half of the 2000s as a reaction to the developing tourism market and are spacious in order to accommodate larger tourist groups, at the same time maintaining the traditional atmosphere (for more on building modern smoke saunas see Tammekivi 2009). According to Siret, an employee of the Setomaa Tourist Farmstead, the new sauna is bigger than the former one, because "people said it could be bigger". Employee Aare justifies the big smoke sauna in Nõiariik by saying that renting a smoke sauna is a pricey service nowadays. A bigger sauna with more space satisfies the needs of a large group of different clients.

The Setomaa Tourist Farmstead and Nõiariik may be characterised as heritage theme parks which, in the first case, commodify local Setu cultural heritage and, in the second case, have invented a story of witches and witch houses. Aare told us that a new smoke sauna was built in Nõiariik because it has to look "decent and new. When it (the smoke sauna) is sunk half way into the ground, then no client wants to pay us for using it." Current saunas on Vetevana Farm and the Setomaa Tourist Farmstead were built by construction companies (the former by the host's son's company), as the previous ones burned down.

Concerning innovation, all the saunas have installed both water and electricity. The clients need electricity, as Aare explained to us, "because it is dark in winter. It is dangerous to use candles". The new smoke saunas consist of three rooms – an entrance hall in the middle for dressing, a large room for bathing accommodating up to twenty people at a time, and a spacious relaxing room with a table and benches. A fireplace is commonly not found in smoke saunas as there is no chimney in these buildings. A living fire in the dressing or rest room became a somewhat necessary element in Estonian saunas that were built at summer cottages since the 1960s and 1970s, when sauna became more a place for partying with drinks and snacks.

The Setomaa Tourist Farmstead advertises its smoke sauna to foreigners as "an authentic smoke sauna". In this example, the physical location and the smoke sauna itself are to create a historic atmosphere. Another component of rusticity to create the feeling essential for sauna experience is soot, which was stressed by Aare from Nõiariik:

> Aare: This sauna doesn't have this vent; therefore the windows and doors are left open. Now it has turned sooty enough. […]
> EV: But why do you want it to be sooty?
> Aare: In the beginning (straight after completion), how can you tell that we have a smoke sauna, when there is no soot.

However, the walls of the smoke sauna of the enterprise are cleaned regularly to get the redundant soot off, so that the clients would not get dirty. Also, in

Nõiariik (compare with Mooska Farm) the turf roof is considered an important element in creating an archaic style. The inspiration to use turf roofing for the Nõiariik smoke sauna comes from Nordic architecture. "The idea to have a turf roof stems from the Viking Age. It is used to attract people. It would have been even easier to use a shingle roof," Aare explained.

## EXPERIENCE VALUE AND THE NEED TO MEDIATE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

In the following, we aim to focus on entrepreneurs' interpretations of cultural and individual meanings of the smoke sauna, the degree of personal mediation used and the identity construction expressed in the smoke sauna service.

Despite a few informants who consciously marketed the smoke sauna service to tourists as a special experience of traditional bathing (Erki) and as a local tradition realised in the hosts' lifestyle (Eda, Merike), most of our informants considered providing the smoke sauna service as something natural and self-evident in their enterprise:

> Siret: There is a demand for the smoke sauna.
> Aare: This smoke sauna, it (the idea) came unintentionally, so that if you have a Finnish sauna, you must have a smoke sauna, too.

Only a few connected commodifying the smoke sauna with using and mediating the local cultural heritage as part of their service. However, even those who did not explicitly stress the importance of the cultural heritage value of the smoke sauna, indicated to its experience value for tourists. For instance, Ene O. said:

> We thought who would come here at all. Who would come to the smoke sauna – they think they would get dirty … But initially quite many people came. […] If we hadn't had a smoke sauna, we would not have done it the same way ... We would have had a Finnish sauna. Then we would not have had tourism. The smoke sauna has attracted tourists.

Experiences and emotions were believed to be something that should have made the clients distinguish between different rural tourism enterprises, as there are quite many who provide bed and breakfast in Võru County. Peeter compared the smoke sauna as a local specialty to eating frogs' legs in France or insects in Thai and stressed that "the emotion a person gets from it is of key importance, no matter if s/he comes here for the first, second or third time". What makes clients feel emotionally aroused in the smoke sauna? It seems to be hard to describe in words both for the entrepreneurs' themselves and for customers.

Peeter himself replies to this question wordlessly, pointing with his palm to his chest. An entry from 2008 in the visitors' log of Suhka Farm says: "The smoke sauna was indescribable. We are speechless with emotion. Everything was fantastic!" Probably one of the triggers for clients might be the specific intense smell of smoke absorbed in the room, which creates a "real sauna atmosphere" (cf. Edelsward 1991: 70) and may evoke romantic connections with our primeval past. According to our informants, the smoke odour was mentioned by most of the clients, who kept smelling their hair or skin after taking the smoke sauna.

Several entrepreneurs acknowledged that even though their clients were from diverse age groups and social backgrounds, for different generations of Estonians the smoke sauna might have varied values for distinct reasons. For the elder generation, who still have some childhood memories of bathing in the smoke sauna, it might be a nostalgic experience. In comparison, younger people, among whom the smoke sauna has become increasingly popular, might perceive it as an 'exotic' experience. Merike from Suhka Farm relates the latter to the chance to identify oneself with one's ancestors' life-world and Estonians' native religion because one can "charge oneself there" and "wash off everything that is bad with water into the earth". However, the smell of the smoke and the dark walls of the smoke sauna might also be perceived as dirty and repellent according to contemporary bathroom hygiene standards. Several entrepreneurs related such unfamiliarity or discomfort to the increasing number of people in Estonia who are used to the urban lifestyle and habits. We heard several stories of how entrepreneurs had to convince their clients to come inside the smoke sauna and check together with them if its surfaces were making them dirty or not. Some clients were said to have had strong prejudices and little knowledge about how to behave in the smoke sauna:

> Merike: They just don't know how to behave. [...] And then (after the smoke sauna) they quickly come to take a shower to wash themselves. In fact, it (smoke sauna) is until now primarily a place to wash, to get clean and of course to heal oneself.

Nevertheless, rules for bathing and washing one's body varied in different saunas. The majority of entrepreneurs found that the smoke sauna was not meant for using modern hygiene products such as shower gel and shampoo. They suggested that their clients should take advantage of the sweat bathing and whisking and finalise their bath by washing themselves with clean water. Traditional birch whisks are provided in most of the enterprises as part of the service, even though the popularity of whisking among clients was said to have decreased. Mooska Farm has created its own product facilitating the multisensory experience – sauna honey, which is mixed by the hostess herself, adding

aromatic oils and sea salt. The effect in modern terms is scrubbing, nutritious and relaxing at the same time.

Even though our informants claimed that there were quite many (returning) customers who were familiar with the specificity of the smoke sauna, they also stressed that it was important to give all groups of clients basic practical instructions related to the sauna of the enterprise – where to change, how to make steam, where to find cold or hot water for washing, and where and how to cool down outdoors. Such mediation refers to the multiple skills and knowledge that an entrepreneur or employee should have. For example, heating the smoke sauna is a task usually accomplished by either a male family member (often the host) or an employee who has specialised in doing this job. Even if clients were informed beforehand about the heating rules of the smoke sauna, almost every entrepreneur or employee had had an experience with some 'expert' client, who decided to add some firewood during the process of taking the sauna. As a result, all sauna goers were literally 'smoked out' of the steam room. Several entrepreneurs brought up the fact that clients who were used to the chimneyed sauna did not know how to get the steam in the smoke sauna, and tended to throw too much water on the vaporizing stones, even though they were suggested just to sprinkle. Thereby the steam became too hot and the sauna cooled down relatively quickly.

Often it is hard for urban people to understand why it takes so long to heat the smoke sauna and why, therefore, the price for this service is higher than for the Finnish type of sauna, or why the smoke sauna for the same evening cannot be ordered in the afternoon. Erki mentioned an extreme example of a middle-aged urban client from Estonia, who could not understand why he heated the smoke sauna so long and suggested that he should use the electric stove, like he himself did, in order to speed up the process. The host of Saunamaa proposed that one way to re-familiarise such people with the forgotten tradition could be to engage them in the whole process of heating the sauna, including assistance with adding the firewood, in order for them to learn from hands-on experience.

All in all, the importance of the integrated experience of local heritage was stressed by Merike, who argued that the smoke sauna should not be a single or isolated service but coherent with other services and products provided by the tourism enterprise. For instance, she claimed that the local entertainment and food provided during the events organised in Suhka Farm should be in tune with the history of the region and with the setting of the farmstead: *it must constitute a whole*.

## PERSONALISED MEDIATION OF THE SERVICE THROUGH DISCOURSE AND PERFORMANCE

There are multiple ways to inform tourists about cultural traditions or heritage related to the smoke sauna and ways in which an entrepreneur can personally participate in the process of mediation. In the following we will briefly touch upon three different ways of mediating smoke sauna heritage in verbal and visual discourses and embodied performances, thereby also communicating personal identity and values to tourists.

Often visitors to heritage sites or objects are informed about the historical meaning and contemporary importance of the place by information boards that may contain both verbal and visual explanations and can be used with or without the assistance of a guide. Our research demonstrated that an introduction to smoke sauna culture is provided on the website of the enterprise, orally via phone calls (when the sauna is booked) and on-site, before taking the sauna. Furthermore, some entrepreneurs use immediate performance in order to give their clients more personalised knowledge about the smoke sauna.

Saunamaa markets the smoke sauna from the host's perspective, relying on Estonian folk beliefs in the sauna spirits. To attract the attention of younger (male) clients, Erki has used a Playboy model of local origin to personify an imaginary sauna fairy that his clients could meet in the sauna. With the help of a professional photographer, a nude photo series, though carefully 'photoshopped' according to the host's vision, has been composed and uploaded on the enterprise's website as well as in the Facebook account. This sauna fairy exposes the closeness to nature and symbolises the purifying effect, at the same time giving a contemporary erotic touch to the whole sauna experience.

On Tuhka Farm an instruction sheet with detailed information in standard Estonian is attached next to the entrance of the smoke sauna. However, when taking a closer look, one discovers that the knowledge and suggestions gathered in this paper are not specific to the smoke sauna, but a compilation from different Internet sources explaining how to behave in the sauna. The hostess Ene O. argued that such instructions were needed because during the first years they had many clients and neither she nor other family members had time and energy "to explain it to everyone".

With the help of a local artist, the hostess of Mooska farm has decorated the facade of her sauna and a detached house next to it (the dressing room) with two pictograms. These are wooden plates covered with archaic style drawings, which display the important functions and symbolic meanings that the smoke sauna has had in the life-world of local people. Eda uses these drawings to illustrate her verbally performed story about the life and seasonal cycles related

to the smoke sauna. She believes that these simple pictures animated with her stories often give a better and quicker overview of the local smoke sauna tradition than a detailed text would, especially to foreign customers for whom English is often not their native language.

The varied landscape in Võru County provides opportunities for diverse forms of active recreation during all seasons. Two of our informants in Haanja municipality take advantage of both the natural environment and cultural heritage of the place, organising hikes in the neighbourhood of the farm. These are often package hikes focused on heritage experience, so that the group of tourists can enjoy a guided walk in a natural environment and a smoke sauna afterwards. This way the hike works as a way of attuning a person for the smoke sauna and enforces the multisensory experience, the interconnectedness of the (smoke) sauna and nature.

Väle from Suhka farm organises guided hiking trips in the neighbourhood of his farm, in the primeval valley of the Piusa River and its surroundings, which are his childhood landscape and related to multiple personal memories (see more in Võsu and Kaaristo 2009: 85–86). He is a discreet guide who does not talk about what he is doing while mediating the local natural or cultural heritage, even though during the walk he is able to give explanations about both. Eda and her husband Urmas, from Mooska farm, love sports activities and they offer diverse guided explorations in the neighbourhood, relying on their personal experiences, skills and wisdom as well as knowledge acquired from other sources (e.g. breathing exercises, Nordic walking, recreational snowshoeing). While introducing their hikes, the Mooska hosts emphasise keywords such as experience, heritage and family mediation. The hikes in both enterprises can be finished by taking a relaxing smoke sauna. However, Eda admits that not all urban tourists are able to fully appreciate the smoke sauna after making a physical effort in the forest – they are simply too exhausted.

Thus, hiking before taking a smoke sauna may be viewed as a modern way for urban people to empathise with our ancestors, who had to do hard physical work throughout the week before getting to the sauna, although now the physical activity serves a purely recreational purpose. Entrepreneurs in this process become mediators who perform personal interpretations of the local heritage; however, these interpretations may vary according to the personality and intentions of the host (cf. Rattus 2007).

Probably the most immediate and intimate mediation of the smoke sauna heritage is offered by those entrepreneurs who agree to join the tourists in the sauna and provide a guided sauna experience throughout the process. For example, the old host of Vetevana Farm said that he preferred to whisk female clients: “I lash them [women] sometimes. There is space for three women

lengthways." A more elaborate guided smoke sauna service is offered by Eda, who perceives that personal mediation is something that distinguishes her business from other farm tourism enterprises:

> Eda: We don't sell the smoke sauna service so that we give the keys and let people into the sauna; we go there together with the clients. […] I've been to practically everywhere in Europe and also to other places, and I've been looking for precisely that genuine cultural heritage experience … and you don't get it without mediation. You cannot interpret these things for yourself. […] It remains incomprehensible when the culture is different. And people in Tallinn have a different culture and people in Võru [town – E.V.], too, and also urban people, these people who lack the connection to the smoke sauna.

Thus, she wants to commodify for her clients what she values herself when in the role of tourist. According to our experience, a sauna visit guided by Eda is an advisedly directed performance, which leaves space for improvisations and customers' own interpretations, as sauna is also something personally perceived.

In contrast, Erki, the host of Saunamaa, is sceptical towards this kind of guided sauna experience, claiming that clients should have their privacy, even though they need practical instructions beforehand. The privacy of the sauna experience needed for both guests and hosts was also brought up by most of the other entrepreneurs who claimed that, even though customers had invited them to join the sauna, they had refused.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EXPRESSIONS OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

In the last part of our analysis we aim to examine how entrepreneurs perceive the smoke sauna as something culturally significant to Võru County and what kind of identity values can be expressed through it.

When we questioned our informants about how the smoke sauna could be characteristic of Võru County and if it was something that distinguished Võru culture from that in the rest of Estonia, the responses we got were quite varied. Peeter, Erki, Siret, Väle and Ene O. considered the smoke sauna typical of Võru County, pointing to the relatively large number of preserved smoke saunas; however, they did not explain the reasons behind such a situation. Merike, Eda and Aare were more specific, explaining that the smoke sauna both as a building and as a cultural practice has been well preserved in Võru County because of its geographical location in the Estonian territory and scattered settlement

pattern that has enforced cultural isolation. Therefore people here have a more conservative attitude towards cultural change and chimneyed saunas, while the Soviet culture of 'sauna parties' was not welcomed here as quickly as in other parts of Estonia. Väle found that the smoke sauna had been rather significant in this region in the past; yet, today most of the old saunas had been rebuilt or abandoned. In addition, Erki and Ene D. had an alternative view claiming that the smoke sauna in Võru County was just one variant among many as there was also smoke sauna culture in, for instance, Russia or Finland. To summarise, the cultural heritage value of the smoke sauna still seems to be tacitly understood by most of the entrepreneurs; or, it is hard to articulate when being asked to reflect on that issue explicitly.

However, there was one cultural practice – smoking meat in the smoke sauna – that was recognised as something typical of Võru County by almost all our informants from different generations. For example, when asked about the connection between the smoke sauna and life in this region, Feliks, the elderly host of Vetevana Farm recalls:

> There is a lot of meat smoking in this region. I don't know about north Estonia, but here all saunas were smoke saunas. The meat that had been kept in a cask was smoked every spring. Some two-three days … Smoked meat has a good taste.

Yet, even though entrepreneurs have vivid memories of such meat, they do not make it in their saunas rented for tourists, claiming that it would be too hard to clean the sauna room after the meat cooking procedure. Nor are they offering meat smoked in some other sauna in the neighbourhood as a local specialty snack for their sauna customers. Eda from Mooska Farm is the only exception in this matter, as she wants to provide multifarious and multisensory experiences related to smoke sauna heritage and she has (re)established this tradition in her enterprise. Erki from Saunamaa is considering serving 'sauna ham' to his clients in the future, because "such an old thing is just to the point". In conclusion, meat smoked in the sauna was something meaningful and valued because most of the informants had some personal memories or experiences related to it. Nevertheless, this is no longer a living practice in the tourism business. For its revival in this context it needs to be given a new meaning and value (e.g. as a local specialty product).

Eda, Aare and Ene O. explicitly stressed that the biggest threat to the future continuation of the smoke sauna culture was the disappearance of the practical need for such bathing and the fact that heating the smoke sauna was a time-consuming activity. When we asked our informants to compare the smoke sauna with other types of sauna at the enterprise, most of them answered that

the smoke sauna gave the best sauna experience because of its unique smooth steam and atmosphere. The Finnish type of sauna was contrasted with the smoke sauna and its intense dry heat was criticised. However, entrepreneurs admitted that they used the former type of sauna more often because of the faster heating process. Therefore the declared value of the smoke sauna in the entrepreneurs' own practice might be bigger than its importance in everyday practice.

For future survival, the meaning and values of smoke sauna culture need to be reconsidered by present generations. For instance, Eda, who is the most aware among our informants about heritage and the identity value of the smoke sauna, clearly distinguishes between its functions and meanings in the past and today:

> The thing we do here is so-called spa tourism, this is for pleasure. We wash in the bathroom, you know. We have it [smoke sauna] here as a way of life, but it is a question of choice, conscious choice. We go there because we enjoy it.

Eda claims that she and her husband like to take things slowly in their everyday life and they could not afford such breaks just for themselves if they were not involved in tourism, which gives them an additional income. However, marketing the smoke sauna as a lifestyle business requires conscious planning as concerns both 'backstage' (negotiating with family members about how and to what extent to share the sauna with tourists) and 'frontstage' (selecting how and what to mediate to the tourists from the family customs and cultural heritage).

Eda believes that the smoke sauna as a re-established tradition can become part of people's lifestyles, their emotional and spiritual values, and a living standard for the young generation, who can make a conscious choice not to consume mass culture but to create a personal connection with local culture through taking the smoke sauna. In a broader context, such a lifestyle choice might be linked to the values promoted by the slow living movement. Erki, who belongs to the younger generation, confirms this viewpoint, arguing that appreciating the smoke sauna is most of all dependent on personal preferences, not so much on the time and energy spent on heating and taking the sauna.

Even though Peeter does not admit that he established the smoke sauna because of its value as a local cultural tradition, there are more than just practical reasons behind his choice of having only this type of sauna in his household:

> [---] the emotion that you get from this sauna … when I come out of the sauna and take a plunge into the pond and go back, depending on the weather, either to the dressing room or sit on a terrace in front of the

> sauna, then I always say to myself: 'This is the Estonia that I wanted' [smiles].

Thus, for Peeter, the smoke sauna has a highly emotional and likewise a lifestyle value, it is something that enables the creation of a feeling of belonging to a place and a feeling of citizenship through personal interpretation (cf. Lester & Poweller 2008).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that the way the smoke sauna service is mediated to tourists in Võru County depends on what kind of role the smoke sauna tradition plays in the entrepreneur's personally interpreted cultural identity. The analysis demonstrated that a considerable diversity exists in the meanings and values that the entrepreneurs relate to the smoke sauna and in the ways that they express these meanings and values in sauna buildings and in the service provided.

We distinguished three major attitudes towards the smoke sauna as a local tradition and heritage regarding the sauna settings in the enterprises studied. Those entrepreneurs who had possessed the smoke sauna as a family inheritance were the most direct representatives of the cultural continuity of the tradition, even though they had transformed it into a tourism service and considered it important to share the same sauna environment used by their own family for generations. The second group of entrepreneurs were creative cultural bricoleurs selecting from and combining different cultural repertoires – old (sauna) buildings were transported from elsewhere and renovated in their holdings according to their personal interpretations of coherence and authenticity, considering both family and touristic needs. The entrepreneurs who had established novel sauna buildings in archaic style were the most intentional heritage producers, interpreting heritage as an old-looking historical theme and expressing it in the use of vernacular building materials, which were merged with historical architectural elements from other cultures. In themed heritage settings the disconnection with the tradition was most explicit because large sauna spaces were built for tourists, not for family use.

Drawing a parallel with staging a theatre production, we claim that the role that most of the entrepreneurs take in producing the smoke sauna service is that of a stage manager, who is concerned with the materiality of the setting. Almost all of our informants had a broad knowledge related to the practicalities of maintaining and taking the smoke sauna, which had been acquired through

personal experience of renovating and using their own smoke saunas. They were likewise eager to communicate the knowledge to the tourists who are today mainly used to the Finnish type of sauna.

Continuing with the theatre analogy, only a few entrepreneurs took the role of artistic director, responsible for a more complex interpretation of the cultural tradition mediated within a service that integrates material as well as immaterial elements into a coherent production. What seems to be less elaborated or reflected upon by entrepreneurs is how the overall context of the enterprise, what other settings, activities or products would contribute to the smoke sauna experience. In case there are a few other services related to local cultural traditions, the smoke sauna in itself may not give you the experience of encountering local cultural heritage. However, there is always a risk in overly managed themed settings within tourism that they leave less space for improvisations and unexpected experiences (cf. Edensor 2009).

The results of our analysis indicated the importance of personal memories as a significant basis for heritage and cultural identity production and mediation. For instance, multiple individual memories of smoking meat in the smoke sauna were connected to the regional tradition, whereas there were a few remembrances of the rituals and vernacular beliefs related to the smoke sauna as these have almost vanished today. This might be the reason why the majority of entrepreneurs do not communicate such symbolic elements of tradition to the tourists.

Usually the immediate interaction with the entrepreneur and his or her family and the intimacy of host-guest encounters are considered key characteristics distinguishing small-scale rural businesses from the large-scale tourism industry. Furthermore, in small tourism enterprises the entrepreneur often enacts multiple roles (cf. Võsu & Rattus & Jääts 2013). Therefore, in addition to organisational and storytelling skills, an entrepreneur should also have good performative artistry in order to engage the customer and make the experience of the service memorable (cf. Pine & Gilmore 1999: 145–146). Although one has to ask: to what extent can a traditional smoke sauna experience be commodified and communicated to clients using performative means of expression?

Different enterprises use distinct means to give additional information about the smoke sauna, mainly in images and texts instead of live interpretation of the sauna experience by the host, hostess or employee. Such immediate guided interpretation of the smoke sauna tradition during the course of a sauna seems to be the most challenging way of mediation as it demands self-reflexivity and skilfully controlled 'self-commodification' by an entrepreneur acting as a guide (cf. Bunten 2008). With two exceptions only, sharing the sauna with customers was not acceptable to the entrepreneurs and employees because of how they

interpreted their own and their clients' privacy within the sauna experience. This touches on another major change related to commodification – traditionally the sauna was shared among family members meaning that the comfortable atmosphere of shared bodily experience emerged naturally. Such an atmosphere is hard to achieve with larger tourist groups in spacious sauna settings.

Even though the entrepreneurs' personal memories and stories of the smoke sauna were related, our informants did not consider the smoke sauna as a collectively shared manifestation of cultural identity but rather as an expression of individual identity and lifestyle. As most of our informants originate from Võru County, they might not consider the smoke sauna to have a symbolic value as a cultural identity marker, either because the practice is still common in the region or simply because this tradition does not serve an identity purpose for them (cf. Noyes 2011). Our analysis allows the suggestion that the "emotional authenticity" (Smith 2006) and "experiential authenticity" (Di Domenico & Miller 2012) of the smoke sauna involving personally meaningful material as well as immaterial elements, and most of all a unique bodily experience, were more significant to most of the entrepreneurs than the possibility to associate their service with historically authentic representations of the regional cultural heritage. However, in spite of the emotional value of the smoke sauna, entrepreneurs admitted that they use the Finnish sauna more often in their everyday lives because the heating process is less time- and wood-consuming.

In the current study the question remains open as to whether the experiential, emotional and lifestyle values attributed to the smoke sauna by rural entrepreneurs indicate the discontinuity of the old tradition or if these values relate to new meanings that the tradition has acquired in the present sociocultural situation. The period of commodification of the smoke sauna tradition in Võru County has been relatively short – a bit more than a decade. It is still developing as a tourism service and might not have been heritagised yet as multiple understandings exist among entrepreneurs as to how the smoke sauna may or may not have heritage and cultural identity value. Some entrepreneurs expressed scepticism towards local heritage policy, pointing to the problems of distinguishing between 'right' and 'wrong' heritage (re)presentations or the danger of musealising a fixed tradition. Furthermore, even those entrepreneurs who used the concept of 'heritage' explicitly in marketing and mediating their business did it in different ways and with a varied degree of personalised mediation. Additional comparative studies are needed in order to examine how meanings and values of the smoke sauna as part of local heritage and identity are constructed and communicated by different groups living in Võru County, and how global ideologies of heritage production (such as UNESCO's) might change the existing tourism service, its interpretations, marketing and mediation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper has been supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education target-financed projects No. SF0180157s08 'Dynamic Perspectives of Identity Politics – Analysis of Dialogue and Conflict' and No. SF0130033s07 'Landscape Practice and Heritage and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT)'. We are grateful to all our informants for contributing to this study. We thank anonymous reviewers and Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch and Mare Kõiva for their comments and suggestions.

## NOTES

[1] According to contemporary administrative division, Võru County is a southeastern region of Estonia, which is subdivided into one urban and twelve rural municipalities. It borders on Põlva County to the north, Valga County to the west, the Republic of Latvia to the south and the Russian Federation to the east. According to the administrative division before 1944, the territory of Võru County was divided into Võrumaa (included eight municipalities) and Setumaa (between 1920–1944 the official name was Petseri (Pechory) County, and it included eleven municipalities, four of which are currently associated with Setumaa while others are part of the Russian Federation). Today these municipalities are centred (due to redistricting) in Võru and Põlva Counties with parts extending into Valga and Tartu Counties. Today the most distinctive markers of the cultural identity of the Võru and Setu peoples are their languages, folklore, and, in case of the Setu, the Russian Orthodox faith (see Leete 2010; Ehala 2007; Runnel 2002; Koreinik & Rahman 2000; Jääts 1998).

[2] These 'guardians' are both representatives of local cultural institutions initiating the revival of local cultural traditions (the Võro Institute, the Võro Society VKKF) and individuals concerned about the continuation of the tradition. The smoke sauna in the territory of historical Võrumaa has been included in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Estonia and the further aim is to apply for entry into the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2013. The 'guardians' have initiated a number of projects to raise local as well as wider Estonian awareness of the intangible heritage value of the smoke sauna tradition. From 2010 we have followed these initiatives and conducted fieldwork trips to interview people and observe sauna customs in Võru and Urvaste municipalities in Võru County. Thereby we admit that as scholars we also became engaged in the process of local heritage maintenance. However, these topics need further study and reach beyond the boundaries of this article.

[3] Võrumaa tourism development strategy for 2015 and action plan for 2007-2010. http://southestonia.ee/uploads/dokumendid/V%C3%95Rumaa%20turismiarengustrateegia.pdf, last accessed on 5 January 2012.

[4] The Finnish Sauna Society as a cultural association for fostering the heritage of the national bath was founded in 1937.

[5] The word *saun* in Estonian denotes both the bath-house and the practice; it has archaic origins and is very similar to the Finnish word *sauna*.

[6] However, historically the sauna was not common in all Estonia, and in certain regions of northern as well as central Estonia people did not have a separate house for bathing.

[7] 'Finnish sauna' is a colloquial term used in Estonia to signify a type of sauna in which the stove is made of iron and the sauna itself is often built separately or joined to the summer cottage. Such ideas were borrowed from Finns. Characteristic of this type of sauna is dry and very hot air (up to 120° C) (Habicht 2008 [1972]: 158).

[8] As heating the sauna using firewood is a time-consuming process, some people prefer to have an electric sauna stove that heats up faster and needs no labour.

[9] Sometimes whisks are also made from the twigs of the oak or lime tree, more rarely from juniper or nettles.

[10] Alhough in the 1960s–1970s living conditions on many old farmsteads in southeast Estonia as well as in the neighbouring regions were still rather archaic.

[11] We argue this relying on the fieldwork conducted in Võru County in 2010–2011.

[12] See previous comment.

[13] In 1990 the International Smoke Sauna Club was established to raise awareness of the value of this type of sauna.

[14] The website is accessible at: www.visitvoru.ee. In November 2011 the website was redesigned and the content reorganised. Smoke sauna can now be found under the category of 'active holiday, without the general introduction of local traditions.

[15] Taal, Kati and Eichenbaum, Külli. *Suitsusaun vanal Võrumaal*. – Eesti vaimse kultuuripärandi nimistu. [Smoke Sauna in Old Võrumaa. – List of Estonian Intangible Cultural Heritage.] http://www.rahvakultuur.ee/vkpnimistu/, last accessed on 5 January 2012.

[16] Conversations with employees took place in agreement with the owners of the enterprise, who could not meet us at the site.

[17] Nature has inspired the hosts to build small „witch cabins" using tree roots exposed by windfalls (the theme is taken from Russian fairy tales of the witch Baba Yaga and her log cabin set on chicken legs). The legend of Lake Uhtjärv and the Estonian traditional folk customs (the making of *'tuhkapoiss'* (ash boy) as part of *'tuhkapäev'* (Ash Wednesday) ritual) are combined with the story 'The Little Witch' (*Die Kleine Hexe*, 1957) by a German writer Ottfried Pleuβler.

[18] This is the official name of the enterprise in English (see: www.setotalu.ee, last accessed on 5 January 2012).

[19] The first smoke saunas were called 'ground saunas' or 'cave saunas' (*koobassaun*). They were built in a pit dug into a natural slope, with a heap of heated stones set in one corner.

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# *OUR CLOCK MOVES AT A DIFFERENT PACE*: THE TIMESCAPES OF IDENTITY IN ESTONIAN RURAL TOURISM[1]

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**Abstract:** One of the effects and results of tourism is that it marks our sense of time, differentiating the extraordinary and 'heightened' time and the time of the mundane. An important role in this is played by the hosts – in the case of rural tourism by the farm owners and tour guides. The tourism farmers and tour guides act as mediators of the temporal experience, therefore creating and providing various *timescape*s for their guests. An altered perception of time, a distinctive temporal experience of place is offered to guests as a specific and special characteristic and a counterbalance to the rush of everyday life in the local identity of two rural border regions. Some meaningful and meaning-forming, interconnected and sometimes opposite notions of temporality are analysed as narrated by tourism farmers and tour guides in two very popular tourism regions in Estonia: Hiiumaa Island and Võru County. The ways in which these hosts (re)construct and perceive temporality are identified and presented and some distinctive elements of those rural timescapes are considered.

**Keywords**: Estonia, identity, rurality, rural tourism, temporality, timescape

Tourism can be defined as an activity of temporary leisure (sometimes contrasted with 'work'), a sensation of place away (from home), and an activity the purpose of which is to experience change (Smith 1989 [1977]: 1). Thus, starting from the very first definitions in the field of anthropological tourism studies, the temporal aspect has been one of the defining elements of tourism: it has been described as the "temporary movement of people" (Mathieson & Wall 1982: 1) and the tourists' periods of stay in their destination are usually "of a short-term and temporary nature" (Urry 2000a: 3).

Tim Edensor has suggested that "one of the effects of tourism is to mark out time, that of the extraordinary from the time of the mundane, a period of relaxation and play which marks release from work and duty" (Edensor 2000: 325). These temporal conceptions of tourism involve the idea of a temporary opportunity to reveal a more 'true' self (that can temporarily put aside the everyday mask that is usually put on to cope with the stresses and strains of

everyday life), the desire to realise a different, sometimes hidden side of one's personality (ibid.). A different perception of time is also an important theme in many folktales plots (Kaasik 2008), and a similar differentiation can also be detected in the ways of experiencing the "touristic" trips undertaken (Järv 2010). Or, as James Buzard (1993: 102–103) has put it rather poetically: "Travel [---] an ameliorative vacation [---] promises us a time or imaginary space out of ordinary life for the free realization of our otherwise thwarted potential."

The *time of tourism(/the tourist)* can be viewed as a continuum of various meaningful relationships among people, objects, and space continually being made in and through the lived experience both by guests (tourists) and hosts (people working in the tourism industry). In this article we will focus on the notions of time and temporality as an aspect of local identity within the field of rural tourism in Estonia, and look at how the concept of time has been theorised in the context of tourism research. The second half of the article focuses on the notion of timescapes, complex temporal environments where the time is experienced, negotiated and imagined by the tourism farmers and tour guides. We will dwell upon some of the time practices that they mediate and provide (among other experiences) to their guests. They share with their guests a somewhat altered, different perception of time, a distinctive temporal experience of place as a specific and special characteristic of those two rural regions. Our main goal is to view some of the strategies that people working in the tourism industry use to mediate these living environment timescapes to their guests.

## FIELD SITES, EMPIRICAL SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

We focus on two Estonian border regions: Hiiu County (Hiiumaa Island off the coast of western Estonia) and Võru County (in South Estonia), two very popular domestic tourism destinations where people have a somewhat stronger sense of local identity due to some unique historical and cultural characteristics. These include, for example, the clearly distinctive local dialect spoken quite widely; the geographical location (Hiiumaa's position as an island and the location of Võru County at the other end of the country when looking from the capital, Tallinn); the natural environment (a hilly landscape with many lakes in Võru County and a landscape dominated by junipers characteristic of Hiiumaa), etc. (On some aspects of Võru (*võro* in local dialect) identity see, for example, Koreinik & Rahman 2000; Ehala 2007; Koreinik 2011; and on Hiiu identity: Uljas 2001; Uljas & Post 2002; Lindroos 2009.)

Empirical data on Võrumaa were gathered by Maarja Kaaristo during three field trips to Rõuge, Haanja and Võru municipalities in July and September

***Figure 1.*** *A View of Rõuge. Photo by Maarja Kaaristo 2008.*

2008 and June 2010. During her first field trip, the goal was mainly to study the issues of locality and identity (on the basis of a questionnaire devised by professor Art Leete), and to conduct interviews with local business people and representatives of the local municipality, tourism officials and other people living in the area. The interviews covered a wide range of topics, such as people's attitudes toward their rural living environment, use of local dialect, etc. During this fieldwork Kaaristo's attention was directed towards the general topic of rural tourism by her colleague Ester Võsu, with whom she undertook a second field trip in September, this time focusing specifically on rural tourism. Kaaristo and Võsu visited several tourism farms in the area and recorded interviews with their owners using another questionnaire that concentrated on the tourism farmers' perceptions of their living environment (some results of this fieldwork have been published in Võsu & Kaaristo 2009; Võsu & Kaaristo 2010). These semi-structured in-depth interviews held with nine tourism farmers on their farms, which form the main empirical basis of the information on Võru County, concentrated on the issues of tourism farming (the farmers' motivation: how and why they had chosen this lifestyle, their general opinions about the tourism situation in Võrumaa and Estonia, their guests and what sort of services were provided for them, and questions about local life in general (culture and the

environment)). In 2010, the focus of fieldwork in Võru municipality continued to be on hosts working in the tourism sphere (Võru Tourism Information Centre); in general, two main methods were adopted – semi-structured interviews and (participant) observation.

Material on Hiiumaa Island was gathered by Risto Järv in October 2009, July 2010 and August 2011. During the two first field trips research focused on how tour guides in Hiiumaa make use of and mediate folklore, and Järv also interviewed several employees of local museums. Risto Järv's questionnaire for the semi-structured interviews was inspired by Melika Kindel's MA thesis (2005) about local traditions and tourism in Lahemaa National Park. Altogether, 17 interviews were conducted, some of them together with a colleague Reeli Reinaus. In these interviews the following topics were discussed: folkloristic narratives in tour guides' narratives and their reception by the tourists; the sources of those narratives (books, the Internet, family oral history) and their proportion in the guides' repertoires; terminology in the traditional material; how the *hiiu* way of life or identity is constructed in the guides' narratives (local dialect, local sense of humour, relations with the neighbouring Saaremaa Island). After the general idea for this article had been conceived, in August 2011 Järv concentrated on tourism farmers and issues of their identity. All of our informants have agreed that we use their real first names and ages when quoting them.

To some extent, the issue of self-reflexivity must also be considered in both our fieldwork studies. Kaaristo regards herself as a 'local' in Võru County, as she was born there into a *võro*[2] dialect speaking family, and often visits her parents and friends, which allows her to identify herself as a *võroke* despite having lived elsewhere for the past 12 years. Järv also feels strong emotional ties to Hiiumaa through his grandfather, who was born and lived on the island until his adolescence. The reason for Järv's first longer 'exploration' of this island in 2008 was a search for his roots, after which he has conducted folkloristic interviews there for at least a week each year, trying to experience local life not just as a visitor but also as a researcher. Although we do not believe that this has provided us with the special advantages of "cultural competence" (Ruotsala 2001: 118), it has certainly had some impact on the course of our fieldwork, the ways of communication and relations with local people, and in a broader sense, on our choice of topics related to Võro and Hiiu identities in general. It must also be noted that while the question of time-perception and temporality was initially explicitly not addressed in either of our questionnaires of 2008–2010, the subject rose rather prominently in discussions with most of the farmers and tour guides.

## TEMPORALITY OF TOURISM

In his article "Tourism: The Sacred Journey" anthropologist Nelson Graburn argues that "a major characteristic of our conception of tourism is that it is *not* work, but a part of the recent invention, *re*-creation, which is supposed to renew us for the workday world" (1989 [1977]: 22, original emphasis). In this sense tourism is something inherently temporary, short-term and extraordinary, something that happens only once in a while and is clearly distinguishable from non-tourism, i.e., everyday life.

According to Graburn, this division of work and leisure, something that enables tourism overall, can structure our perception of time, which is, as he points out, very similar to that of the ritual, analysed and conceptualised by a lengthy line of theoreticians. There is a long tradition in anthropology of structural examination of events and institutions as markers of the passage of (natural and social) time, which is rooted partly in Émile Durkheim's (2001 [1912]) notions of the *sacred* and the *profane*: according to Durkheim, "religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present a common quality: they presuppose a classification of things – the real or ideal things that men represent for themselves – into two classes, two opposite kinds, generally designated by two distinct terms effectively translated by the words profane and sacred" (Durkheim 2001 [1912]: 36).

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1964 [1898]), when analysing rituals of sacrifice, talk about sacralisation that elevates the participants to another state of being, and about the process of desacralisation that follows it, when everything returns to the regular state. Edmund Leach in his essay from 1955 "Time and False Noses" (Leach 2004: 132–136) suggests that the regular occurrence of sacred-profane alternations marks important periods of social life and in addition to that provides a measure of the passage of time. A ritual puts a stop to normal and profane time, and creates abnormal or sacred time; the end of the ritual signifies reintegration with the normal and mundane. Through the experience of this ritual structure, people become adults (initiation, rites of passage), are welcomed into this world or sent to the next (birth or funeral rituals), or move on to the next year (new year festivals), etc. This kind of (temporal) structure of the sacred and the profane in the Estonian folk calendar has been studied by folklorist Mall Hiiemäe (1998). All in all, these types of rituals function as markers in time and the total flow of time has a pattern: according to Graburn there is a fundamental contrast between the ordinary/compulsory (quite often work) state spent at home and the non-ordinary/voluntary sacred "away from home" state, and a stream of alternating contrasts provides meaningful events that measure the passage of time. Therefore, one of the effects

of tourism is to mark time, to differentiate the extraordinary and 'heightened' time and the time of the mundane.

During this period of tourism, one is temporarily freed from many of the norms and limitations of everyday life and, following Graburn, tourism can thus be compared with the idea of the liminal time period. This notion was first coined by Arnold Van Gennep in his *Rites of Passage* (2004 [1909]), which describes the rites of transition in traditional tribal societies that consist of preliminal, liminal and postliminal states. This was later followed up by Victor Turner (1967: 93–111; 2008 [1969]), who expanded the notion of liminality as an "interstructural situation" (Turner 1967: 93). During a rite of passage, an individual is in the liminal phase, "neither here nor there" (Turner 2008 [1969]: 95), in a state in which the structuring properties of the 'normal' no longer apply, and which is characterised by a perception that time beyond a certain boundary is different from that of the everyday.

Graburn's (1988) tourism is a liminal (or "liminoid", as Turner himself later on suggested for other phenomena resembling liminal rituals, yet which differ from them by free will and optionality in the choice of actions (Turner 1982: 20–60)) kind of "anti-structural" phenomenon, where the usual everyday routine is turned over and the norms no longer apply. While travelling, the tourist inhabits a state between the two worlds full of endless possibilities, belonging fully to neither (Järv 2010: 283), doing and believing in things they usually might not in everyday situations, as one of the tour guides explains:

> They [the tourists] come here to spend their holidays; they want to get away from their usual environment. So we go to Tahkuna [peninsula], there is a Kandle pine tree by the side of the road. This pine tree takes all your illnesses away. So I talk about it and all of them want to stop there [---] and we cannot deny it to them. I wouldn't say they're exactly gullible, but they believe everything I tell them about it. (Tiiu, b. 1958, Hiiumaa)

This is a common situation in which the tourist chooses to adhere to new norms or structures to his or her liking: new norms of behaviour (e.g. making new acquaintances more easily), new norms of clothing (scantier, more casual, etc.), interests (visiting 'the sights', museums and churches even if one might never do so back at home), daily routine (waking up late, staying up all night), establishing him/herself as a part of new social networks, which cease to exist or fade when back at home, and so on. During this 'sacred journey' of tourism, the passage of time is experienced in a different manner, and the time spent travelling can seem more 'real' than 'real life', at least quality-wise, as one of the tourism farmers said:

***Figure 2.*** *For the tourist the water border can mark a shift in timescape where one can be freed from everyday problems. A fishing boat near Heltermaa harbour. Photo by Elo Järv 2009.*

> You leave everything behind when you step on the ferry: all your troubles and obligations and ... everything. You are somewhere ... I don't know where, in another realm, perhaps. And I think it's the water's fault, this water in between. This water, this wide water border changes us inwardly and frees us from all our everyday problems. (Kalle, b. 1956, Hiiumaa)

Holidays spent 'somewhere else' can be described as, "'I was really living, living it up … I've never felt so 'alive' in contrast to the daily humdrum. Thus, holidays (holy, sacred days, now celebrated by travelling away from home) are what make 'life worth living' as though ordinary life is not life or at least not the kind of life worth living." (Graburn 1989: 26) These notions all incorporate ideas concerned with "letting your hair down", "getting away from it all", and "letting go" – the associations which sometimes assert the need to perform acts of a different nature compared with everyday life (Edensor 2000: 325).

However, one might say that according to this schema, time could be seen essentially as unidirectional, linear, continuous flow, with sequences of events, 'heightened', but nevertheless kind of 'strung up' on a line that extends from the past into the future, just as Barbara Adam (2005: 506) criticises the "tra-

ditional Western" notion of time in anthropology. So it is quite clear that this 'time of tourism' needs more elaboration and our aim is to try to look at it as a continuum of various meaningful relations among people, objects, and space, which are constantly reinvented and made in and during lived experiences. As Nancy Munn (1992: 116) writes, human temporality is

> a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices. People are *in* a socio-cultural time of multiple dimensions (sequencing, timing, past-present-future relations, etc.) that they are forming in their 'projects'. In any given instance, particular temporal dimensions may be foci of attention or only tacitly known. Either way, these dimensions are lived or apprehended concretely via the various meaningful connectivities among persons, objects, and space continually being made in and through the everyday world.

According to Leach (1976: 34), in the biological sense we experience the passage of time in a continuous way, supported by the fact that we get older "all the time". However, this experience, this continuum has to be divided into measurable segments of time like seconds, minutes, hours, and so on. "Each segment has duration, but notionally the intervals between the segments, like the bar lines on a musical score, have no duration. However, when we come to convert this notional time into social time by acting it out, each 'interval of no duration' itself takes up time." (Leach 1976: 34) We move from one present to another without having to break through any chronological barriers that might be supposed to separate each present from the next in line. The features that were previously identified as serving the segmenting function – rites, feasts, and ceremonies, or, in our case, the touristic journey – are all integral elements of temporality (just boundary markers such as walls or fences to the landscape) (Ingold 2000: 196). In practice, of course, there are no strict separations or boundaries between these different "segments" of time and "there is no *direction* in which flux or process is *moving*, and there is no *one* river of time that *flows*" (Hodges 2008: 415, original emphasis). The passage on a ship that takes you from mainland Estonia to the island of Hiiumaa is one of the boundaries or markers that denotes the passage of time (the only ways to get to the island are either by sea, which most of the locals and visitors use, or by aeroplane, which is used less frequently as it is more expensive; there are no bridges or other connections). While on board a ferry, you cannot decide on the pace of your movement yourself, you have to follow (and adjust to) the pace of the ferry. You experience those boundaries (passage on the ferry) as integral elements of temporality, not as something that is somehow segmenting your personal time into clearly distinctive parts.

The *time of the tourist* is definitely not a linear unidirectional river; nor is it easy to separate 'tourism' from 'work'. Leisure is not a field that can be clearly delimited from working time and today we cannot juxtapose work and leisure (or tourism) antagonistically as the boundaries between work and leisure time increasingly wear away and blur. Where should we position answering work-related e-mails while on vacation or taking a day off to go sightseeing during a work-related trip? Laptop work combined with the spreading availability of the (wireless) Internet is quite a new phenomenon that clearly has had and will have an immense influence on the ways we perceive work and leisure. Should working from a tourism farm (most of the visited farms had excellent wireless internet connections) be classified as work or leisure or something in between? And where should we draw the line? Should there be a line at all? In addition, it should be noted that the nature of 'work' largely depends on the particular (tourist) context. This means that some activities, which for some people (for example tourism farmers) are everyday chores, can in special settings become interesting leisure or pastime activities for others:

> And a Swedish army major stayed here for twelve days. He milked the cow and everything … [---] We didn't think of offering him this opportunity, he insisted on it. So when I went to the cowshed in the morning to clean it up a bit half an hour before the time we had agreed on, he was already there. He was afraid that maybe I would milk the cow myself and wouldn't let him! (Margit, b. 1968, Võrumaa)

This also means that sometimes the amount and nature of the farm work can actually follow the seasonality of the tourists visiting the place. One of the guides at a farm museum explained how they just let the guests "perform" some farm works despite the fact that it had actually been done already and the season was long over (for example, haymaking).

The seasonality of the tourists' visits also turns the pace of life upside down for the tourism farmers and the tour guides, at least compared to other people living in the area. All of them explained how their rhythm of life differed greatly from the others on many levels. For one, summer is the busiest time and therefore they can almost never take a vacation then (if they do go on holiday, they usually do so during winter or late autumn). And, of course, this time that might seem a time for relaxation for tourists or for people living on the island, from the perspective of those working in the tourism industry it is the most hectic time of the year:

> …summer is so intense, one would think we live here on the island in our slow rhythm, what can there be, it's boring. But actually the summer is so intense, much more so than in the cities; generally the locals here

> look forward to the autumn to get some peace again. But of course we have lots of change here in our year. The summers are a big change for us. (Tiiu, b. 1966, Hiiumaa)

Nelson Graburn (2001) has also added a distinction between the high and low points in the time of tourism. He asserts that the "sacral phase" of the experience is by no means monolithic. Graburn also implies that each experience is different for every tourist, making each one "personally negotiated". The most obvious example of this is that the pace of time, and how we interpret and perceive it, may vary, depending very much on the particular (tourism) situation. When discussing the changing nature of the relationship between work and leisure, the German researcher Karlheinz Wöhler (2006: 188) concludes that "the dissolution of boundaries means that time has lost its place and place has lost its time", and it is quite clear that this de-bounding of place and time modifies work and leisure and neither of the spheres can be seen as 'pure', as all these different notions of work and leisure overlap and blur.

## EXPRESSING THE IDENTITIES DWELLING IN TIMESCAPES IN VÕRUMAA AND HIIUMAA

> *Two guys from Männamaa* [a village on Hiiumaa Island] *were walking in Kaigutsi village during the first republic* [1920s–1930s] *and saw a pocket watch lying on the road in the sand. They didn't know what a pocket watch was. They examined it and discussed it there and one of them said: "I know what it is!"*
> *– "What is it then?" the other one asked.*
> *– "You know, this is the eye of envy and evil."*
> *And the other one took a stone, he was the more lively one, and smashed it. But the world was saved, wasn't it?* (Kalle, b. 1957, Hiiumaa)

Although recent developments in anthropology suggest that we move away from the term 'identity', which has been called a "heavily burdened, deeply ambiguous term" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 8), it is nevertheless still admitted that "the idea that everyone is the same and there are no distinctive differences in meaning and style is ridiculous; there are. But identifying them and explaining them is the challenge" (Rabinow *et al*. 2008: 108). Margaret Somers has suggested reinventing the concept of identity by using the notion of narration since a "way to avoid the hazards of rigidifying aspects of identity into a misleading categorical entity is to incorporate into the core conception of identity

the categorically destabilizing dimensions of *time*, *space*, and *relationality*" (Somers 1994: 606, original emphasis).

Therefore, we will attempt to track down and explain some of those "distinctive differences" as exemplified by the perception of temporality narrated by tourism farmers and tour guides in Võrumaa and Hiiumaa. We will not be looking at identity as some sort of "rooted body that grows, lives, dies, and so on", but instead at the identification processes as "constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction" (Clifford 1997: 25), which are "dynamic and dialogic, found in the constellations of a huge cultural matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices" (Edensor 2002: 17). Those matrices are formed and transformed by certain groups and individuals, who produce meanings and connotations, therefore sometimes creating "symbolic communities" (Solomos 2001: 203), in our case we could say, temporal communities.

We view identification not as a "return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'" (Hall 2003: 4) and therefore try to move away from the analyses that tend to be more weighted towards 'heritage' and the 'common past' rather than the 'common future' or even 'common present' (Roche 2001: 75). The interviewed people who work in rural tourism do not necessarily search for the temporal golden past or pastoral idyll; their appreciation of their temporal environments is based on a conscious negotiation of different aspects of their living environments, and they bring forth the ones that they themselves or their guests appreciate, and, therefore, certain new rural identities are formed and forged. Or, putting it in a different way, "identities, understandings of experience, and foundations of knowledge are fractured from the start" and we should aim to "work with, rather than deny, the collisions and crises between and within all the oppositional predicates inhering in the articulation and elaboration of the emancipatory promise" (D'Cruz 2008: 5). Tourism does not exist in isolation but is heavily intertwined with the aforementioned elements of identification, the (re)presentations of which are continuously being (re)produced and consumed by various actors (Pritchard 2000).

Since human temporality is a symbolic process "continually being produced in everyday practices" (Munn 1992: 116), time and temporality are constantly being (re)produced and interpreted by the tourism farmers and tour guides for whom the sense of time seems to be largely place specific, forming a part of their local identity. We will use the notion of timescape to look at the temporal aspect of rural tourism in Võru and Hiiu counties. As both authors' fieldwork has shown, tourism farmers and tour guides find the different temporal quality of the experiences they provide and mediate very important, therefore creating various timescapes for their guests. According to Barbara Adam (2004: 143), a

timescape is a cluster of temporal relations and features in certain spaces and contexts, related to particular practices of "transcendence and transformation". The notion of '-scape' indicates that time is inseparable from space and matter; it gives scale, perspective and context. All in all, a timescape is a broad perspective on the complex temporalities of the world around us, a temporal environment of memories, experience and imagination. Timescapes "emphasise their rhythmicities, their timings and tempos, their changes and contingencies. A timescape perspective stresses the temporal features of living. Through timescapes, contextual temporal practices become tangible. Timescapes are thus the embodiment of practical approaches to time" (Adam 1998: 10).

It is in this context of the deep-felt connection between time and place that a tour guide, coming from generations of Hiiumaa islanders, is positioning herself and constructing her own expertise for mediating this island to guests:

> … and when I am narrating them the lore of my father or grandfather or someone else, I tell them that it's like 'my father says' – because I am a *hiidlane*[3] myself, I can tell them the stories of my great-grandfather if I like, for example, I can tell them that my great-grandfather was a very good brewer in that village or estate, and I am very proud that I have this long family lore of 300 years, that I have all those ancestors. I am from this island. Because usually the guests are happy when they meet someone local. This is my strong suit and the source of my pride. (Helgi, b. 1956, Hiiumaa)

Filipa Wunderlich has argued that "places are temporal milieus within which repetitive everyday activities, spatial patterns and cycles of nature interweave and orchestrate into bundles of expressive rhythms" (Wunderlich 2010: 46). According to her, these rhythms are unique to particular locations and also affect our sense of time in unique ways. The sense of time comes from immediate sensual experiences and involves a meaningful appreciation that defines our relationship with a place. A distinctive temporal experience of place is sensually valued and affectively remembered (ibid.: 45–46), both by the tourism farmers and tour guides as timescape mediators (and according to their narratives, their guests as well).

We will identify and present some distinctive elements of those rural timescapes not in hierarchical order or in a conclusive system, but rather by mapping some ideas of temporality that were identified by the tour guides and tourism farmers. Our following analysis is loosely based on Barbara Adam's above mentioned concept of timescape, where she distinguishes the following nine elements: "time frames (seconds, days, years, lifetimes, eras, epochs); temporality (process, irreversibility, impermanence); tempo (pace, intensity/rate of

activity); timing (synchronization, Kairos); time point (moment, now, instant, juncture); time patterns (rhythmicity, periodicity, cyclicality); time sequence (series, cause and effect/simultaneity); time extensions (duration, continuity: instant to eternity); time past, present, future (horizons, memory anticipation)" (Adam 2004: 144), focusing on two of them – tempo and time extensions – as these two topics are those that were elicited most prominently from the gathered empirical material.

## TEMPO: THE SLOWER PACE OF RURALITY

A significant aspect of the studied timescapes entails deliberate attempts to 'stop' time, to make the guests visiting Hiiumaa or Võrumaa experience what John Urry (Lash & Urry 1994: 241) has called "glacial time". This is an attempt to replace instantaneous clock-time with a more inert, slower perception of time (Baerenholdt *et al.* 2004: 8), an aim that is not limited to the tourism situations only but is connected with "the growing tendency to equate the good life with the slow life" (Shaw 2003: 120; see, for example, Parkins 2004 on "slow food" movement). Rural tourism is certainly one of the fields where peaceful, serene environments for relaxation are created and maintained for the guests. This is a conscious negotiation of the different temporalities which make up the everyday lives of these tour guides and tourism farmers who notice, value and purposely magnify the elements of their everyday lives that seem to suit their guests best, encouraging them to step out of their everyday temporalities.

The changes in the timescape start with the beginning of the journey. Since Hiiumaa is an island, which is not connected to the mainland via a bridge or some other means and in order to get there one has to take the ferry, it is actually possible to determine where the timescape changes and the "glacial time" moves in: the ferry. "The time changes on the ship", as Ester (b. 1942, Hiiumaa) said. Once the guests have boarded the ferry, the awareness of and the immersion in a different timescape can take place on the way to the island, as Ester further explains:

> And our own children and relatives who visit us, they say that when they board the ferry, something in the world changes for them. That all this bustle and hurrying stays behind and the situation is totally different. (Ester, b. 1942, Hiiumaa)

The situation in Võrumaa is different: there you cannot actually put your finger on the very liminal situation of the changing temporalities. However, one could say that due to Võrumaa's location in the 'periphery' (from the perspective of

the capital Tallinn, which is exactly at the other end of the country), the process of getting there (either driving or taking a bus) is in itself time-consuming: at least 3 hours by car and more than 3.5 hours by bus, which in Estonian context is a considerable distance.

"Glacial time" involves an active appreciation of locality; it "can develop in relationship to where one was born or brought up, to one's place of current residence or work, or to where one has visited or even where one might visit corporeally or imaginatively", and it is often opposed to measurable clock-time (Urry 2000b: 159). For the tourism farmers and tour guides interviewed, cities (and the mainland) appeared to be full of instantaneous, 'clock' time, whereas their own timescapes seemed to represent "glacial time" in their narratives – a feeling that the place has persisted and will persist as a distinctive entity even though the world around it might move at a different tempo.

> Our clock moves at a different pace from the mainland, we are not in a hurry. You will have to stay really calm, for example, if the ferry doesn't leave on time. (Marju, b. 1951, Hiiumaa)

> Our guests have freedom here; they don't have to live by the clock; for example, we don't say that breakfast is served only from 7 to 9. If they

***Figure 3.*** *Sometimes time can stand still on a tourism farm. Interior of a farm visited in Võrumaa. Photo by Ester Võsu 2008.*

> want breakfast at one o'clock in the afternoon, why not. They are free here. (Juta, b. 1950s, Võrumaa)

The perceived difference of host and guest temporalities can be seen in the following interview excerpt, in which two daughters of the owners of a tourism farm in Võrumaa, Eva and Ene, both in their thirties and both living in Tallinn, but spending as much of their summers at home as possible helping out their parents, discuss the different temporalities of their two homes:

> Eva: I think that the people here are a bit different.
> Ene: Really calm.
> Eva: They are kind of slow and always very helpful.
> Ene: How did you put it this morning – meditative? They speak in such calm voices. I went to have a manicure this morning and she [the manicurist] spoke so peacefully to me, it is so different ...
> Eva: Calm.
> Ene: Calm, peaceful.
> Eva: And the other day I went to have my car checked and there was a huge queue, in Tallinn it takes like 15 minutes but he [the mechanic] had lots and lots of time, spoke to me something in the Võru language and wanted to discuss this and that. Or, for example, when you go to the grocery store. 'Could I have 500 grams of cheese please?' And how the shopkeeper takes this cheese and moves and examines it and how she takes the knife, it can be really irritating at first.
> Maarja: Because you're used to things being done more quickly, are they doing things quicker in Tallinn?
> Eva: Yes.
> Ene: They [the people] themselves even move more quickly in Tallinn.

The situation is similar in Hiiumaa, where informants also see an inherent difference between locals and those who visit the island, the former having a more relaxed attitude towards time everywhere they are, the mainland included:

> People from the mainland are nervous in the harbour: why can't I get on the ferry already? The *hiidlane* waits and [thinks] quietly: 'Oh, so I didn't get on this ferry, it's okay, there will be the next one. I want to go home, but if I cannot, it's okay, I'll just wait for the next one.' (Lili, b. 1956, Hiiumaa)

The tourism farmers strive towards providing their guests with this timescape of a slower quality, one which they see as a counter-scape to the rush and hustle of everyday (usually urban) life. They also tend to prefer (given a choice, of course) the tourists whose principles and worldview they perceive to be more

similar to theirs, uniting hosts and their guests through different acts of being part of the same environment. "I would like to spend time with people who spend time," said Urmas (b. 1948, Hiiumaa), one of the tour guides interviewed.

The topic that recurs in all the narratives of the tour guides of Hiiumaa is how stressful the short and quick tours are for them. All of them feel and explain that one needs time to experience the island, and most of them expressed the idea that the four-hour tours are something that they really do not want to do if given a choice.

> The hardest things are the quick tours. I'm trying to avoid them. But sometimes, when I'm really short of money, I do those four-hour tours as well: rushing to the Kõpu lighthouse and back. But I try to explain to them [the tourists] that it is not possible to really see anything in such a short time, that you can only see a little, I cannot do more within this short period of time, the distances in Hiiumaa are long. They are very surprised, yes, I would say this is folklore or a legend: everyone thinks Hiiumaa is so small and when they come here, then they say: 'Oh, it's 70 kilometres! It is not possible!' (Urmas, b. 1948, Hiiumaa)

The guests are invited and expected to participate in this process of 'slower' living, which can sometimes create a little friction or misunderstandings between the host and the guest if their views on exactly what should be done and enjoyed in this environment, and how, differ slightly.

> They [the tour groups] call me up, thinking that they'll have plenty of time, exactly four hours between the two ferries and they think they have enough time in their hands. (Viktor, b. 1960, Hiiumaa)

Both the tourism farmers and tour guides have to negotiate the sometimes different temporalities of their guests. It is especially visible in the case of tour guides, who talk about the topic of time first and foremost in the perceived difference in their desired tempos and the tempos their guests would like to impose upon them: the real amount of time needed for the guided tour to see Hiiumaa. So it often happens that the tour guide just has to make a choice of whether to adjust to the clients' demand and their different perspective of the use of time available to them or not. Several guides stressed that they prefer longer tours that take two days, so that they could show the tourists everything they think is worth seeing on Hiiumaa.

> Sometimes [the big tourist groups] are in such a hurry and they have a time schedule that I will have to adjust myself to. (Lili, b. 1956, Hiiumaa).

> For those who just want to come here for four hours and imagine that they can [do anything in that time], I don't do [guided tours] for them. (Viktor, b. 1960, Hiiumaa)

But, as the time passes, the visitors might adjust to the different timescape and start to appreciate it:

> When they come from Tallinn on Friday, they are so busy and they can't understand how it is possible that someone is ordering dinner and they have to wait until he's done so that they could check in. Because it is all done at the same front desk. [---] On Saturday, they are already a bit calmer and on Sunday they say: 'It's so peaceful here, I don't want to leave. If only I could stay for one more day!' And they try to organise their work stuff so that they could leave on Monday. (Ester, b. 1942, Hiiumaa)

The tour guides and tourism farmers perceive the different temporal quality of their homes and it is important for them to share this with their guests as well. In the deliberate attempts to slow down time, conscious negotiation of the different timescapes (those of the hosts and those of the guests) occurs.

## TIME EXTENSIONS: SILENCE AS A MARKER OF TIME

The tourism farmers experience temporality by being in touch with the rural environment, with the nature surrounding their farms, listening to its sounds and, just as farmers and tour guides in Hiiumaa, comparing it with other environments (i.e., the city). They dwell in their respective timescapes throughout time, and perceive them through different modes of practice. They discover the temporal, sensual and affective qualities of their timescapes through everyday corporeal and sensory involvements with their lived environments (Wunderlich 2010: 47). The perceived silence or tranquillity of the surroundings provides the tourism farmers with certain timescapes that add a different quality to their lifeworlds, especially when compared to urban settings. In fact, an aural environment perceived as silent can be of great value in rural tourism, and it is often expressed in the wish to keep balance with the nature (Võsu & Kaaristo 2009: 75).

James and Mills (2005: 13) have noted that "time is not homogeneous, but full of markers on different scales – not only sounding bells, alarms, and ceremonial guns, but changes in the weather, rising and falling levels on the stock market, organic life and death itself". A distinct characteristic of the environment that was often stressed by the interviewed farmers and could be identified as a marker of their timescape is indeed its auditory quality, i.e., the silence.

Sound is "a phenomenon 'of the moment', an experiential *now*, appropriate for marking the present but inescapably sequential too, flowing in a rhythmic direction recognized as significant by participants" (James & Mills 2005: 3, original emphasis). The perceived silence of their timescapes, the expression of duration and continuity (Adam 2004: 144), is an important marker of the living environment, distinguishing it from other environments that are not as desired.

> It is really different here, the climate and the nature, the fact that we're an island – they come by ferry, that's something different for them. And for the people – they ride bicycles here. The serenity, the slowness, you don't have to hurry anywhere. (Lili, b. 1970, Hiiumaa)

It must certainly be stressed that 'silence' in the context of these rural timescapes does not mean the nonexistence of sounds, but rather signifies an absence of distinctive urban sounds, such as traffic, etc. (Daugstad 2008: 417–418).

> Our ideal guest is a person who loves nature, loves the quiet and peace. They want to come here and be here and switch themselves off from all

***Figure 4.*** *Tourists love nature, quiet and peace. Rural idyll with cows in the sea near Kõrgessaare harbour, Hiiumaa. Photo by Risto Järv 2010.*

> this mass communication and the noise and the bustling of the city that usually surrounds them. (Vello, b. 1957, Võrumaa)

Silence is an experience that has visual, aural, social, haptic and temporal aspects. These must be expertly and carefully "harmonized in order to facilitate an experience of silence" (Valtonen & Veijola 2011: 187) by the tourism farmers. As Paul Rodaway has mentioned, the "sounds of nature seem at times to have been relegated to a background, decorative rather than functional. Inside our buildings and cars, and even public squares and parks, we hide away from natural sounds by playing radios, televisions and compact disc players" (1994: 155). The tourism farmers have noted this as well and try to 'educate' their guests by pushing them towards appreciation of the kind of sounds they think suitable on their farms.

> I want to show [on my tourism farm] how the peasant used to live, in harmony with nature. It's about what we are not anymore and how we seek modern amenities everywhere. For example, there's something that we [the tourism farmers] don't particularly like but we have to accept it. When the city people come here, the silence as such and birdsong is killing them. They just must find SkyPlus or Raadio Ring [local radio stations playing pop music] or whatever as long as it makes lots of noise so that they wouldn't hear what's surrounding them. And at midnight they just have to have the fireworks, so that everyone living nearby in the village could hear: we are here and we can do this. But during the last year, I've actually been able to finally change those attitudes. I've arranged fireworks 'a la my farm': at a certain point we light a big bonfire, and that's the fireworks for them. (Aigar, b. 1958, Võrumaa)

Silence is one method of identification in (rural) tourism (often to mark a separation from the noisy, bustling urban environment) and this needs to be carefully arranged and mediated by the tourism farmer who actively tries to 'educate' those who do not seem to share his or her worldviews on what should be enjoyed in this rural environment and how it should be enjoyed. As the perceived 'silence' is one of the timescape markers in rural tourism, this needs to be carefully arranged and mediated by the tourism farmer. Aigar opposes fireworks which, to his liking, make too much noise, so he replaces them with bonfires which make different sounds, are quieter and fit better with his view of his timescape.

Tourism in general is a phenomenon that differentiates the mundane, everyday time from the extraordinary. In the liminoid situation of tourism, the everyday structures that apply in 'normal' situations might not do so anymore and new structures and dispositions are born. Among other things, we can talk about temporality as one of those effects that differentiates normal time from

the time of tourism. People in the tourism situation, in the rural setting, are introduced to new types of temporality, to a different timescape, and so movement from one timescape to another, although smooth and dynamic, can still be detected in some cases, for example, by passage across the sea on board a ferry from the mainland to Hiiumaa Island.

For many tourism farmers and tour guides the different temporal quality that they perceive in their home is something special that ought to be shared with the tourists. Therefore, the host's personal experience is one of the most important aspects in their creating and conveying this temporal quality to the visitors. The sense of time seems to be place-specific, forming a part of the local identity in the visited rural places. We have taken a closer look at two elements of the timescape: the tempo, slower pace of (rural) life that is experienced by tourism farmers and tour guides in Hiiumaa, and the 'time extensions' – the continuity of the timescapes marked distinctively by its aural quality, i.e., the silence. In the attempts made by the tour guides and tourism farmers to slow down time, guests are offered an opportunity to enjoy a different, slower timescape. This relates well to the tourism farmers, for whom silence (i.e., the absence of urban sounds) is a distinctive temporal marker of their living environment, which they consciously try to mediate to their guests.

## NOTES

[1] This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT) and the target-financed projects Dynamic Perspectives of Identity Politics – Analysis of Dialogue and Conflict (SF0180157s08), Folklore and Folklore Collections in Cultural Changes: Ideologies, Adaptation and Application Context (SF0030180s08) and Folklore and Society: Tradition Memory, Creativity, Applications (SF0180139s08).

The article is based on the conference paper presented at the Finnish anthropology conference, Dynamic Anthropology: Tensions between Theory and Practice, University of Helsinki, Finland, October 5–7, 2011.

[2] When speaking about the people living in Võru County, instead of the standard Estonian words *võrukesed* (people from Võrumaa) and *võru keel* (Võru dialect), the endonyms in local dialect – *võrokesed* and *võro kiil* – are used.

[3] *Hiidlane* – an islander from Hiiumaa.

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.toulouze-niglas

# NATIVE SPIRITUALITY IN (RE)CONSTRUCTED PERSONHOOD: OBSERVING AND FILMING YURI VELLA

*Eva Toulouze, Liivo Niglas*

**Abstract:** This article[1] is an attempt to understand what role spiritual matters play in the ideas and everyday life of a public figure quite famous in Western Siberia, the Forest Nenets writer, reindeer herder and activist Yuri Vella, and how the so-called religious practice is articulated in his life. In our reflection, we do not rely on any ad-hoc discourse, on issue-centred interviews, but on our fieldwork observation of speech and practice, a big part of which has been recorded on video with the aim of using it in the making of ethnographic films.

**Keywords**: personhood, identity, spirituality, religion, participant observation, ethnographic film

## INTRODUCTION

The 20th century brought radical changes in the material and spiritual life of the Siberian indigenous communities: Soviet rule attempted to transform deeply not only social lives but also individual worldviews in order to achieve the project of inventing the so-called "Homo Sovieticus". This project has certainly not been achieved according to its initial aims. However, Soviet systematic endeavours have certainly had consequences on the natives' lives (see, for example, Leete & Vallikivi 2011a; 2011b). They had to adapt to understandings very different from their own, while starting from a point radically different from the dominant, Russian, commonly accepted truth. Almost a century later, what is the result? What has been left of the northern natives' pre-Soviet worldview? How have concepts and practices changed?

There are different ways of approaching these questions. We (Eva and Liivo – we will refer to ourselves by first names) have chosen to concentrate on one individual, in order to understand in depth the kind of processes at work in personhood construction. It is clear that we understand personhood from a Western point of view. However, we are convinced that northern natives have had to find ways of adapting and surviving, and these ways have deeply af-

fected their individualities. They have been individual as each person had to find answers to questions that were not community issues: children in boarding schools, young men in the army had to express individual agency in coping with new and barely understandable phenomena. We have concentrated on one individual, Yuri Vella, with whom both authors of this paper have interacted for almost fifteen years, living in his camp and keeping constantly in touch with him. Yuri is a peculiar person, particularly interesting to follow: coming from an ordinary native life experience, very much in compliance with the 'script' the Soviet regime had imagined for natives (Gray 2003: 48), he has developed a keen reflexive native consciousness, which leads him to constantly follow his own behaviour and his own actions, incomparably more than the majority of his kin and people in general do. His experience is certainly not to be generalised: it would be erroneous to pretend that Forest Nenets in general follow his pattern, he is more an exception than a rule, but he shows one of the possible intellectual ways open for a person of his generation. Other possible ways are double patterns – one in the forest, the other in the village –, conversion to Christianity, predominance of materialistic and positivistic understandings, for example. But Yuri's approach, while being unique because of his consciousness, is deeply embedded in a world that is shared by his native companions.

The materials we rely upon are of different kinds. They are mainly based on fieldwork: Eva has been to Yuri's place three times – in 1999 and 2000, for a cumulated time of five months, two of them in the company of the Estonian linguist Kaur Mägi. Moreover, she has met Yuri in other public events in Russia and abroad (1998, 1999, 2005, 2008). Liivo met Yuri for the first time in Tartu in 2000 and was thereafter invited by him to shoot a film about the Forest Nenets. He twice spent a month (in 2000 and 2001) at Yuri's place and made the film *Yuri Vella's World* (Niglas 2003). In 2009, Eva and Liivo dwelt at Yuri's camp for three weeks while shooting video footage for research and for a new documentary about him. Liivo returned to Yuri's camp some weeks later in the autumn to record additional material for the film during the coupling of reindeer. These fieldwork trips provided us with film material and several conversations, as well as practical experience of rituals. The film footage, more than 50 hours in total, is an additional fixed material and we may add to this the interviews in the numerous films made about him, and the content of the available part of the video archives he himself shot regularly between 1995 and 2001.

## Methodology: observing and filming

While staying in Yuri's home, our fieldwork method was mainly just living (Kerttula 2000: 3). We were engaged in our own work – Eva translating Yuri's poetry, Liivo shooting for documentaries – but as anthropologists we simply observed and participated in Yuri's everyday life. We carried water for sauna, played with Yuri's grandchildren and spent hours drinking tea and listening to Yuri's stories. There was no specific research plan, no thematic interviews. Therefore the spiritual issues as commented hereafter result from how they came forth spontaneously in a given observed situation. There are specific reasons why we focused on participant observation in our fieldwork at Yuri's place.

Yuri is a very active and outspoken person. He is constantly on the move, always doing something, be it taking care of the reindeer, checking fish traps, building a sledge or driving a car to a nearby village or town. It was very difficult to pre-plan a longer interview session with him because we would simply never know when and for how long we could do it. On the other hand, he is usually very talkative and likes to express his views on all kinds of matters. He likes to talk about himself, or, more precisely, whatever topic he is concentrating on, which he usually approaches through his own personality. In other words, although it is complicated to conduct a proper interview with Yuri, it is relatively easy to gather information from him. As fieldworkers we just had to participate in his activities and tried to keep pace with him while making our observations and collecting data.

This fieldwork methodology works well with the kind of filmmaking Liivo has carried out at Yuri's places since 2000. As a filmmaker, Liivo is reluctant to make interview-based films. Many documentaries use the interview – an informant or an expert, usually seated in a room, answering a set of questions posed by a researcher or filmmaker – as the main narrative device. In his film work, Liivo tries to harness the potential that is inherent in the real life behaviour of the film characters, including their spontaneous reactions to the presence of a camera. He employs observation as the main strategy in his filmmaking, but his camera is not limited to being merely 'a fly on the wall'. His approach emphasises 'being with' rather than simply 'looking at' the film subject. Filming Yuri means participating in his everyday activities with a video camera, which is not only a recording device but also a partner, whose presence enables Yuri to comment on his action, to discuss various topics and to construct his identity. The object of the video observation is not just Yuri's behaviour and insights, but also the role of the filmmaker in that observed reality. Therefore, although Liivo's filmmaking is observational in form, it is participatory in essence: filmmaker represents his subject's socio-cultural real-

ity by showing a series of contiguous events, thus encouraging the audience to learn by observing rather than just by listening; and in order to "enhance the value of his material as evidence", he reveals his role as a filmmaker in the recorded events (MacDougall 1998: 134)[2].

Our research project as a whole thus included both fieldwork and filming. The important part of the information and insights employed in the present analysis were achieved when Eva and Liivo stayed together at Yuri's forest camp in the summer of 2009. Our aim was to film video footage on Yuri's life history, focusing on his different biographical episodes. We planned to use these episodes both for the research and for the documentary film. Eva's role was to engage Yuri in informal conversations while Liivo recorded it with a video camera. Our plan was to ask Yuri to take us to the places that had some sort of significance in his life history or had influenced him as a person. We hoped that visiting these places would trigger the flow of information from Yuri and reveal his emotions in the way it could not have been achieved in a normal interview situation. Thus, while previously Eva and Liivo had worked independently, one doing fieldwork, the other making a film, this time we decided to join forces and use a video camera as a proper fieldwork tool.

Using a video camera in ethnographic fieldwork is quite common these days. Some researchers see it merely as a 'note-taking device', others use it more systematically in the data collection, analysis and representation phases of the research in order to focus, for example, on aesthetic, corporeal or other sensory aspects of reality under study (Pink 2007; 2009). In the case of Yuri, the video camera had an important methodological value for us. It provided us with the mechanism for studying his self-representation. The role of the camera in the construction and representation of personal identity is one of the methodological devices that film can offer to anthropology. For example, Jean Rouch put the idea of performance and role-playing at the centre of his filmmaking. He has stated that "when people are being recorded, the reactions that they have are always infinitely more sincere than those they have when they are not being recorded. The fact of being recorded gives these people a public" (Blue 2006: 268–269).

Yuri has repeatedly stated that his life is a museum (Toulouze 2004): it is on display for others to see and to learn from. He is always ready to demonstrate his way of life and to explain his understandings of reality to the audience, be it by hosting people (researchers, politicians, filmmakers, etc.) in his camps, delivering public lectures, giving interviews to the mass media, or participating in TV programmes and documentaries. As the main aim of Liivo's filming was to make a feature-length documentary about Yuri, we offered him a potential film audience that he could relate to and perform for. He is well experienced

in manipulating visual media (Niglas 2005), and he knows how to make an impression on the audience.

Yuri is a highly media-conscious person to work with. He has familiarised himself with the film medium by watching thousands of fiction and documentary films: he has a huge collection of VHS tapes that he likes to play on a TV set in his forest camp, and whenever there is a chance to watch TV (when the TV signal in his forest house is powerful enough due to the weather conditions, or when he is visiting friends and family in nearby villages and towns) he often spends hours watching several films in a row, sometimes until early morning. For more than five years, when working officially for the Research Institute for the Revival of the Ob-Ugrian Peoples, he also systematically used a VHS camera to document his own life in order to demonstrate how the natives live in the region.

Yuri is personally interested in film as a process. He consciously cooperates with the filmmaker, both by thinking technically (answering questions so that they could be easily edited), visually ("What a beautiful sequence you could have had!") and in terms of the message. Thus, the mere presence of the camera is a catalyser, which provokes information. We are conscious of the peculiar quality of this information: it is simultaneously explicit, biased and controlled. As for Yuri, film is a way of forwarding the messages he has been thinking about. He is, on the one hand, careful and aware of what he says, while on the other he says certainly more than he would without a camera pointing at him. The camera makes him talk, which is certainly partly a need for him to find clarity in his own thoughts (the 'sofa of the psychoanalyst'). The camera as a recording and representation device encourages him to put on a good performance, to show his storytelling and reasoning skills. In many cases, the camera just records the same things he has stated elsewhere, in conversations or in his stories and poems, but sometimes it makes him approach his life experience from a new angle. By talking to the camera, he constructs both his narrative and himself, giving us a kind of personal 'official' discourse about his biography. 'Official' does not mean it is false or invented. It just attempts to give a coherent narrative of life's naturally heterogeneous layers and incoherent course. In this 'official' autobiography there are iconic stories, emotions, turning points, philosophical developments. It reveals more clearly than anything else who Yuri attempts to be, not only for us, but mainly for him. Thus, it participates actively in his production of sense and the construction of his identity.

This article is about one individual. It is one possible way to approach world-view questions, and certainly not the least interesting, for it allows one to go deeper into reality's complexity without having to cope with differences between individuals and the need to generalise and to modelise a large amount

of diversity (as in Pentikäinen 1971). Still we cannot avoid the necessity of simplifying and modelising, which reflects the attempt to organise the thinking of one single individual. His personal effort to produce order is certainly of great help, although we are aware of the possible manipulation this control on the information flows allows. But the manipulation itself is also of significance.

## About native spirituality: an attempt to define what we look for

The kind of evidence we are looking for is intuitively clear while it is tricky to formulate and to define, for in Nenets culture the boundaries are not as clearly drawn as they are in Western scientific understanding. If we were missionaries or officials, we would certainly speak about Yuri's 'religiosity', about his 'beliefs'[3], about his 'religious thinking', even about his religion. We would have no scruples in using a word which refers to our own default worldview and covers an unambiguous sphere. But we are anthropologists and we know that the way a Siberian native understands the world and the connections within it is not to be summarised with the words 'religion' or 'belief'. These are exogenous, they have been imposed upon the natives by alien mental structures, by people who, being professionals in that sphere, could only interpret the unfamiliar by using familiar categories: their thinking habits and their languages did not and still do not provide them with appropriate tools, they do not correspond to the realities they are supposed to cover. At the same time, those categories have been accepted, interiorised by the natives themselves (Asad 1993): in contact circumstances, speaking a language that is not theirs, they took over the conceptual tools introduced by the *Other* and used them while confronting the attempts to penetrate their consciousness. These tools became a kind of weapon: even if they were not well suited for their case in a theoretical way, pragmatically, they could still be advantageously used, when nothing else was available.

We are thus facing a challenge: to express what is not to be reduced to the concepts we have in our kit box. The closest is perhaps 'ontology', which is certainly fit (as worldview is) for the holistic approach it induces, but seems not to be sharp enough to be of much help in defining boundaries. We have chosen here the word spirituality, giving it very much the sense used by Hann (2007: 387). Nevertheless, even this term remains critical: for, in concept as well as practice, there is no clear boundary between spiritual and profane in the world of indigenous people in Western Siberia. The spiritual aspect is in all deeds, even the most trivial: the choice of a place to urinate in the forest is an act directly embedded in the notion of sacred; in the permanent dialogue

and negotiation one is involved with all the forces that surround the human being. Eva's fieldwork shows this eloquently: in 2004, during an offering in a Khanty forest camp, prayer was thoroughly intermingled with jokes and laughter; slaughtering reindeer in order to eat meat is no less a sacrifice (we will come to this later on). The clearly defined realms of sacred and profane, of earthly and spiritual, are part of our worldview. From this point of view, the choice of this issue is clearly connected to the understandings we have grown up with. However, the holistic approach does not annihilate the sense of sacredness; it just refuses to isolate it and inserts it into a continuum. We will concentrate on one end of this axis. To put it in other words, we will try to follow Yuri's ways of negotiating his own place in the world with the other forces – human, natural or spiritual – that must be domesticated. The three aforementioned spheres are not thoroughly distinct from one another, forming three layers of one whole, they are also disposed in a continuum without clear boundaries. By limiting our subject (for scientific approach, Western-centred, requires limiting), we impose our worldview; but still, we consider we may do it, for this understanding has been dominant in the region for some time now, and these concepts are used by the natives themselves. Moreover, we suspect that Yuri himself is very much influenced by this way of reflecting on the world. In any case, communication with the spirits exists and is undoubtedly of great importance for Yuri and his family.

## (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONHOOD

In order to appreciate how the perception of the sacred sphere interacts with other aspects of Yuri's worldview, we must start by giving an overview of his biography (see also: Toulouze 2003). This explains how from a typical Soviet start in life, the course of his personal history has led him to occupy a unique position among the intellectuals of the Russian North.

### Yuri Vella's short biography

Yuri had quite an ordinary Soviet childhood. After the death of his father, who was a kolkhoz reindeer herder, he moved with his mother to Varyogan, a village founded on the upper Agan River in the 1930s by relocating nomadic Forest Nenets and Khanty from the region into one settlement. There he went to school and visited as often as possible his grandmother Nengi, who shared with her grandchild her stories told in Nenets. In Varyogan Yuri could attend

only elementary school and had to move to Agan – a bigger, predominantly Khanty settlement down the river – in order to continue his studies in a boarding school. Afterwards he started high school in the regional centre Surgut, but soon got into conflict with his Russian language and literature teacher, who did not appreciate him writing poems, and he left Surgut without finishing school.

Yuri's further years did not differ from most native boys' course of life. He served in the army, was employed in different jobs, and married a native girl, Elena Taylakova, from a Khanty family living in Agan. One year after completing his compulsory service in the army, he decided to stop drinking and started therapy with a well-known Sverdlovsk-based physician – this was one original decision that he made quite early. Another step, which was not so commonplace[4], was to move to his wife's place: as Elena was the youngest in her family, she was supposed to live with her mother until the latter's death. Later they moved back to Varyogan, where Yuri earned his living as a hunter in a state enterprise and spent long periods in the forest, sometimes with his family. Meanwhile, on the advice of a Russian ethnologist, Izmail Gemuyev, he applied for distance education at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow: in order to do that, he first had to finish high school and then to attend university courses in poetry while working full time; for two years he worked as the president of the rural soviet of Agan, but after realising that his attempt to turn the local policy towards the indigenous people had failed due to the significant number of Russian newcomers living in the area, he went back to his profession as a hunter.

In 1990, when the Soviet economic and political system was crumbling, Yuri completed his first poem collection, which was published the next year[5], and decided to leave the village in order to live with his family in the taiga. He bought ten reindeer and moved to the area where his paternal ancestors used to live as reindeer herders and hunters. However, like many other areas in Western Siberia, where oil was discovered in the 1960s, his ancestral territory had suffered from the ruthless exploitation of the Soviet oil industry.

Yuri has lived there ever since. Today he has twenty-four people under his responsibility – daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren – and he manages a much larger reindeer herd. Meanwhile he has published several new books[6]. As the territory where he retired with his reindeer is on the land used by Lukoil, the giant multinational company exploiting oil resources in the region, Yuri found himself in a conflict with the oil industry and also with local authorities. He had to become politically active and start a fight for indigenous rights in order to survive as a reindeer herder in one of the most important oil-producing regions of Russia. Since then, he has been known as an activist who often uses very clever and exceptional ways to fight for the rights of natives to their tra-

ditional way of life. This makes him a very uncomfortable 'trouble maker' for Lukoil and regional authorities.

## The revelation

Yuri, as we have pointed out, has experienced an upbringing very similar to that of other young men from the taiga. Although his connection with his grandmother was quite close, he did not live in her home but in a boarding school, where the ruling values were those of the communist regime, i.e., materialism and anti-religiosity. These values were given to him by default. He did not discuss them at the time. One of his jobs[7] was working as a propagandist in the 'Red chum' (the propaganda corner in the village). Actually, Yuri told us that he had applied to be accepted into the Communist Party three times but had been rejected each time. This shows that he had then no doubt about the righteousness of the Party's politics and of the general political discourse, part of which was atheist education. As a whole, in the remote parts of Russia, it was actually a convincing story for ordinary citizens who had no basis for comparison, as they had never gone abroad nor seen anything else.

To the ethnographer Andrey Golovnev, who, in 1992, enquired about his understanding of the Nenets gods, Yuri answered that for him, the word *num* had long meant only sky, and it became the name of a god only when later he read in books that this ordinary word was also the name of the Nenets' main god (Golovnev 1995: 380). This provocative answer indicates that in his youth Yuri was not explicitly instructed in the Nenets' worldview. He discovered this aspect of his culture only later on. In any case, this is the way he presents his biography: there is a clear turning point, as in a kind of Pauline religious conversion.

There is a long and interesting episode in the video footage shot in the summer of 2009 at Yuri's summer camp. It shows how the mere presence of a recording camera can catalyse a long and uninterrupted flow of information with almost no questions from the filmmaker. It was our first day at Yuri's forest camp and one could sense that Yuri was excited about being filmed again. It almost felt as if the camera was an old visiting friend, with whom he was eager to share his personal news and insights after so many years of separation[8].

Yuri was digging soil in a small garden next to a reindeer enclosure. When Liivo approached him with his camera, Yuri started a long monologue that lasted all in all for almost an hour. Whenever Yuri ran out of thoughts, he returned to digging. But in a short while, seeing that Liivo continued shooting, he took up a new topic, even if the camera was filming at the other end of the

garden. Liivo took it almost as a test – to see how long and on what issues Yuri would keep talking without any interference from the filmmaker. The topics he brought up were obviously very relevant for him at that moment. He talked about the garden and the difficulties of maintaining it; about his new passion for sledge building; about his concern over autumn pastures where reindeer go for the rut and the oil people to hunt and drink. Surprisingly, one of the topics was the revelation that changed his life many years ago.

This happened while Yuri was studying at the Literature Institute. During his first years at the institute, Yuri underwent a fascinating process: he discovered the notion of culture[9]. During the first year at the institute, the students had to study ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and Yuri discovered that they were very much universally understandable by people from other cultures (much more so than Oriental philosophies). He started realising that the Nenets also had a culture of their own: while the teacher talked about classical cultures, Yuri reflected in comparison about his way of thinking as a native. He thus discovered his own culture not through the elders or his kin, but by going far and facing other, different 'cultures'. Actually he considers now that school had not transmitted any hint of high culture either to him or to his daughters, and that it just destroyed what they knew without bringing them anything in return. In *Yuri Vella's World* he states: "Children live in a boarding school. Returning to camp, they don't know anymore how to live there, how to heat a stove, from which side to approach reindeer. They have to learn all this over again. But there's no work in the village. Our children graduate high school or technical school, but they don't find work. And so they lounge around. For them, what is there to do? Nothing." (Niglas 2003)

Studying at university allowed Yuri to discover that there were real intellectual and ethical values in the Russian and 'Western' culture overall. He discovered world literature as well as art and classical music, all of which was kept far from the natives' reach. He also discovered the contradictions between the discourse he was accustomed to and historical reality. Once a lecturer commented on the existence of intellectuals and poets among anti-Bolshevik groups, known as the Whites, during the Russian Civil War in 1918–1921, and Yuri discovered that there were values on the 'other' side too – loyalty and honesty, for example, which had been denied by their teachers at school, who had always presented the Whites as 'bandits'. It was one of the first contradictions that led Yuri to start doubting the whole system and trying to judge always by himself, without relying on any authorities' discourse. He has learnt to doubt: he started applying this new knowledge to all domains in life, subjecting all information to critical examination dictated by his own reason. For him, authoritative speech has entirely lost its weight, and forever.

However, Yuri discovered something else as well. He realised that what his people had been deprived of by Russian colonisation was also culture. Until entering university, he thought as they had been told that they were a primitive people, and that Russians had brought them civilisation[10].

## (Re)constructing an indigenous identity

Now, by discovering the *Others*' culture, Yuri also discovered his own, and from that day on he started defending the Siberian natives' values in any situation with which he was confronted. One must admit that not only culture was at stake in Western Siberia's oil industry development, which started in the 1960s and achieved a peak in the 1970s: the natives' physical life started to be endangered, as the environment around them, which they relied upon, was gradually being destroyed by air, water and soil pollution. While the political conditions in Russia changed, confirming the suspicions that had already arisen, the natives' position in their own land became more and more ambiguous: on the one hand, they were provided with the so-called kinship territories whenever they chose the traditional way of life,[11] on the other, as those territories were often already being used for oil production, conflicts between oil workers and reindeer herders were multiplied. For oil companies as well as for many newcomers in general, the landscape is a place where there is nothing, which is empty, because there are no signs of buildings or other marks of civilisation. Therefore they occupy it irrespective of the signification it may have for the indigenous people.[12]

Yuri wants to show the depth of the cultural layer inherent in the Agan natives: he likes to exhibit their skills in deduction, in reconstruction. 'Playing detective' is one of his favourite attitudes[13], which we have witnessed many times. A good example of Yuri's performance as a detective is captured in a sequence Liivo shot in May 2001.

Yuri is walking in the forest looking for the herd. He reaches a spot without big trees not far from a small lake and informs the camera that there was once a campsite there. The only visible evidence of the campsite that the camera can see is a wooden detail of a traditional conic tent (*chum*), half-hidden in the moss. Yuri shows where the entrance was, detecting it from the location of a tiny pile of rotten tree branches that used to be firewood that was used to heat the chum. As there is no sign of a fireplace, Yuri claims that people used an iron stove and therefore they lived there either during or after the war. He points out that the people lived there in winter because the trees were chopped down when there was snow – he shows a tree stump with traces of an axe blade,

which is half a meter high. He adds that the campsite was used temporarily, probably in order to hunt for squirrels or wild reindeer. And then he gives a personal twist to his interpretation, speculating that the occupants of this site could have been his father and mother, because, according to his mother, that is the area where they lived after the war.

The aim of this performance for the camera is clear: to show that the natives are able to see and interpret, while the white man who sees the same things does not understand what messages objects, landscape and animals convey. As Yuri explains in the same sequence, the white man is blind and does not wish to see, where there would be so much to see. That is why Siberia is presented like a white stain. But the landscape, the trees, the soil, the objects speak: they are not only the remains of the native culture; they may be part of a culture still alive. And the way people know and see it is a direct expression of its peculiarities and of what this culture may contribute to universal knowledge.

Yuri's contemporary insertion in traditional culture is the result of a conscious construction that started after he graduated from the institute. He built himself up in several ways. In 1990, he changed his way of life totally by becoming a reindeer herder: he had never lived permanently in the wild; he left the village and started a new life from scratch. It was actually very hard on his wife, who did not want to leave the life she was accustomed to and which she liked. Becoming a reindeer herder was his own personal project, corresponding to his personal dreams and to his peculiar vision. With his wife's help he built dozens of kilometres of fences, several log huts in different camps, roads to them, even bridges. He learned to be a reindeer herder, albeit he had never lived with reindeer. At forty, he attempted to learn skills that one should acquire while a child. Part of this reality is the fact that he is still rather clumsy as a reindeer herder. He is not good at catching the reindeer with the lasso. This explains why Yuri, who is usually very happy to be filmed, gets easily irritated when filmed during reindeer catching. He often mentions that he is "a young reindeer herder". Sometimes he turns to that story in order to show the proficiency of Russian reindeer herders. For example, in his personal video archive there is material recorded at the Congress of Private Reindeer Herders in 1999, which shows him in his introductory speech sharing with the audience how he asked a reindeer herder in Lapland how many ways he knew for castrating a male deer. As he received the answer "one", he added proudly: "You all know that our elders know six ways for castrating a deer, depending on the result you want. I myself know three of them, and I may use only two, because I do not have my own teeth anymore." But more often this story is meant to convey that Yuri has not achieved the proficiency of most herders. Compared to his neighbours, the difference in knowledge and ability is clear: as we observed during our fieldwork

in 2009, his Khanty neighbours were very proficient in preparing the reindeer, and they ate more parts than Yuri and his wife did.

Yuri's construction is heroic and desperate. What he did for his material life, he also did with his mind. He bent it in order to create a new awareness and to build up a whole indigenous identity, while he had been condemned to duality by the circumstances of his upbringing. He attempted to reunite his own world. Of course, there are no witnesses to how he struggled, except perhaps his wife, who nevertheless was in enough trouble herself, trying to adapt to a life she had not chosen (and that by now she has learnt to love). However, we may assume his struggles were hard.

Thus, what he is attempting to do is not to invent a new identity from scratch, but to reunite his divided identity, to find anew what has been lost and annihilated, to reconstruct himself. In the same way, he learnt to live within native spirituality, which is now fully part of his identity. We do not know whether he has the same apprenticeship feeling in so-called spiritual matters, but we are going to explore this issue in the following part of the article.

## A SERIOUS 'ENTERTAINMENT': SACRIFICIAL PRACTICE TODAY

Once, in 1999, when Eva was living at Yuri's place, they were visited by a couple from Num-To, to whom Yuri had promised to give an old snowmobile. They spent about two weeks at Yuri's place. Once Yuri asked the man, a Forest Nenets:

> – Do you know how to make a god?
>
> – No, I have never made any.
>
> – That's good! The result is better when one makes a god for the first time. Mine is too old. I must have another.

Some days later, as we were all together indoors, Yuri gave his guest a piece of wood and a knife and asked him to start carving. He gave him instructions in order to have the piece of wood carved into a rough anthropomorphic shape. When it was ready, Yuri wrapped it in tissues and performed a short ceremony. At the end of it, he addressed Eva and said: "Well, this is how we entertain ourselves." The tone was ambiguous. Yuri watched Eva's reaction attentively, with a hint of a smile, which was clearly open to various interpretations.

For us, this last remark shows Yuri's attempt to integrate Eva's potential reaction into his discourse. He had not known her for long by the time and he supposed that, like almost all the *lutsa*[14] he had formerly met, she could con-

sider his beliefs as ridiculous, and tried to protect himself by being the first to laugh at them. There was something pathetic in Yuri's defensive position. It illustrated how injured the native people were in their relations with outsiders and how frequently they had been ridiculed by them.[15] Or may we infer that Yuri still remembered how he would have reacted himself not so long ago? Was there a part in him that still distanced itself from what he attempted to be, in spite of long-term habits? Actually this cautious behaviour is not accidental. We can identify it in an episode in *Yuri Vella's World*, where Yuri talks about the President's reindeer.

Yuri is feeding dried bread to reindeer and explains that there is a custom to present a friend or a relative with a reindeer that stays in the herd of the giver, and that it is possible to conclude how lucky its owner is by observing the behaviour and the fate of the reindeer. He goes on saying that some years ago he and his wife had dedicated a female reindeer to the president of Russia, and that when her first calf was born, they learned that Boris Yeltsin, who was the president at the time, had become ill. Yuri continues: "We performed a rite of sacrifice, offered the calf to the gods so that the President would recover. Soon the mass media announced that the President was well again." Yuri does not explicitly connect the two events; he leaves the conclusions to be drawn by the audience. We have already commented on this in a former article: "He does not assert that the sacrifice was the reason for the president's recovery, but the fact is that he was healed. This is an interesting point in Yuri's behaviour. Clearly, he believes in the connection between the reindeer and their owners, between the deeds and their consequences. At the same time, he is perfectly acquainted with the Western scepticism about all this kind of 'superstitions', and he presents them in a way unobjectionable to the outside world." (Niglas & Toulouze 2004: 106) The influence of modern values proceeding from the Soviet materialist understanding upon traditional way of thinking is very clear here.

## Offerings and sacrifices

Sacrifice is the main form of communication with the spirits practised by the Siberian natives. It punctuates the year and the main periods as well as the main moments in people's lives, and helps people to express veneration towards the divinities who rule their lives – the local ones, the ones represented in natural elements as well as the protectors of the clan. An offering, a sacrifice is a way to draw their attention to the people who perform the sacrifice and who ask for well-being. They also accompany any kind of communication moving from below towards the highest spheres.

We have had the opportunity, separately and together, to participate in several ceremonies we shall here recall. In 2009, we had brought Yuri as a gift a long piece (3 metres) of white fabric. It is one of the accessories for sacrifices and offerings. It was supposed to be a welcome gift, as Yuri had declared to Eva once in 1999. While during previous visits when Eva had brought one, it had been put aside and certainly used by Yuri when needed, this time we were thoroughly involved in its use, most probably because of the interest Yuri had in our filming. As our visit took place in the second half of July and beginning of August, we were not expecting to participate in blood sacrifices, for the reindeers change their fur at that time of the year and herders avoid slaughtering them before their skin is fit for use. However, the family was longing for meat, so they started at the end of July to follow the reindeers to see whether at least one of them would have a proper skin. As we had only some days left before returning to Europe, Yuri addressed the two of us asking: "Which of you bought the fabric? Is it a gift from one of you personally or from both?" We answered that it was our common gift. What would have happened if only Liivo or only Eva had been the donor, we do not know – would Eva being a female have had an impact? Certainly, the presence of the camera was a key factor. He knew we wished to film and he was ready to adapt his deeds to the needs of filming. Anyhow, Yuri then told us to choose the use for the fabric ourselves, the situation being the following, as he explained to us: the proper way to do things would be to proceed to a reindeer sacrifice with the fabric being loosely knotted around the neck of the reindeer during the sacrifice, dipped in blood afterwards and brought to a sacred place we had expressed the wish to see not far from the Vatyogan River. But there was no time: the reindeer would not be sacrificed until our very last day because of the skin. So we were given a choice: either to put the fabric aside for the last day and perform the first part of the full ritual or go to the sacred place before the sacrifice and make a simple offering with the fabric. We chose the second alternative for both general and self-interested reasons. The latter was the needs of the film Liivo was shooting, as the topic of the film was directly connected with the Vatyogan area. The general reason was also related to the same piece of land. The area by the Vatyogan River was a critical place for Yuri's herd and he was deeply concerned about it. It was the rutting place for his reindeer, but the governor of Khanty-Mansi region had given the same land to the Lukoil hunting club. Yuri had been unofficially given a copy of that document some months earlier and thus discovered why his reindeer were often harassed during the rut by hunters. He had decided to chase hunters from the Vatyogan shores and planned to build a provisional log cabin there for this purpose. To have an offering and a prayer in a sacred place situated in the middle of a disputed area seemed to be appropriate to Yuri's

needs at that very moment as this had been his main concern during the whole summer. Moreover, the summer had been mosquito-free, and the reindeer, who are usually attracted home by the smoke produced by burning fresh moss in the so-called reindeer house (*olennyi dom*), were not bothered by insects and roamed freely on the Vatyogan River, causing deep concerns to the herder. So, to have an offering in the area seemed to be an appropriate decision. Yuri had previously suggested that Liivo's film could be about the Land of Love (i.e., the Vatyogan area where the rut was taking place), hinting that it would probably also include him fighting with the oil people there. By carrying out a ritual in the place, he was offering the filmmaker a powerful episode that would intensify the film narrative.

Thus, we went with Yuri and his three-year-old grandson by car to the sacred place, which was a hill of elongated form, in the centre of which there was a natural treeless sandy corridor. The heart of the sacred place was the top of it, where besides a metal pole hammered into the ground proving the oil workers' presence, there were recent reindeer skins hanging on trees and pieces of reindeer hair still dragging across the ground. Before the sacrifice Yuri tore three pieces from the fabric: he gave one to his grandson and one to each of us. He explained that Grandmother (his wife) would sew the piece on the child's *malitsa*, the anorak-type clothing for men. There are two types of *malitsa*, the winter one and the summer one, but both have a hood, and the piece of sacrificial fabric is sewn on the back of the hood as a protective mark. While Liivo was filming, Yuri addressed the gods, in Nenets as he always does, his prayer being interrupted by repetitive bows and turns clockwise. He held his grandson by the hand and the three-year-old child imitated all his grandfather's gestures and movements, except at the end of the prayer, when he clearly got bored and started playing on the ground. After the prayer, Yuri asked Liivo to climb up a tree and knot the fabric around a tree branch in the proper way. Before climbing the tree, Liivo gave the running camera to Eva and asked her to continue to record the ritual. While he was climbing, Yuri kept shouting "Wow, wow!" and asked the child to do likewise.[16] After Liivo had come down, Yuri asked him to walk around the tree with him and his grandson, while Eva filmed. Yuri set the order by age: first he, then Liivo, then the child. Yuri interfered when the child wanted to walk between him and Liivo. Eva was not involved, not so much because of the camera, but because females do not participate actively in offerings.

This is one example of an offering without a blood sacrifice. In the following sections, we shall present other examples of sacrifices of reindeer in connection with both sacred places and prayers that are pronounced during their performance.

**Sacred places**

People make sacrifices and address the gods in special places. These are places felt to be connected with the spirits and anyone having a 'spiritual' experience at a specific site may start a tradition of a sacred place there – in the beginning for himself, later on it may spread and become more widely used, as with the one on the Vatyogan, at which Yuri sacrifices. While driving there in his four-wheel-drive minibus[17], Yuri explained into the camera the probable origin of this sacred place:

> A *kapi*[18] lived in that area and once, while hunting, he got to the hill and saw it was a nice place. He started to walk back and suddenly heard a bell ringing. He returned and looked for the bell, but couldn't find one; he moved and heard the sound again. So he decided it was a sacred place.

The main sacred place close to his camps has been destroyed: it was on the spot currently occupied by the oil workers' village Povkh, and more precisely by the offices of Central Technical Engineering Service. Actually, according to Yuri, several "bosses" died at their working table in this office, and so he added: "That shows that the sacred place is still functioning."

However, some sacred places are only for him and his family. One, for example, is not far from his former winter camp[19]. It was chosen because a swan nested on it, and Yuri felt it to be a sign. It was here that the first sacrifice Eva attended took place. Its circumstances show that it was all but an entertainment.

In 1999, Eva had just arrived with Yuri and his wife from Helsinki and they found that there was no meat in the camp any more. In the evening, Yuri and his wife discussed which reindeer to eat. On the following day they all went to the place where the herd stayed, in a corral further in the forest. Yuri spent much time inside the fence with his grandchildren but by the evening there was no reindeer chosen. Yuri behaved according to what he had said in a previous congress of private reindeer herders: one was too slim, the other too nice, the third too old, it was impossible to decide which would be slaughtered. But during the night Yuri had a dream. He saw that Death was hanging around, looking for his wife. He decided instantly after having awoken that a sacrifice had to be made, in order to expel Death from the camp. He went back to the herd with his wife and took three reindeer, which they brought to the camp. After lunch he made a short speech: "We are going to make a sacrifice, no cameras or recorders can be used, and leave your bad thoughts behind in the camp." The first part of the speech was clearly addressed to Eva, who had a camera and a minidisk recorder, but the second could well have been addressed to his wife, who had been very irritated the whole day. The sacrifice was held in the private sacred

place, in the presence of the whole household: his wife, his second daughter and her two sons as well as Eva. The ritual was very similar to the others we had witnessed: having tied the reindeer with a lasso, and put some whitish fabric around their necks, Yuri addressed the gods. Then he slaughtered the reindeer by knocking them down with the back of an axe and then pushing in a knife under their front legs in order to stab the heart, and behind the neck to hit the brain. All the time until the legs of the reindeer became still, Yuri talked to the gods and whipped their bodies with the lasso, as if encouraging the animals to run faster, for the movements of the reindeer's legs represent its galloping towards the other world and when the reindeer remains still, it means he has arrived. When the sacrifice was over, he poured vodka for "those who can drink it"[20] and everybody took some food from the small table of food and drink offerings. Then the longest part of all started – the skinning and the cutting of the meat, as there were three reindeer. The male animal genitalia were thrown up into a tree, and the heads were also hung on the same tree. Then we went back home on sledges pulled by a snowmobile.

This story shows how serious Yuri is about sacrificing. As long as only his comfort was at stake, he could linger and give his reindeer time. But as soon as the situation became critical (the dream), quick action was required. The fact that he forbade any kind of recording[21] was clearly another sign of the seriousness of the situation: it was not meant to be an exotic display, but a real ceremony with a real purpose, not fit to be mixed up with a public show of local identity. It was designed for a higher purpose, to protect the inhabitants of the camp from impending death. Actually we learned later that in those days a Nenets woman in the village of Varyogan died. Yuri presented this information as proof that the sacrifice had been successful and that Death had to turn to another place to catch his prey.[22]

## Prayers[23]

The performer of the sacrifice – which is always the oldest of the men – is the one who prays in a loud voice. And Yuri does it in Nenets, although it is not a language he uses every day. Actually, in the last years, many of his Nenets partners in conversation, elderly men, have died. As he is married to a Khanty woman who does not know Nenets actively, he never speaks it at home: their daughters were brought up in Russian and so have their grandchildren. Therefore usually there is nobody around who understands Nenets. His praying in his mother tongue is thus quite annoying for his wife. Once in 1999, during a meal, she said: "You have talked too long. What could you have to say so

extensively?" He answered: "And I didn't by far say all I wanted." Actually, for him his prayer is as a private conversation, an address to the gods, and its form seems quite free: one may recognise very short formulas in the address parts, but the core of the text is quite flexible, as proved both by this fragment of conjugal conversation and by the way the prayer is pronounced, as clearly Yuri is looking for words that match his thoughts at the moment. Still, this freedom according to which every prayer is a single event represents a choice of formulas that may be repeated, and thus, the composition of prayers reveals, like many other features in this field, a limited flexibility (see below).

During the previously reported offering in 2009, the text of the prayer was the following, according to Yuri's own translation from the video tape into Russian:

> Eh, Old Man of the Vatyogan! Our guests, those two[24], because they walk on this land, have brought you as an offering this small pieces of fabric. Receive this offering with your right hand. Protect well your land from those who threaten it. Not only your land, but our land as well.[25] Let our reindeer never be without food, let our reindeer always find their nourishment here.[26] Let the other animals in their nests never be without food. Let the animals never meet distress. Let fish always dwell in your former riverbeds[27]. Old Man of the Vatyogan, look well after this land; let the plants grow well and the lichen sprout well. Let the reindeer calves always find food between the legs of their mothers; let them always find lichen and mushrooms[28]. Continue to add good days[29]. Let the men walking on this land never meet misfortune. Let people always meet each other with a smile. Eh, Mistress of the Agan, you too, look here, take you too this offering in your hand and bring these fabrics to your lips. Let your hand touch this offering. And help the Old Man of the Vatyogan to guard this land. Eh, Master of the taiga, you too, look here. You were, at some time in the depth of the centuries, also assigned the task of protecting this land.[30]

Some remarks about this text. First of all, the addressees: Yuri, as he emphasised in his own commentary on the translation, addressed three gods at different levels. Two of them were local divinities, one of them ruling the closest river, and another the whole basin. The third god was a very general one, the master of the taiga, who seems to be totally unconnected with the places themselves, but is the protector of some kinds of beings – in this case, he is the protector of vegetation. In terms of structure, the introduction explains the offering, and begs for its acceptance; the second part expresses what is wished for in exchange of the offering. Actually our presence is just a pretext: we, the visitors, seem to ask for permission or to express gratitude for the permission

to walk on these lands. Yet, the demands do not come from us, but from the people belonging to the gods. There is one main demand: protection of the land against those who threaten it. But Yuri mentions them just once; he prefers to insist on the positive demands. The 'beneficiaries' of the demands are first of all the fauna and flora: the reindeer, the other animals, the plants; then again the reindeer and only after them the human residents. Thus the prayer is focused on nature and men are present as part of nature, with wishes most similar. We do not know if and to what extent Yuri chose the wording of his prayer thinking about the future film about the Land of Love and about his fight with the oil people there.

Actually we have another video recording of a sacrifice described below, in which there was also a verbal dimension. In December 2000, Liivo filmed a ceremony whose main aim was to provide Yuri's kin in the village with meat. Yuri brought from his camp three reindeer, one of them white. The sacrifice was held in the small pine grove behind his village house in Varyogan, and his kin attended it. Actually there were also non-natives, either husbands of his kinswomen or acquaintances (one Ukrainian). All the men were involved in the ritual slaughtering. They followed the rules of traditional sacrifice: the men stood in one line side by side while Yuri knocked the reindeer down with the back of the axe before stabbing the animals in the heart and behind the head. After having skinned the animals, he divided the meat among the different households of his family. The ceremony was concluded by another ritual act: Yuri's son-in-law (the father of his youngest daughter's baby), instructed by Yuri, dipped a small piece of reindeer hide in blood and drew two circles on the house: first on the wall facing the grove and then on the wall to its right.

Yuri prayed two times during the sacrifice: the first time shortly before stabbing each reindeer and then later again because the legs of one of the stabbed animals were still moving. We have the video recordings of the prayer before the slaughter of the first and the third reindeer. In the case of the first, a white reindeer, Yuri addressed the heavenly divinities – Father and Mother of Heaven. The other address was general, without any mention of a concrete god. The texts were simple and short, with two main themes: asking the gods to accept the offering, and protect the people called their "children".[31] The second moment in the ceremony when Yuri spoke – for quite a long time – was when the three animals had been knocked down and stabbed one after another. They were actually dead, but one of them still moved its legs. The lasso was put around his neck and Yuri talked to the gods while shaking the lasso, as imitating the movement of reins. Then he addressed different gods, most of them local: he started with the one of Varyogan (Tupka Nat in Nenets), then the Mistress of the Agan, and then the Old Man of the Forest. At this point we notice that the

structure is pretty much the same as in the previously reported offering: firstly the divinity of the particular place, then the master or mistress of the larger river basin, and then the master of the taiga. This seems to be the main 'trinity'. His list was, however, not finished: he also addressed the God of the Tyuytyaha, the rivulet close to his camp, and a god in the form of a goose, a clan divinity.[32]

So usually prayers are a compulsory part of any reindeer slaughter and this, as well as feeding the spirits (see the next chapter) shows that each slaughter is a sacrifice. Most of those performed by Yuri correspond to this rule, but not all. When Eva and Liivo were at the summer camp in August 2009, the slaughtering took place on the last day of their stay. The family was moving south to Agan for a few days, to the funeral of one of Yuri's wife's elderly kin, and the camp was visited by a neighbouring Khanty couple. The slaughtering had been decided before, but the coming of these neighbours, whose relations with Yuri were not the best,[33] led him to take advantage of the neighbour's better skills of lassoing and they marked the calves together. Then they chose a reindeer whose fur was already long enough to make it fit to be used, and they slaughtered it. Yuri's mood was not the best: the tension with the neighbours, the fact that it was too early to slaughter a reindeer, the forthcoming trip to Agan reflected on his disposition. Even the presence of the camera seemed to annoy him this time. Thus the slaughtering proceeded quite rapidly: all the men stood side by side, the men of the family closer to the reindeer, the neighbour standing behind, but still in the sacred space. And all the usual proceedings were respected, except the verbal ones. Yuri only commented about the cat that was expecting meat at some distance, and just killed the reindeer in the usual way without a single address to the gods. Moreover he, his wife and his son-in-law left the subsequent activities (skinning, cutting, washing and cleaning parts of the meat) to the neighbours. This reflects the absence of dogmatism, the flexibility that characterises his 'religious' practice.

## FLEXIBILITY IN YURI VELLA'S SPIRITUALITY

What we call flexibility is the absence of any absolute rules in proceedings. There are ordinary features, but exceptions are always possible. We could also call this feature 'pragmatism'. It appears in different fields.

For example, as we have shown, sometimes the ceremonies are rigidly kept from recording, but sometimes filming is allowed. It depends on the nature of the sacrifice. The ceremony where Eva was asked not to use recording devices was carried out in order to prevent the death of his wife – therefore, the ritual was too serious and too urgent for Yuri to risk the efficiency of it by allowing it

to be recorded. In other instances, for example, when Yuri slaughtered three reindeer for meat, the rituals had a more general nature and Yuri did not mind someone recording them, as long as the filmmaker or the researcher followed certain basic rules of behaviour during the ceremony, like staying behind the sacrificed animal and not crossing the line where other male participants of the ceremony were standing. And then there were ceremonies where Yuri was genuinely interested in having been filmed, as in the case of sacrificing the piece of white fabric we had brought with us.

As we have shown, there is no difference in nature between the slaughtering mainly for meat or slaughtering mainly for sacrifice – we use the word 'sacrifice' mainly in order to characterise the predominant scope of the slaughtering to be inserted into a continuous axis. The ritual may be simplified and the verbal dimension reduced, but the house gods must be fed with sacrificial blood. While for an explicit sacrifice all the camp will be physically present, when the ritual aspect is not emphasised, everyone's presence is not as compulsory. Once after the first snow in the autumn of 1999 one reindeer was slaughtered for meat as Eva was working in the log cabin. She was not called to attend, and she saw Yuri coming in with a bloody bunch of fur, opening the box situated on the sacred wall and 'feeding the spirits' with it. This showed that undoubtedly it was considered as a sacrifice. In other cases – as in the slaughtering of reindeer in August 2009 – we did not notice the feeding of the spirit dolls in the cabin. It may have been due to lack of attention from our side, but we cannot exclude that it just did not take place.

We have no clues about the reasons for the non-accomplishment of one rite or another; we have not conversed on this issue with Yuri himself. But we should take into account the possibility of very human reasons, such as fatigue (our hosts are ageing and may be tempted to reduce efforts to the minimum), stress, bad mood and other forms of mental disposition.

Another sign of dominant flexibility is the fusion of Khanty and Nenets traditions in Yuri's practice. Using fabric for sacrifices seems to be a Khanty custom[34] practiced also by the Forest Nenets in certain areas, mostly where sacred places are visited by both communities, but not everywhere[35]. We do not know to what extent using fabric in sacrifices is due to the regional Forest Nenets peculiarities and to what extent it is a syncretic feature of Yuri's offerings that he has borrowed from the Khanty. As we have demonstrated elsewhere (Niglas & Toulouze 2004: 110), Yuri himself does not often draw a clear line between Forest Nenets and Khanty tradition and he tends to see the indigenous people of the region as one culture.

What we would like to emphasise at this point is that rules are not to be followed blindly, and that each person, each head of family knows when and

how they may be adapted. Clearly, the interest and the welfare of the reindeer and the people are always taken into account. This is no peculiarity of Yuri's approach, but a general feature known in Siberian Arctic communities. Flexibility and mobility are general characteristics of the peoples' worldview and Yuri is no exception.

Still, this flexibility may have limits, and we suppose that the concrete definition of the limits is very much connected with the single individual's understanding. While being quite flexible in most matters, there are rules that must be complied with. We can formulate the hypothesis that there are general rules followed by everybody, no one even thinking of ignoring them, a kind of hard core on the axis, while others are submitted to individual choices and variations. There are rules that are particularly important for Yuri, according to our observation, and he is quite critical of their non-compliance by other performers. The fact that others may overlook them shows that they do not belong to the hardest core.

In his camp, when a sacrifice is performed, women do not take any active part before skinning. They are present at some distance (5–10 meters), staring, but not moving or bowing. They only join the men in the sacred area to take food from the sacrificial table. Yuri's wife does not participate in any spiritual practice (at least openly). However, there are different examples. For instance, once we watched on a VHS cassette a public ceremony performed in Khanty-Mansiisk on behalf of the indigenous Association to Save Yugra[36] by the Northern Khanty writer Maria Vagatova-Voldina, who is a respected elderly woman. Yuri commented on this ceremony, highly disapproving of her "putting" herself forward in that position, while there were men available. She was most probably the oldest person present, and certainly no more of fertile age[37], but as there were younger men present, she broke some rules by performing or accepting to perform this sacrifice, moreover publicly. Clearly, this deed was not perceived as shocking by many Khanty, Mansi or Nenets, as it was organised by an institution whose members are natives. However, it is an institution in which women, and even younger women[38], have played a central role from the very beginning, and it is probably their influence that has led to more flexibility in gender issues.

But for Yuri, an elderly man himself, a patriarch within his own family, flexibility has its limits, and the issue of gender roles is certainly one of them. He seems to be very keen on systematically separating the genders, as Eva had the opportunity to observe during all her fieldwork (Toulouze, forthcoming). We do not know enough about the Forest Nenets' traditional gender practices to appreciate whether this limit in flexibility is a documented or Yuri's own reinvented tradition. We may just observe that, according to Yuri's own words,

compared with the Khanty, the Nenets tend to be much more relaxed about rules, and it is certainly the case with gender issues[39]. But practice reveals that it is certainly very important for him to emphasise male predominance in the spiritual sphere.

## AMBIGUITY IN YURI VELLA'S PERCEPTIONS

Sometimes, we still have the impression that Yuri's position concerning spiritual matters is not as crystal clear as it would seem in the previous sections. We shall focus on two problematic points: his relation to shamanism and to filming. His views seem to be contradictory and ambiguous on both issues, at least to our understanding, and we shall try to unravel them.

### Yuri Vella and shamanism[40]

Every adult man in the Khanty and Nenets environment is able to communicate with invisible agents in some ways. This is actually what any head of family does when he makes an offering. To transmit one's wishes to the gods does not require high esoteric skills, and the 'making of a god' shows very much the same, as above. But men who have more skills get in touch more easily with unseen beings, of whom some may even assist them. This mediation role is the function of shamans, who have both skills and techniques to get superior knowledge and abilities, who can be helped by spirits to find answers. The most famous among the Forest Nenets shamans was Kalliat[41] from the Ngahany clan, Toivo Lehtisalo's main informant in 1914 (Lehtisalo 1959). In this region, shamans have generally disappeared. The persecutions against them in the 1930s have been well documented (Leete 2007). Yuri himself mentions them in his literary texts, especially in one story whose main character is the old man Kapitya-ai, a Khanty whose skills were so genuinely recognised by the Nenets that they gave him a Nenets name. Kapitya-ai was denounced to the Soviet authorities as a shaman and committed suicide thereafter (Vella 2008: 34–35). Actually, Yuri never says explicitly that Kapitya-ay, or his Nenets counterpart Yavunko (he too was so popular among the other ethnic group as to have been given a Khanty name), were shamans. He says they were wise old men who knew many stories. It is not difficult to understand, especially when reading a recently published story about Yavunko (Vella 2008: 27–29) that these old men had superior knowledge and skills. But Yuri is reluctant to use the word 'shaman'.

One must of course be prudent in saying that there are no shamans any more, and one must not forget that there may be people practising shamanic skills while there is no wider knowledge of it. The Khanty are very secretive about their shamanic practice as well as their 'religious' practice in general, secrecy being a fundamental part of it (cf. Pesikova 2006). The Forest Nenets seem to be less so.[42] The only thing we may say for sure about the Nenets, is that the last Nenets who had the reputation of being a shaman in the Agan basin was Yancha, whose son Pavel died in the 1990s as an old man. The memory of Yancha is caricatural: Yuri himself sings a song imitating Yancha, who was a very old man who would often drowse while beating the drum and singing about fly agaric. There is no full proof he was a shaman, but if we add it to his reputation, we may assume he might have been one. Actually Yuri had never seen the old man himself, only others imitating him. So, as often happens, a personal song is performed through several intermediate interpretations. The comical aspect of Yuri's performance is interesting: is it a way of showing shamans through ridicule? Is it a relic of Soviet practices, when shamanism was prohibited? Is it only a funny way for Yuri to perform a song? It is difficult to give a clear answer to these questions. We would suggest that political caution was not the only psychological reason at stake. Soviet materialist education has not left Yuri unscarred, and scepticism, while not totally acknowledged, may be expressed in that way. Anyhow, Yuri seems not to be willing to be explicit on this subject.

As far as the Khanty are concerned, the 'last' shaman in the Agan basin, Ivan Ivanovich Sopochin, whose character has been fixed in Lennart Meri's film about the bear feast, *The Sons of Torum* (1990)[43], is still alive in people's memory, as he died only in the mid-1990s[44]. Yuri knew him well, and is even better acquainted with Sopochin's son, Iosif Ivanovich, who is a very well known person in the Agan community. He is suspected of having inherited some of his father's abilities, but he is still not considered a full shaman and he tries to play the role of a leader in the community, though he seems to be much more intimidated by the oil industry than Yuri.

We mentioned the situation in the Agan basin because Yuri is actually deeply interested, even fascinated, by shamanism: it is clear when he watches recordings of Ivan Sopochin's drum playing in the film *Refugees from Kogalym* (Ernazarova 1991), as both Eva and Liivo have separately witnessed. Once in December 2000, when Liivo was filming some evening activities in Yuri's cabin, Yuri was again watching the film and commented that while one is playing the drum, one straightens up, becomes lighter. He is also in trouble with the definition of the word 'shaman'. In a sequence included in *Yuri Vella's World* (Niglas 2003), Yuri is watching a VHS recording of a German television programme,

where he is presented as a shaman; in his smile, comments and tone one may read several concomitant attitudes: on the one hand it is clear that the suggestion of his being a shaman is seen and felt as absurd and ridiculous; on the other hand, he feels flattered by the idea. Actually this sums up the ambiguity of Yuri's attitude towards shamanism. What is shamanism, who is a shaman, who is or may be a shaman? And could he be a shaman?

The fact that this is an issue for Yuri becomes clear if you look into the glossary presented in the last issue of his Nenets journal *Tilhivsama*[45]. In this glossary, he tries to explain the notion of *tadibja*, which is the Forest Nenets word usually translated as 'shaman'. Yuri explicitly denies this connection: for him, to translate *tadibja* as shaman is a sign that the reader has understood nothing. This reveals that Yuri tries to disassociate the Nenets notion (seen as expressing something serious and important, highly symbolic of native communities' identity) from the Russian word for this phenomenon[46], which is seen by Yuri as inappropriate. This shows his personal concern about the whole notion, and actually this may also be significant for the whole generation, for they themselves lack a living experience of shamanism as they have not been brought up with it. They have been accustomed to hearing this word used by Russians with a depreciative connotation, and even worse consequences. So the word is dangerous, and does not cover a stable notion, for during the repressions, among the people accused of being shamans, there were wise old men, mere bearers of tradition. Still, shamanic knowledge is part of the symbolic tradition of Siberian indigenous people, so it was necessary for Yuri to define his position towards it, as soon as he made the choice of accepting his cultural heritage. This may explain why he likes to emphasise his organic connection to shamanistic knowledge: he often, for example also in *Yuri Vella's World,* tells a story about his parents, who consulted a shaman one and a half years before he was born; the shaman predicted his birth (a boy), and that he would be the only child, as well as the early death of his father.

As a matter of fact, we have the impression that Yuri would very much like to be a shaman, but as far as we know, he is not one. He has hinted to us that he has no special abilities, and he may assert that as a fact, because he has probably checked himself, hoping to discover that actually he is one. But the facts were very clear and he definitely regretted not to be able to be in direct contact with the spirits. Nevertheless, as he writes in one of his short prose texts (Vella 2008: 34), anybody – not only a shaman – can beat the drum[47]. Yuri himself has one and, as he has told Liivo, sometimes, on special occasions, he beats it.

Still, he likes to entertain ambiguity; although, in a rational conversation he says that unfortunately he is not a shaman. However, he likes to recall the two stories an old man used to tell, one if he wished the next day would be

very cold, the other to call for warm temperatures – as in the written version of this story (Vella 2008: 28–29). Yuri always finishes his storytelling by saying that he has used them himself to get the weather he wishes. As one of the main signs of one being a shaman is the ability to master the natural elements and especially the weather, he achieves thus – if by words only – his dream of having special gifts.

Apart from the abovementioned episodes in which Yuri was reacting to film images on a TV screen and telling a story about his birth, Yuri never talked about shamanism in front of the camera. We assume that it can be explained by his deep belief in shamanism. The forces that are engaged in shamanistic beliefs and rituals are too powerful to play with, although it would certainly help to attract media attention that is so vital for Yuri in order to achieve his political coals. But Yuri cannot pretend to be a shaman when he is not one – it could be dangerous for his life and for his family's welfare.

## Filming: public versus private

Actually, as a public person, Yuri often relies on his native way of interpreting the world in order to achieve his goals. It is interesting to follow how he has used the President's reindeer story for media communication (cf. Niglas & Toulouze 2004; Niglas 2005; Novikova 2000: *online*; Khanzerova 2009: *online*; Butenschön 2003: *online*). Another example is how, in April 1999, when, as mentioned above, he erected a conic tent in front of the local administration building in Khanty-Mansiisk and in order to give more weight to his message, he took advantage of a Nenets custom connected with death. He put inside the tent a doll that represented the administration, which was ill with 'oil plague'. He then referred to the Nenets practice of leaving a dead person in the tent, and transformed the tent into a tomb only by changing the direction of the opening door and turning it towards the West (Niglas 2005: 127). However, traditions and worldview are different from spiritual issues. Eva has heard Yuri discussing the Ob-Ugrian practice of the bear feasts. He denied in a conversation that these events belong to the 'religious' sphere: he considers them as a way of being. Here, we recognise the holistic feature of native spirituality. It would be wiser and more appropriate to use the concept of 'continuum' proceeding from the direct address to the gods toward the everyday practice of native culture, in which examples like the ones quoted above or the President's reindeer are situated in between.

He counts on the attraction of exoticism and uses it for achieving his own aims, which are meant to protect the land for future generations. He uses this

tactic on several levels. Once, in the winter of 1999, while Eva was a guest in his camp, two cars full of Russians visited him. He was not deeply acquainted with the visitors. They brought him a bottle of vodka as a gift. Yuri, very much as we can imagine an indigenous chief, gathered them in his cabin; he delivered a very impressive speech both about the rules to be followed in the forest and about the deadly significance of vodka as a gift. His attitude, sitting and speaking like a patriarch, added weight to his message. We thus see that he is able to manipulate curiosity about exoticism.

Yuri has very much taken advantage of the media as a way to give publicity to his endeavours for he has understood the importance of it in forging public opinion and thus giving strength to social forces. Here we may mention two early experiences. In 1990, there was a wave of reindeer killings and reindeer helicopter hunting by oil workers. Yuri organised a demonstration closing the road to the oil field, and invited not only regional, but also international media (Swedish TV was on the spot). The erection of a conic tent in the middle of the square facing the regional administration in Khanty-Mansiisk in the spring of 1999 was also a highly mediatised event. We may wonder, seeing that he has used traditional customs – i.e., that the Nenets give reindeer to friends and relatives who are far away in order to follow their wellbeing – to send political messages to the Russian president if he has also used traditional religious practices to gain media attention, as has been done in the same region, for example by the Saving Yugra association, who organised public sacrifices[48] and bear feasts. What are the uses of the sacred in the public sphere?

One of the public actions connected with the sacred realm is the denunciation of shameful acts committed by officials against what should be sacred. Some public appearances of these issues may be identified both in literature and in action. Some literary texts are devoted to the expression of Yuri's reactions to desecration.

More privately, Yuri reacts extremely painfully when oil companies intrude in sacred places. In the basin of the Vatyogan, a tributary of the Agan River, there is the abovementioned sacred place on the top of a hill (see above, the offering in 2009). The Nenets (and certainly also the Khanty) used to visit this place and make sacrifices and offerings. Yuri told us on camera that when he was working as a hunter in the vicinity in the 1980s, there were reindeer antlers and skins all over the trees. When we were there, we could see only a few very recent ones hanging on the trees. The old ones had disappeared, and Yuri accused the oil workers of having removed them.[49] According to Yuri, the same oil company workers used to drive over the hill, until he informed them that for the natives it is a sacred place. Then Lukoil's workers came with a bulldozer and made a ditch to block the access for motorcars to the sacred place. But "they

did not understand that the whole hill is sacred". And, for mysterious reasons, they planted an enormous metal pole on the top of the hill, probably as a geodesic landmark. Yuri explained to us in an angry voice that he was shocked, as he was also shocked when the newcomers did not respect cemeteries: for him, as he told us (the Western people), "it is like someone knocked a metal pole in the middle of a church". Moreover, although this does not reflect directly what sacred places represent for him, it shows the requirements for general respect for the sacred that he would expect to see followed.

There are several other examples of how newcomers have desecrated places important for the indigenous peoples. Close to the city of Raduzhnyi, a suburb of dachas has been built on the sacred place of the Kazymkin's clan. The little town of Novoagansk, 8 km from Varyogan, has been built on a cemetery. In *Yuri Vella's World* (Niglas 2003), he recalls the time when it was part of nature. The sad expression on his face is more eloquent than any words. The desecration of cemeteries is a bad newcomer habit from which the locals have suffered. Close to Lukoil's 7th department automobile base, at a distance of 150–200 metres from the lake, was the grave of Yuri's grandmother's mother-in-law, Evy. And as we have already mentioned, the leaders of the oil workers' settlement of Povkh, according to Yuri's story, all died some time after destroying the sacred place. However, this story remains a private conversation and we have the impression that it is too serious a question to make fun of and to manipulate for the mass media. Still, it was told to the camera. We have the impression that filming is something between totally public expression and an intimate conversation. Yuri knows that eventually part or all of it may become public, but everything depends on the filmmaker's editing. Could it be that for Yuri ethnographic filmmaking, based on a long-term relationship between the filmmaker and the film subject, is more accurate and delicate means of representing his inner reality than TV reportage or news programmes, which often focus on the superficial and sensational? Although Yuri has never clearly expressed his content with *Yuri Vella's World*, saying half-jokingly only that it is "an Estonian view" of his life, his eagerness to be filmed again in 2009 proved that he must have been rather pleased with Liivo's film.

We have seen in the case of a very serious sacrifice and in the case of shamanic activities that Yuri is reluctant to exploit the exotic 'religious' issue for other purposes; it acts in his life as a value *per se*, which is not to be desecrated for profane use. But these are extreme examples. We may still wonder where the border between the indigenous worldview and religious issues runs. Does Yuri himself draw a distinct border? Aren't clear borders a characteristic of Western scientific thinking, incompatible with the way Siberian indigenous peoples reflect on their own experience?

## CONCLUSION

The study of Yuri's connection to the sacred within his ontology shows one individual's possible approach. The comments above are an attempt to draw a possible model on the basis of what we were able to observe by living with him and his family, by filming him and following his discourse. Is it possible today to study these issues otherwise than to examine each individual in depth? Thanks to Lehtisalo, we have some representation of what could have been the understanding of the sacred by the Forest Nenets back in 1914 (Lehtisalo 1924). Later on they emerged from isolation and were exposed to the very strong influence of Soviet ideology for many generations. This led to a painful duality in their consciousness, while their worldview was basically holistic. The duality in understandings – materialism against animism –, with a double belonging – village against wild – has coerced each individual to negotiate ways of positioning themselves, of inventing their own ways out of the deadlock, of dealing with their own personhood and spirituality. Yuri's experience is particularly interesting, for he is an intellectual deeply conscious of himself. It is impossible to argue that he follows the path of his forefathers. He wishes to do so, but he is compelled to adapt, to recreate his identity, his tradition, in order to find himself and to look for support in the forces that are external to him.

His practice is serious and committed. Unlike many other ethnic activists, he does not exploit this sphere of spirituality for his struggle for indigenous rights. Although he is known to have participated in massive collective sacrifices, he has never organised one, albeit his imagination has proven to be very fertile when he looks for media-friendly forms to achieve his political aims. He has undoubtedly used what can appear as peculiarities of the indigenous worldview to promote his welfare and to draw attention to the needs of the local indigenous population, but he has not mixed his personal spirituality with the public sphere of protest and political expression.

However, as has been demonstrated in this article, Yuri is rather enthusiastic about being filmed, even when it comes to recording rituals and sacrifices. Thus, his reluctance to use spiritual matters in his public appearances as the testimonies of his life experience and indigenous identity is not absolute. His attitude towards filming religious practices is flexible, as it is also flexible towards other aspects of his socio-cultural reality. It depends on the nature of the particular ritual and perhaps also on the specific relationship he has with the person(s) behind the camera. In some cases filming can even be a sort of catalyst for a ritual, or at least have some influence on the proceedings of the ritual.

All in all, Yuri is very ambiguous and cautious when it comes to stating his religious understandings. On the one hand, due to his intellectual background,

he is more than capable of rationalising along the lines of Western materialism. But on the other hand, as a person who is strongly aware of himself as a native, Yuri understands that it is absolutely vital to negotiate one's position with the spirits, to communicate with them. Yuri has learnt to play his role as spiritual leader in his own family, although he seems to be more at ease in the ordinary communication with spirits than trying to fit himself into the role of a shaman. Yuri is well aware of peculiar power coming from some people – Ivan Sopochin was undoubtedly a strong shaman –, but he tends to be critical of the notion, and more importantly, he cannot but reconcile with the reality that he does not master the necessary abilities. While indigenous spirituality plays an important role in the conscious construction of Yuri's personhood, the specific aspect of this spirituality – shamanistic experience – is too far out of his reach to be included in that construction or in the filmic representation of it.

In any case, this article is an attempt to outline a possible blueprint of a particular person's spirituality. We have found that the quest for a form of spirituality peculiar to the Western Siberian natives, without being theorised by Yuri, is very much present in his everyday life, while the influence of Soviet ideology is present in Yuri's caution both towards his visitors and towards the spiritual matter itself. This spirituality seems to be a late reconstruction, and as such it is both flexible on some aspects and rigid on others, as in gender matters. We achieved these results mainly on the basis of observation and filming. The next stage would be to conduct issue-centred interviews with Yuri, in order to discover what his own awareness is on the subject. As we have many hours of valuable video material on the topic, it would probably be fruitful to use it in interviews to elicit information from Yuri's conscious as well as unconscious mind. This will allow us to check the validity of our present deductions and give us a clearer picture of the mechanisms behind Yuri's way of constructing, or reconstructing, his personhood as an intellectual, as a native, and as a spiritual person. Studying Yuri Vella in depth gives us a deeper insight into one particular way in which humans could adapt to invading Western globalised thinking.

## NOTES

[1] This article was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and the Estonian Science Foundation (grant No. 8335).

[2] For discussion on observational and participatory cinema, see also Nichols 1991; Young 1975.

[3] Several authors have emphasised "that 'belief' in the interiorised sense that Christians usually use the term may not be applicable to other religious traditions" (Hann 2007: 385; see also Ruel 1982: 22–23, 27).

[4] Forest Nenets as well as Khanty traditionally practice patrilocal residence.

[5] There were actually two books both titled *Vesti iz stoibishcha*, (News from the Camp). The first book (1991a) was published by a Sverdlovsk publishing house in a traditional way, with an editor who made slight changes (not political). Yuri was not satisfied with the changes and some months later published a new shorter volume at his own expense (1991b).

[6] For a complete list of Yuri Vella's books, see http://www.jurivella.ru/index.php/--raamatud--books.

[7] He worked at the fish centre, as a post worker, etc.

[8] The last time Liivo had filmed Yuri was in May 2001. But since then, Yuri has been filmed by others many times, both for documentary and for television (see, for example, Gretchikov 2005).

[9] About the meaning of this word in Russian (kul'tura), see Grant 1995: 15–16.

[10] As one Nenets inhabitant of Varyogan observed to Eva in 2000: "*Vy znaete, my zhe pervobytnyi narod!*" (You know, we are a primitive people). Moreover, the Russian word *tsivilizatsiia* (civilisation) is commonly used to characterise the Russian culture as opposed to the primitiveness of the natives.

[11] In Russian - *rodovye ugod'ia*. In 1992, the Duma of the Autonomous Khanty-Mansi district passed a new law giving the natives this possibility. See also Jordan 2004: 30–31.

[12] Eva remembers from her fieldwork in 1999 an observation made by a Russian driver (from Ukraine), who had been living in Siberia for thirty years. While driving in the suburbs of Raduzhnyi, a town built in about 1985, the driver said: "Look at this: there was nothing here, and now there is an airport. And here there is a dacha quarter." Actually, the place where the airport now is was the summer pasture of Egor Stepanovich Kasamkin; the dacha quarter was built on the same clan's cemetery. See also Eremei Aipin's short story *Pervoprokhodets* (Aipin 1995: 172–173).

[13] Actually Yuri Vella is not the only intellectual from the indigenous peoples of the North who uses this way of explaining one layer of his culture, as Eva witnessed in 2004, when Eastern Khanty intellectual Agrafena Pesikova-Sopochina explained to her the landscape around her camp in the same way.

[14] This is what 'white people' are called in Western Siberia. Actually this name is used in the whole of Siberia (Anderson 2000, etc.).

[15] This aspect is emphasised by Irinarh Shemanovski, one of the last missionaries who worked with the Western Siberian Nenets (the Tundra Nenets) at the beginning of the 20th century (Shemanovski 2005: 14–21).

[16] Art Leete has written (1997: 46) that the Khanty, who share many cultural traits with the Forest Nenets, shout during a sacrifice in order to draw the attention of the gods.

[17] For more information about the importance of a car in Yuri's life see Niglas 2011.

[18] In Nenets, a *kapi* is a non-Nenets, but native. Usually, in this area, it is the word used for the Khanty, but it may also refer to other ethnic groups (Selkups, for example).

[19] In 2009 Yuri Vella and his family moved to a new winter camp: the pastures surrounding the former one could no longer provide enough food for his reindeer.

[20] Yuri never consumes alcohol himself and he is usually very angry with people who do. But for sacrifices he accepts it, although he never joins in the drinking himself, and nor does his wife.

[21] Kaur Mägi has also had the experience of Yuri forbidding any recording or photographing during a sacrifice (oral information, June 2010). Actually we do not know how Yuri would have reacted if someone was making a documentary about him at that time. Would he have allowed recording the ritual because the would-be film could serve as a concrete benefit for his cause? We are inclined to believe that Yuri Vella, despite of his eagerness to use film for his political ends, would have been very careful turning this critical situation into a media event.

[22] This idea of replacement in death is clearly very much present in the understanding of how the interaction between humans and forces functions: it is possible to steer the final direction of the strike. A good example is one comment Yuri Vella made to us in 2009 about the oldest inhabitant of Varyogan. Being asked whether this man was still alive, he observed with a look of disgust on his face: "Oh, yes, and he is not close to death. He feeds on his children: all of them are now dead; he avoided his own death by eating them. This man is dangerous." (See also Vitebsky 2005: 124, for quite a similar example of replacement.)

[23] Few prayers have been recorded from the Forest Nenets. We have some samples in Lehtisalo's Nenets texts collection (1947: 547–549) in different situations. Two of them are prayers accompanying a reindeer sacrifice as in our material. Still, except for having in both cases an address to Num, the main heavenly god, we do not recognise any formulas corresponding to the texts presented below.

[24] The authors of this article.

[25] Yuri Vella refers to the same land on the Vatyogan, which belongs both to the god and to the people who live there.

[26] Clearly a formula: see Vella 2008: 76.

[27] The Siberian rivers have many meanders. Some of them have become still pools isolated by land from their former river.

[28] Forest Nenets is a language that uses augmentatives and diminutives widely. Here both words "lichen" and "mushrooms" are in their diminutive form, because they are connected to reindeer calves. In addition to the reindeer's main food – lichen – Yuri Vella mentions mushrooms because reindeer are very fond of them. As a rule, the

Nenets, Forest as well as Tundra Nenets, do not eat mushrooms themselves in order to leave them to the reindeer (Susoi 1994: 19).

[29] Yuri's explanation: "There have been good days until now, let them continue."

[30] Yuri's explanation: the Master of the taiga is responsible for the vegetable world, which is also threatened.

[31] "Mother of the heaven, old man of the heaven, look at the offerings put here by these children. Let the children who walk on the earth walk without trouble. Try to give them a good time and good weather." (Text translated by Kaur Mägi.)

[32] All this information is due to the translation from Forest Nenets by Kaur Mägi.

[33] The neighbour's herd grazed not far from the place in which Yuri's herd stayed in the rut period, and Yuri was afraid that the herds might get mixed. Moreover, the neighbours have made compromises with the oil workers that Yuri Vella does not approve of. Still, they keep seemingly friendly neighbourly relations.

[34] Eva has witnessed it among the Eastern Khanty. See also the description of a collective sacrifice, where the Khanty use fabric the same way Yuri does (Balalajeva & Wiget 2004: 81).

[35] There are data about using fabrics as offerings by the Forest Nenets: Zen'ko-Nemchikova reports, when mentioning an analogy with Khanty rituals, the Forest Nenets tradition of bringing to sacred places in collective sacrificing ceremonies fabrics in different colours, white being the colour for the spirits of the high world, of the skies. Unfortunately, she does not describe the ritual slaughtering of reindeer (Zen'ko-Nemchikova 2006: 238). Khomich does not exactly describe sacrifices, but gives a general overview, in which fabrics are not mentioned (Khomich 1995: 210, 219).

[36] In Russian: *Associacia Spaseniye Yugry*.

[37] Gender in indigenous cultures is a wider issue, not to be developed in this context. However, fertility is the basis of taboos to be followed by women: girls who are still not menstruating and women past menopause are seen as closer to men. Therefore sacral activities led by elderly women could be acceptable from this point of view. As Vella's wife is a Khanty, we have no information about Forest Nenets female cults.

[38] The first president was Tatiana Gogoleva, a young Mansi woman, later a successful politician, who was assisted by Zoya Riabchikova, a young Khanty teacher.

[39] Even today the Khanty have customs that show how seriously gender rules are observed: the reluctance of elderly women to accept trousers in the younger's vestimentary practices, the women's reserved behaviour with male visitors according to Yuri Vella's own remarks, and the custom of hiding the face behind the scarf in the presence of male non-blood kin (*izbeganie*).

[40] It would certainly make sense to further develop the issue of shamanism today among the indigenous peoples of Western Siberia. While some researchers have touched upon it (Siikala & Ulyashev 2010), the aim of this article is not to delve into the question in general, but to try to understand, based on Vella's practice, how he relates to it.

[41] On Kalliat, see Mägi & Toulouze 2002.

[42] An observation made to Eva in 1999 by Yuri Vella himself, who remarked that the Forets Nenets adapted much better to the new rules after the Revolution: they were the first around Varyogan to become members of the Communist Party.

[43] Lennart Meri was an Estonian writer and filmmaker, who made several films about Finno-Ugric peoples from the 1970s onwards. He later became the first president of Estonia after the country regained independence.

[44] About Ivan Sopochin, see Kerezsi 1995.

[45] At the beginning of the 1990s, Yuri Vella started to issue a paper in Forest Nenets – the first attempt to write this language, following his uncle Leonid Aivaseda's first number of the publication. It was a single sheet, either A4 or A3, with articles, poetry, riddles, photos and drawings, everything made by Yuri himself. He stopped publishing it after the eighth issue.

[46] We are well aware that the international word 'shaman' is not a Russian word, but a loan from a Tungus language (Vitebsky 2005: 12). However, it is the word used by Russians and that is why we call it here functionally 'Russian'.

[47] "The drum hangs on the wall. You would like to reach out and give it a beat, but you feel hesitant. Nowadays many raise a drum beat not in order to get power for their souls, but to fill their stomachs. It wouldn't be good if my children and my grandchildren would think that my art existed just to increase the family budget …. The drum hangs on the wall. And still, you would like to beat it so badly…" (Vella 2008: 34).

[48] See Leete 1997, 1999.

[49] Actually the oil workers are those who, according to Yuri, behave as no natives would. As a matter of fact, there are no other non-native people in the area besides the oil workers.

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.leete-koosa

# *THE CHURCHES WERE OPENED AND LOTS OF MISSIONARIES ARRIVED*: DIALOGUE BETWEEN KOMI IDENTITY AND FAITH

***Art Leete, Piret Koosa***

**Abstract**: The Komi people in northern Russia tend to consider the Russian Orthodox faith as a natural part of their lives and self-image. During recent decades different Protestant churches have spread intensively over the Republic of Komi. Although the Protestants constitute a small minority of the local population, they play a major role in initiating discussion concerning ethnic traditions, identity and the freedom to select a faith. The local population's predominant approach to religious issues is blurred, although they tend to prefer the Russian Orthodox faith, albeit without frequenting church ceremonies. This pro-Orthodox stand is grounded on loyalty to ancestors and ethnic traditions. We take the process of religious change among the Komis as a starting point from which to discuss issues of individual and collective identity, and the variability and stability of people's self-understanding as well as understanding of *the Other*.

**Keywords**: the Komis, Protestant, Russian Orthodox, individual identity, collective identity

## INTRODUCTION: IDENTITY AND FAITH[1]

In this paper we analyse the way that social identity and religious issues are treated in a contemporary Komi village.[2] We concentrate on the ideas concerning social categorisation documented by us over the last 16 years in a region[3] that has to a certain extent been influenced by Protestant missions over the last decade.

It has been acknowledged among scholars that Pentecostal and charismatic (P/c) Christians advocate egalitarian identity discourse that emphasises the issue of being the children of God and the attempt to reduce the role of class, race, gender, traditions, and ethnicity in people's self-identification (see, for example, Robbins 2004: 125; Lunkin 2009: 92; Meyer 2010: 120–121).

At the same time, different studies also indicate that P/c Christians' relationships with local customs and traditional ideology are more ambivalent. These

missions propose certain egalitarian ideas but the aim is not to eliminate all previous, familiar differences (Robbins 2010: 637, 647–648; Meyer 2010: 121–122).

In the Komi case, we concentrate on a few examples that enable us to reveal how details of identity play a certain role in building up a model for the treatment of the religious domain. We provide as a starting point for our discussion local, culture-specific self-image of the Komis and then track some moments of dialogue between the traditional and P/c identity approach.

P/c Christianity proposes an identity trend with a strong egalitarian emphasis. In a way, the Komis also favour sameness of the collective self. However, the Komis expect that the identification of an individual with a group must be associated with traditions and ethnicity. Proper religious belongingness (to Russian Orthodoxy) is part of the overall identity configuration, although it does not play a key role in it. And in contrast to the P/c demand for comprehensive believing, contemporary Komi folk Orthodoxy is much more fragmentary in everyday life.

It is justified to claim that the self is "plastic, variable and complex" and that its depiction must follow this "complexity" (Cohen 1995: 2). This variability is definitely easier to follow if we analyse individuals. The collective self is more levelled but to a certain extent and in specific conditions individuality also moves towards collectivism (see Hogg & Reid 2006: 8–9).

> The compelling requirement for a strong sense of self extends beyond individuals to groups, large and small. A sense of collective self may be qualitatively different from that of individual self, but the imperative need for identity is not less. (Cohen 1995: 11)

An individual perceives him- or herself differently as a person and as a member of a group. Nevertheless, the need for both identity dimensions is evident. Group norms reveal the specific properties of a group. Collective rules shape the group's behaviour, which, in turn, initiates diffusion and generates further regulations (Hogg & Reid 2006: 7). Intergroup behaviour may promote different models of communication, for example, conflict, cooperation, and social change. An accent is put "on intergroup competition over status and prestige, and the motivational role of self-enhancement through positive social identity" (ibid.).

Michael Hogg and Scott Reid propose that individuals' understanding of group characteristics can be revealed by mapping a cognitive set of people's descriptions of features of their shared identity:

> Individuals cognitively represent social categories as prototypes. These are fuzzy sets, not checklists, of attributes (e.g., attitudes and behaviours) that define one group and distinguish it from other groups. (ibid.: 10)

We aim to discuss the relationship between social identity and religion in the Kulömdin district of the Republic of Komi, Russia, as it can be established in the contemporary situation. We attempt to combine the social identity approach that emphasises the entanglement of individual and group categories.

## KOMI IDENTITY (KULÖMDIN VERSION)

Historically, since the 19th century, the Komis have been described as the children of nature, harsh, tough, hospitable, honest, simple, careless, uncultured, curious, talkative, smart, reasonable, creative, slow, etc. (Popov 1874: 47–52; Mikhailov 2010 [1851]: 23; 2010 [1852]; Arsenyev 2010 [1873]: 46; Volkov 2010 [1879]: 57, 62–63; see also Jääts 2005). These are typical scholarly statements of the time. In general, it was presupposed that indigenous ('primitive') people could be easily described as a group, because they share similar personality traits and in their simplicity they cannot hide their psychological essence. This meant that there was no recognised need to investigate individuals because they would not indicate anything specific.

Although today scholars pay much more attention to individual expressions of identity, it must be admitted that the Komis largely emphasise collective self-determination. Among the Kulömdin Komis, an idea exists of their being the very central and most common people (the biggest Komi ethnographic group, the most correct dialect).

> There are a number of different dialects but it seems to me that we in Kulömdin have the most correct [dialect], [identical to] literary language. All our words correspond to literary language. In our village there are no deviations from the written language. (F, b. 1939, FM 2006)

Sometimes this centeredness is represented quite prominently:

> We, the Upper Ezhva ones, assume that, firstly, we are the biggest group that speaks our native language. [If we secede,] there will be nothing.[4] This people will disappear.[5] (M, b. 1965, FM 2006)

Even the pastor of the local evangelical community (a Russian from Nizhniy Novgorod) admits: "Here in Kulömdin people say that they are *chik komi mort*. It means that they are the real Komi people, they speak the [real] Komi language." (M, b. 1978, FM 2009)

In traditional agrarian societies (and the village Komis belong to this category at least partly) people build up their self-image and social relations based on equalising and balance (see Stark 2002: 32–33). A number of interviews made

during our fieldwork indicate that the Komis consider themselves as ordinary, average people who are characterised by all kinds of intermediate parameters. They represent the right and customary way of life. Individual behaviour and characteristics are connected to the representation of the group of village Komis as a whole. The self represents prevalent values and norms of a community.

Different qualities ascribed to the village community as a whole may not always actually hold true when it comes to individuals. Nevertheless, a person tends to define him- or herself drawing on those characteristics (Koosa 2010: 109).

## RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND KOMI IDENTITY

Orthodox Christianity has occupied a central place in the Komi culture for a long time. Relatively little is known about the pre-Christian beliefs and worldview. The first bishop of Komi, St Stephan of Perm (Stephan Khrap) had already converted the Komis to Russian Orthodoxy by the end of the 14th century. Stephan created the Old Permic alphabet called *Anbur* and translated ecclesiastical texts into the Komi language. The alphabet was used until the 17th century but it continues to have a strong symbolic meaning and encourages the understanding of the Komis as an especially Christian Finno-Ugric nation. Over the centuries Orthodox Christianity became an integrated part of the worldview and everyday life of the Komis (see, for example, Episkop Pitirim 1996; Chernetsov 1996; Vedernikova 1996; Limerov 2003: 63; Savelyeva 2004: 59–60; Zherebtsov & Zherebtsov 2004: 211–212). Klavdiy Popov asserted that by the 19th century the Komis had became more religious than their "enlighteners", i.e., Russians (Popov 1874: 47). Today, the Orthodox religion is generally treated as the proper faith of the Komis.

In the Kulömdin region, the Russian Orthodox faith has been the dominant spiritual force since the 17th century, when the Komis inhabited the area. At the same time, it is significant that from the 18th century, the Upper Ezhva region was also one of the three centres of the Komi Old Believers (see Vlasova 2010: 18, 24–25). In addition to the local folk Orthodox movement, Bursylysyas ('singers of good' in Komi) have spread in the area since the end of the 19th century.[6] In the Upper-Ezhva region the very first Protestant community in Komi lands appeared at the end of World War I (consisting of German war prisoners) (Sidorov 1997 [1928]). At least from the end of World War II, the Protestant communities have existed in the district continually (FM 2008).

Despite the overall long-term religious diversity in the Kulömdin region, most of the groups aside from mainline Orthodoxy have always been marginal.

At least in a certain tacit manner, this being an average village Komi is related to (folk) Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is also seen and valued as a meaningful framework for understanding the world by those people who do not actually consider themselves to be religious or believers. Religion is not usually seen by the village Komis as a special sphere of life. Rather, it is just one part of the knowledge and skills that constitute some kind of practical set of guidelines or regulations that people follow in their everyday lives (Koosa 2010: 109).

Such a relationship between faith and identity has been described as characteristic of different people in a global context:

> […] adherence to a common complex of beliefs offers practical benefits to a human group by giving it a common set of collective representations that enhances social cohesion. The performance of communal rituals strengthens bonds even more. (Hicks 1999: xx; see also Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 41)

Similarly to other regions of Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) also attempts to restore its former positions in the Komi Republic. Local bishop Pitirim has declared:

> Orthodoxy is the traditional religion of Komiland and we are going to fight out our canonical territory. European countries already went that way, defending historical Christian values from the fatal influence of alien religions and sects. We follow the European way and we are not afraid of anything. The Komi land has been blessed by St Stephan of Perm and we must carefully keep all treasures we have got from that superior historical and religious figure. (Episkop Pitirim 2010)

Several authors have referred to the contemporary spiritual environment as a "religious marketplace" in the sense that nowadays people can choose freely between different religions and consume their services as in a free market (see discussion, for example Gross 2008: 648; Panchenko 2004: 112; Shterin 2000: 178). This concept points to the issue that different religions compete for followers on equal grounds and the choice is made purely on the basis of individual preference. In fact, this concept may fit more to an urban environment. In rural areas, a social network dominated by relatives and neighbours is much tighter and communal social control is stronger. In this situation, it may appear more complicated to choose a 'strange' or 'non-traditional' faith as it may cause ridicule and condemnation. Even if a Komi does not consider him- or herself a believer in the strict sense of the word, Russian Orthodoxy is valued higher as the faith of the ancestors, as *one's own* faith.

> Local people curse me, my neighbour curses me. She says to me, well, why are you not in the Orthodoxy but in Christianity[7]? Why do you believe in Christianity? [---] But I don't feel anything bad at the moment, everything is just fine. No evil stuff has been taught to us by anybody, despite the issue that we are engaged in the Christian faith. (F, b. 1938, FM 2008)

Most of the Komi villagers do not regard themselves as true believers. Possibly, clear spiritual self-definition is not an essential problem for the people who follow folk Orthodox practices and assure continuity of local religious traditions. This silent persistence helped to preserve the faith throughout the Soviet era. These folk Orthodox believers may express quite strong opposition to competing new religious groups. At the same time the possibility of finding new meanings and alternative understanding of the world is not entirely excluded. Most importantly, it is understood that everybody must have some kind of firm ground for interpreting the surrounding world (Koosa 2010: 47).

> Of course it is better if a person believes, even if he is not [Russian] Orthodox Christian. Anyway, I don't have in mind those secret sects who turn people into zombies, demand complete submission and something else. I speak about Christian religions, different branches, about Christianity. I think that it is better to let a man believe, because a person must have some kind of undivided inner spiritual core. Without that spiritual core only physical substance remains. In this case, it is problematic to distinguish a man from an animal. (F, b. 1970, FM 2007)

Several visits to the Kulömdin Komis have revealed to us certain indicators that refer to the idea of commonness. People present themselves as *ordinary* and this is in a silent but deeply rooted way related to Russian Orthodox faith. It is simply self-evident, *natural*, that the village Komis are Russian Orthodox. Concurrently it is clear that even those who do not admit that they are believers regard Russian Orthodoxy as their *own* and meaningful way of looking at the world. In addition, these people are granted *access* to the knowledge of Russian Orthodox traditions and they use it for *practical* purposes. Faith of the Komis does not have a particular shape. It rather manifests itself in everyday activities and in daily communication in a way that Clifford Geertz refers to as a common sense (see Geertz 1993 [1983]: 73–93).

For a considerable time, the Old Believers and Bursylysyas movements have been organic elements of the local religious landscape. It has been argued that both groups have greatly influenced the character of the spiritual aspects of identity dynamics among the Kulömdin Komis. On the one hand, these movements constitute a conservative moment in local religiosity, while on the other hand, they formulate a certain loyalty to innovative and alternative religious

trends. It is uncertain to what extent this line of discussion based on the logic of analogy has actually influenced the majority of the local population in their way of believing. The hegemonic position of proper Russian Orthodoxy is unquestioned in the area and people make a clear difference between the Old Believers and the usual Orthodoxy. The Bursylysyas' separation from the ROC is anyway ambivalent (see Koosa & Leete 2011).

In the post-Soviet period, two tendencies have resulted from the ROC's attempts to restore its former position in society. The first tendency is connected to marginalisation of the majority of the Orthodox population in Komi villages, who do not always follow the official teaching or even consider it as privileged or essential when communicating with the divine and otherworldly. They represent a loose network of folk Orthodoxy with its members' faith manifested in unarticulated and hidden forms, where spiritual behaviour is not remarkably affected by the increase of public attention towards post-Soviet religious issues. These people's understanding of faith is framed by a certain feeling of continuity. For them, being a village Komi also means acceptance of folk Orthodoxy. They visit church only a few times a year during the major church holidays. Those practising the faith may be really skilled in traditional domestic religion and they preserved this through the Soviet period when there were no churches or priests available in the region. These people themselves stress that they are not really 'believers' because they lack the knowledge about accurate faith and the related know-how, stating: "The believers fasted but we lacked the skill so we did not fast!" For these people, the understanding of 'real believing' is related to frequent church-going and regular domestic prayers (Koosa 2010: 51; Leete 2011). In a way, then, the Kulömdin Komis accept the stance of the local Orthodox priest, who states that only a person who strictly follows the rules and teachings of the official Church and not some "suspicious" folk traditions can be considered truly Orthodox.

The second trend is related to the growing passion of churchgoers. The core of churchgoers is remarkably enthusiastic, having become dedicated believers during the last 15–20 years, and this group contains mainly middle-aged and elderly Komi women who enthusiastically attend church ceremonies, Sunday school, and other related social events, indicating that churchgoers' loyalty to their priest forms a significant part of their religious identity. In church they find strength to withstand difficulties, consolation and opportunity to share their experiences with other churchgoers (Koosa 2010: 53; Leete 2011):

> Here can I find my remorse, my strength of mind, food – spiritual and physical. Beauty! You can also have a chat, here they understand you and you understand the others. (F, b. 1955, FM 2007)

Actually, the borderline between these two groups is not clear. The churchgoers' group includes several 'grannies'[8] who represent the other group which supports folk Orthodox traditions. They have not experienced spiritual awakening or conversion but continue to believe as they did during the Soviet period. Today they just attend church but prefer to stay in the background without active involvement in the congregation's activities (Koosa 2010: 51).

## PROTESTANTS AS 'THE AMERICANS'

Although in Kulömdin district only few small groups of evangelical Christians have appeared, they are perceived as a considerably dangerous force by the local population (particularly, by the district's administration and local priests of the ROC). The activities of Protestant missions (that are all perceived as foreign, although some of them have a Russian origin) are interpreted through a presumed political agenda as an internal fifth-column activity with strategic objectives that involve imposing foreign power and culture (see also Koosa 2010: 46):

> I don't know. I can't regard these [new Christian denominations] as trustworthy. I am very much intrigued to find out who stands behind that and from where they get resources. You see, that's the reason why I can't trust them. (F, b. 1970, FM 2007)

This kind of attitude from the Orthodox population is not unambiguous, as we can see from discussions between local people. However, clearly a strong element of suspicion is present.

> F1 (b. 1965): The American here promotes ... of course, he says that everything is normal, about God, love. But I deny very much the fact that he is here.
>
> F2 (b. 1960): He helps a lot. He has many things like that ...
>
> F1: Listen! All this is American politics. Who would take him here if he didn't help as he does? I could understand if he comes here with an open heart. But we have lots of such 'Williams'[9] here in Russia and it must be purely the result of American politics. (FM 2006)

In local disputes concerning the presence of Protestant groups in the area, a conceptual combination of the ethnic and religious *Other* can be detected. The most wide-spread ethnically based label for the Don village Protestants in the area

is 'the Americans'. The reputation of the American factor in local religious life is reflected in the regional newspaper with a strong Russian Orthodox agenda:

> – The Americans distribute their faith. They go to kindergartens and principals allow them to perform. All doors are open to them.
> – Who are these Americans?
> – Those who live in the neighbouring Don village. Of course, they do not go by themselves but their followers do. A woman from the district centre sends her preachers to us. They visit schools and give ten roubles to every pupil for the purpose that children would approach them later. They have been invited to kindergartens to participate in festal days. Once they were invited to celebrate a birthday. They held hands and started to pray in their own way. After that one woman got a headache and was suffering more than a week.
> – I was shocked by this situation. The two Americans who have settled in Don village have converted the whole of Kulömdin district to their Protestant faith. At the same time there are plenty of our monks in Ulyanovo monastery[10] and priests who inhabit the same region, but they are not able to resist the Americans at all. (Suvorov 2007)

Certainly, this approach is somewhat exaggerated, but it clearly shows the direction of the local population's attitude towards the Don evangelical community.

The American missionary William himself admits that his presence causes problems in communicating the Christian message to a wider social audience:

> I'm not an organisation, OK? I'm *one* American; it's not like everybody … When I first came here, everybody [said] – well, there are all the Americans, you know. There's only *one*. Lots of people will call you all kinds of names and it hurts being an American because – ha, American, he's a spy or he's here because he wants something, you know, that kind of … persecution. (FM 2008)

Local members of the Don evangelical group reflect a lot on the issue that they are called 'the Americans'. In all cases it is done with a certain ironic standpoint. As an example we provide a short discussion developed by a couple of more experienced members of the group:

> F1, b. 1966: We have one American, William, but all of us are referred to as the Americans. 'There are the Americans walking!' [laughing]
>
> F2, b. 1971: They obey the American faith! [laughing]
>
> F1: There is the American faith, consequently – all of them are Americans!

> F2: Although we became believers a long time before he arrived here. He got here to us and we were already believers. (FM 2009)

The pastor of the Don evangelical community explained the issue of a certain fear of America by specific historical circumstances:

> There is a problem that if you are Protestant, you must be somehow ... You see, here we are all called 'the Americans'. All of us, even me – ah, the Americans! This is how they refer to us generally. All this is still present in people's mentality. For a long time people were just unaware of any religious plurality. They were not acquainted with the fact that a number of different regular Christian churches exist. Even during the Soviet years, the only church that people knew was the Orthodox church. And that was usually closed. A storehouse or a store was built in there. Later the churches were opened and lots of missionaries arrived, mostly Protestants. But people had preserved such a mentality that only one true church existed, the Orthodox Church. If you are a Russian, consequently you are an Orthodox. (M, b. 1978, FM 2009)

Don evangelicals are convinced of William's wonderful personality, with one of the core members of the group expressing how the group perceives the American missionary's character:

> He does not try to convert the Orthodox people. People can see this and support him. He is an American. He just has a different kind of heart. You must believe that he does it all just because of love. You need to have that sort of heart that is filled with kindness and love and prayers to God.[11] (F, b. 1966, FM 2008)

This topic is much elaborated on among the Don evangelical community. The members of the group recognise that local people blame them for being too fond of foreign cultural and political influence. However, the evangelicals do not agree with this view, stressing several facts, such as the fact that three local people were members of the Baptist community of Syktyvkar even before the evangelical missionaries arrived in the area and also the simple point that they are not Americans but Komis and Russians.[12] They also point out that in the context of religious freedom Protestant faith is legal in Russia and they have the right to follow it.

The circumstances are even more complicated because the local population in general considers the Russian Orthodox religion to be the proper faith because of its traditional position in the area. Being accused of attacking cultural traditions and foundations of society by their religious preference, the evangelicals

attempt to argue that they are actually not opposed to the indigenous worldview but are themselves also a conventional part of local culture.

For example, bridging the Orthodox and evangelical worldviews is done by depicting the American missionary William as St Stephan of Perm, the christianiser of the Komis.

> The enlightener is necessary. Just as Stephan of Perm arrived in Komiland and spread Christianity here, William arrived in the same way. When we first met in Syktyvkar, at the church of Christ the Saviour[13], he said that he had no idea where to move. At that time, in our Kulömdin district [in the Republic of Komi] we had the highest rate of unemployment, the highest level of criminality and addiction. William planned different social programmes to help elderly people and alcohol addicts. I told him that our district needed all this very much. And, in addition, also spiritual support, naturally. He told me that he needed to think about this and get advice from God. He must do as God commands. And after a month I was called and told that I had to find a residence for him. (F, b. 1966, FM 2008)

Identifying missionary William with St Stephan of Perm is related to an ideology that supports an interpretation of the history of evangelisation among the Komi people, which claims that in the 14th century St Stephan of Perm started missionising in the Komi language. Later, the Orthodox clergy gave up teaching in Komi. And today evangelical Protestants have re-established an indigenous mission, thus returning to the original evangelising practices of the first Komi missionary. In this way, Komi Protestants can make claims about authenticity.[14]

Nevertheless, it is clear that the topic of possible similarities between the missionary practices of St Stephan of Perm and contemporary Protestants is too complicated to be used in everyday situations when the evangelicals need to argue their indigeneity or 'not-otherness'. To explain their domestication, Protestants often claim that there is no basic dissimilarity between them and Russian Orthodox Christians. Differences in practices are not considered essential. Also, the Don evangelicals even attempt to adapt to local traditions in their ritualistic behaviour.

For example, they have arranged the commemoration of a deceased congregation member in the local graveyard, which could be interpreted as an attempt to fit into the Orthodox social environment. The Protestants did not copy all related Orthodox customs but just sang the departed lady's favourite songs.

More evidence has been recorded concerning a spiritual dialogue or amalgamation. In the Don evangelical community there are some women who have been baptised by ROC priests (one of these elderly women even after having visited Protestant meetings regularly during 3 years). 'Grannies' also bring folk Orthodox rituality into Don evangelical church (for example, in August 2011, when celebrating the Transfiguration[15] by bringing some apples to the after-service meal and disappointing the evangelical missionary Semyon greatly when they were not really able to answer what kind of holiday they were celebrating and why, and what it had to do with apples).

In general, the evangelical community of Don favours a very tolerant approach to the local population's religious habits – as long as they are not seen as purely hypocritical or diverting from the genuine relationship with God – and attempts to fit in with the overall Orthodox social context.

## DISCUSSION

Although the Orthodox community of the Kulömdin area is not coherent in its understanding of faith, there are no basic differences in its attitude towards the Don evangelicals. Common features of this standpoint can be summed up with a couple of general notions.

First, an overwhelming majority of the local population with an Orthodox background (regardless of the degree of their own religious activism) considers Protestants as a kind of peripheral social phenomenon. Protestantism is treated as a deviation from normality in the sense of spiritual practice and considered to be a little dangerous to Komi traditions and overall Kominess, despite the fact that Protestants constitute just a tiny minority in Kulömdin district.[16] At the same time, the topic of Protestant appearance and growth in the region is not actively discussed among the people of Kulömdin district. For example, only a few people have noticed that Pentecostals act in the district centre, although they have been present since 2000. Meanwhile, the Don evangelicals are relatively well-known, although mainly because they had an American missionary among them for 7 years. Actually, this topic leads us to the next point.

According to the common understanding of the population of Kulömdin district, Protestantism is initiated and nurtured by *Others* (predominately, Americans). This means that people presume the existence of a certain political agenda, which is hidden behind the public message of the Protestant mission.

Sometimes more ambivalent or neutral opinions have been expressed, stressing that any sincere spiritual effort is welcomed. Initially, the Orthodox priest of Kulömdin church also accepted the Don evangelicals' efforts in spreading the

Christian message and joint services were even held.[17] Later, this relatively friendly co-operation ceased. Members of Don evangelical community argue that an ideological line in the diocese of the local Russian Orthodox Church tightened and priest Alexander was forced to break off his closer contacts with local Protestants. Father Alexander explained his unwillingness to have too familiar a relationship with evangelical Christians by Protestants' excessive eagerness to publicly demonstrate the sameness of the evangelical and Russian Orthodox faith.

Unexpectedly for the Orthodox majority, but with clear pragmatic logic, Protestants react to this rejection by introducing an ideology of reason, similarity and normality. Protestants assert that 'the real faith' is the same among all Christians and everyone needs to co-operate in evangelisation. Evangelicals also claim that they accomplish missionary tasks similarly to original Orthodox enlighteners, applying the Komi language in spreading God's message. In this way Protestants revive authentic local missionary practices. Missionary William is metaphorically domesticated by being equated with St Stephan of Perm.

This kind of flexible and fast adaptation to the local cultural context by using the most unexpected arguments has been documented in respect of evangelical churches in different countries (see, for example, Lunkin 2009: 97, 112).

It must be admitted that for the majority of the population in Kulömdin district, this effort of presenting evangelical faith as in principle identical and equal to Russian Orthodoxy has remained largely unnoticed. People do not delve into evangelicals' efforts to settle with local spiritual traditions. Instead, they may discuss the issue that the local Orthodox bishop Pitirim also claims to carry on a Christian mission in the footsteps of St Stephan of Perm (FM 2010).[18]

Finally, we would like to return to the discussion of collective and individual components of contemporary Komi identity in the context of religiosity. We can assert that individual understandings and expectations exist concerning collective values. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to detect a definite collective subject. At the same time, there are certain similarities in individual attitudes that produce an impression of a considerable impact from collectivism on individual life philosophies and behavioural patterns.

We can deduce from Cohen's as well as Hogg and Reid's approaches that a theoretical problem exists concerning the complex, variable and plastic nature of the self (both individual and collective). As our field experience indicates, collectivism is highly valued among Komi villagers irrespective of their religious preferences; meanwhile the actual details of collective values may be interpreted individually. People are convinced that they share a certain set of ideals with other members of the community, although sometimes these mean different things.

Further, it must be noticed that in an intergroup relationship, different models of communication have a contradictory but to some extent also somewhat logical pattern. The sense of sameness is not always defined by confessional boundaries. Don evangelicals are ready to associate themselves (due to similarities in the genuineness of the faith) with local Russian Orthodox churchgoers (but not with the majority of local population with loose Orthodox identity). However, Protestants' suspected foreign ethnic agenda hinders a possible association between these groups from the Komi Orthodox point of view.

It is usually possible to pick out a number of contradictory details from one's field data. In any case, these modalities indicate that two tendencies exist simultaneously. On the one hand, there is an ambivalent interpretation of group characteristics and values, even those that are considered central. There is no grass-roots level conformity in the details of understanding a group's practice and ideology. On the other hand, collectivism exists as an in-group perceptual idea, and this too is a firm fact.

## ABBREVIATIONS

FM = fieldwork materials of the authors from 2006–2011

## NOTES

[1] This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence, CECT), Estonian Science Foundation (Grant No. 8335) and the Center for the Study of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Russia.

[2] The Komis (Komi-Zyryans) are a Finno-Ugric people with a population of 228,235 according to the Russian census carried out in 2010 (Perepis: *online*). The Komi Republic is situated in the northeastern corner of the European part of the Russian Federation.

[3] Art Leete has been visiting the area annually since 1996, Piret Koosa started her fieldwork among the Komis in 2006.

[4] This statement was made during a discussion about Komi ethnographic groups (the Izhma and Udora Komi) that had declared their will to be recognised as separate ethnic units, not as a part of the Komi people.

[5] It is interesting to mention that the official website of Kulömdin district (Kulömdin culture: *online*) introduces Kulömdin as "one of the main keepers of Komi ethnic traditions and culture". It is also notable that in 1926 a discussion was initiated in the local newspaper *Yugyd Tuy* concerning a plan to transfer the capital of the Komi region

from Ust-Sysolsk (today Syktyvkar) to Kulömdin: "Only Kulömdin unites the whole land into a whole, only Kulömdin consolidates around itself all parts of Komiland" (Zherebtsov *et al*. 2007: 160).

[6] The initial leader of the Bursylysyas translated ritual Orthodox texts into Komi. He also delivered his own sermons, translated several psalms into the Komi language, wrote religious hymns and organised spiritual conversations in Komi. The movement still exists today. (For more about the Bursylysyas movement, see Chuvyurov & Smirnova 2003; Koosa & Leete 2011.)

[7] Local evangelicals usually call themselves simply Christians.

[8] Grannies (*babushki* in Russian) – old religious women who formerly, before Soviet repressions, took charge of the religious rituals conducted by Orthodox priests. These elderly women are still widely acknowledged as religious experts among the community. It even happens that to some people their opinion in matters relating to religion has more authority than that of the local priests (Mitrokhin 2006: 45; Keinänen 1999: 159). The term is widely used in Russian scholarly literature and everyday conversation.

[9] This woman refers to the American evangelical missionary William Wood (who himself belongs to a nondenominational church), who sees his mission in spreading the word of God in the Russian North. In 2004, he played a crucial role in establishing an evangelical community in Don village, Kulömdin. In 2011, William left the Don group and initiated a new evangelical community in Koigorodok village in the southwestern part of the Republic of Komi.

[10] In 1866, the monastery of the Holy Trinity and St Stephan was established in Ulyanovo, at a distance of 25 kilometres from Kulömdin. At the monastery, several churches were opened between 1867 and 1886. By the end of 1918 the monastery was closed. In 1994, a group of monks lead by Father Superior Pitirim (later the bishop) re-established the monastery. (Rogachev 2001: 73, 75, 80; Taskaev 2001: 85–94)

[11] At the same time, quite a few villagers react with annoyance when William, as a former drug addict, is presented to them as almost a holy man, and feel that he is not the right person to judge their way of life and preach the word of God to them.

[12] The Don evangelical community consists of around 15 more or less regular members (almost exclusively women – by 2011, the last male church-goer left the group and the only men around are missionaries), most of them Komis.

[13] A Baptist church in Syktyvkar.

[14] Komi Protestants have a deep interest in this topic. For example, Nadezhda Popova from the Komi Evangelical Church has completed her BA studies at the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary with a study of the mission practice of St Stephan of Perm (see Popova 2009).

[15] Transfiguration (in Russian: *Preobrazheniye Gospoda Boga i Spasa nashego Iisusa Hrista*, August 19th) in official church tradition (see Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). In Komi folk traditions (in accordance with customs in all Russian

Orthodox regions), at Transfiguration people bring to the church apples and other fruits and berries, which are blessed after the service (Konakov 1993: 96–97).

[16] We once asked pastor Andrei how many Protestants there were in Kulömdin district. He replied: "Protestants? You can just count them on your fingers." By using this method, Andrei managed to number 50 active believers and up to 100 'leavers' (*ukhozhane* in Russian, as Andrei said), i.e., those, who have visited Protestant meetings but have not become (regular) visitors (FM 2009). This means that, depending on the mode of calculation, Protestants constitute 0.17–0.5% of the district's population. (No official statistics concerning Protestants in the area are available. Therefore, one must just ask somebody who knows them all.)

[17] The Don evangelical community was founded in 2004, and Father Alexander started his services in Kulömdin Orthodox church in the autumn season of 2006 (before that for 3 years there was no permanent Orthodox priest in Kulömdin and monks from nearby Ulyanovo monastery performed more or less regular church rituals). By the spring of 2007, the relationship between these two congregations had already worsened.

[18] Pitirim even managed to give an anti-Protestant speech in Don middle school (although religious propaganda is prohibited in schools). This fact demonstrates that the ROC takes William's efforts very seriously. In addition, over the last couple of years, priest Alexander has arranged Russian Orthodox ceremonies in a private house in Don village (Sizov 2009). And the next Orthodox church in Kulömdin district will soon be built in Don.

In the mid-1990s, the idea of the metaphorical return of St Stephan of Perm was firmly present in Komi national discourse (see, for example, Vasse-Vásolyi 1996: 46).

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doi:10.7592/FEJF2012.51.gross

# INCOMPATIBLE WORLDS? PROTESTANTISM AND *COSTUMBRE* IN THE ZAPOTEC VILLAGES OF NORTHERN OAXACA[1]

***Toomas Gross***

**Abstract:** In recent decades, Protestant population has grown rapidly in most Latin American countries, including Mexico. The growth has been particularly fast in rural and indigenous areas, where Protestantism is often claimed to trigger profound socio-cultural changes. This article discusses the impact of Protestant growth on customs, collective practices and local identities using the example of indigenous Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez in northern Oaxaca. Drawing on the author's intermittent fieldwork in the region since 1998, most recently in 2012, the article first scrutinises some of the recurring local perceptions of Protestant growth in the Sierra Juárez and their impact on communal life. Particular attention will be paid to converts' break with various customary practices pertaining to what locally is referred to as *usos y costumbres*. The article will then critically revise the claims about the culturally destructive influence of Protestantism, suggesting that the socio-cultural changes in contemporary indigenous communities of Oaxaca may actually be caused by more general modernising and globalising forces, and that the transformative role of Protestantism is often exaggerated.

**Key words:** Protestantism, indigenous customs, culture, identity, Oaxaca, Zapotecs

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, Protestant churches – various Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in particular – have grown rapidly in Latin America. The alleged corollaries of this growth – converts' emphasis on success and prosperity, more individualist worldview, and more emotional relationship with one's faith – have often been considered by scholars as vehicles of much broader and deeper social and cultural changes than the mere fragmentation of the 'religious field' or the makeover of individual converts' lives. Even though it is the *individuals* who convert, *en masse* conversions are claimed to transform entire communities and societies. This may entail novel forms of social organisation, changes in collective practices, new modes of thinking, and new values. In rural indig-

enous communities, Protestants propagate breaking the links with the past that are maintained through customs and traditions. To emphasise the deeply transformative effect of Protestant growth on contemporary Latin America, Patterson (2005: 45) calls this process a 'religious revolution'. Although such a claim is probably an overstatement, it is not entirely off the mark in certain contexts. Historically, Catholicism has become tightly entangled with cultural as well as social and political identities in Latin America, both on national and on local levels. Although Catholicism has not penetrated all communities and indigenous life-worlds in Latin America, it *is* strongly present in most of them, albeit in multiple syncretic forms. Given such a strong link between Catholicism and cultural identity, religious change *has* to have a significant socio-cultural impact.

The aim of this article is to explore the latter claim in the ethnographic example of indigenous Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca in Southern Mexico. The discussion is based on my intermittent fieldwork in the region since 1998.[2] I endeavour to critically review the putative relationship between the growth of Protestant population and the recent socio-cultural changes in the indigenous villages. As I will suggest, Protestantism *does* have an impact on local cultural practices and the 'collective consciousness' in the Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez, but its transformative role should not be exaggerated. Various Protestant groups adapt to local customs and cultural practices relatively easily, rather than reject them. Moreover, the socio-cultural changes that are often claimed to be the result of Protestant growth can have other primary causes.

## THE DYNAMICS OF PROTESTANTISM IN MEXICO

In most Latin American countries the Catholic Church has for centuries enjoyed a privileged position, often granted to it by law. Although Protestantism[3] in Latin America dates back at least to the beginning of the 19th century (Mondragón 2005: 47–49), until the mid-20th century Protestant groups in most countries were few, the percentage of Protestants in the population insignificant, and the rise in their numbers very slow. Roughly in the 1960s, however, membership growth in Protestant churches exploded, leading David Stoll (1990) to famously ask in the title of his well-known book: "Is Latin America turning Protestant?" The rise of Protestantism has been particularly marked in Brazil, Chile and Central America, where Protestants now constitute more than twenty percent of the total population.

Protestant growth in Mexico has been considerably more sluggish, which is partly explainable by various historical factors. The hegemonic position of the Catholic Church in the Mexican society was secured during the early years of independence. The fourth article of the first federal constitution, *Acta Constitutiva de la Federación* (1824), declared:

> The religion of the Mexican nation is and will always be Catholic, Apostolic, Roman. The nation protects it with clever and just laws and prohibits the exercise of any other. (cf. Aguirre 1992: 192)

Considering such a favoured position of the Catholic Church in the early 19th century Mexican society and the colonial legacy, it is not surprising that Catholicism has gradually evolved to constitute an integral part of the Mexican national culture.[4] One might even argue that Catholicism co-defines the Mexican national identity and constitutes a source of dominant national symbols. Most notable among these is the Virgin of Guadalupe, the 'master symbol' of Mexico according to Wolf (1958: 34). Some earlier scholars went as far as to claim that Catholicism 'suits' the 'Mexican mentality' and especially the country's indigenous population better than Protestantism. For example, Manuel Gamio, the 'founding father' of Mexican anthropology, suggested in his *Forjando patria* (*Forging a Nation*), first published in 1916:

> The transition from indigenous paganism to Catholicism [in Mexico] found no obstacles because from the indigenous point of view both faiths were analogous, which favoured their religious fusion. Paganism and Protestantism, however, were different and counter-symbolic in their essence and form. […] It is thus logical that the Mexican Indians voluntarily accept the Catholic creed, assimilating it in their own manner, and reject Protestantism because it appears to them abstract, exotic, iconoclastic, incomprehensible. (Gamio 1982: 87–88)

Esquivel, a Catholic and fervently anti-Protestant lawyer, extrapolated a similar argument to the whole of Latin America. "The Hispano-American soul is not adaptable to Protestantism," he (1946: 66) confidently claimed.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Catholic Church in Mexico also adopted a strongly 'nationalist' discourse to confront the 'Protestant danger' (e.g. Crivelli 1929). Protestants were accused of serving the interests of the United States, because they challenged Catholicism, which was considered the main source of cultural resistance against the North American influence.[5] A radical journal of that era entitled *Amauta* stated in 1927: "The Protestant creed is to us an anti-nationalist cult, an instrument of conquest, manipulated by a foreign race." (cf. Mondragón 1994: 331)

Closely linked to such 'nationalist' rhetoric has been the so-called 'culturalist discourse' against Protestantism, rooted in the above-mentioned perception that Catholicism in Mexico is not a religion like any other but a 'worldview' that sustains the national identity and provides the Mexican nation with its most important collective symbols. Mondragón (1994: 331) eloquently calls such a mode of thinking 'Guadalupanism'. Rejecting the saints, Protestants also reject the Virgin of Guadalupe and consequently have a destructive impact on the national and cultural identity, as the critics argue (De la Torre 1995: 9).

Condemning Protestantism publicly on nationalist and culturalist grounds was, of course, more common in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet such reasoning has been slow to vanish especially in Southern Mexico (Blancarte 1992: 417), and was still a relatively common constituent of the rhetoric of the Oaxacan Catholic clergy in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, as I will demonstrate below, the 'culturalist' and 'nationalist' argumentation against the spread of Protestantism is still existent in the contemporary indigenous communities of the Sierra Juárez.

Despite the strong resistance to Protestantism by the Catholic Church, the general dynamics of Protestant growth in Mexico are reminiscent of the trends in the rest of Latin America. It means, above all, that rapid and almost exponential growth has replaced the slow linear increase of Protestant population in recent decades. The Mexican census data demonstrate this vividly (Fig. 1).[6] Two significant trends within the process of Protestant spread in Mexico, reminiscent of those in the rest of Latin America, stand out. Firstly, Protestant growth has in most contexts become synonymous with what might be called 'Pentecostalisation'. In other words, Pentecostal and especially Neo-Pentecostal churches are now growing much faster than the so-called 'historical' Protestant denominations (e.g. Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Anglican churches). The trend is common to most of Latin America. As Hernández (2007: 73) claims, possibly as many as 70 to 75 percent of all non-Catholics in contemporary Latin America are Pentecostals. The other noteworthy trend in Mexico is the shift in the 'demographic weight' of Protestant growth. Until the middle of the 20th century, most Protestant converts lived in urban centres and in mestizo communities, and belonged to the middle class. For the past few decades, however, Protestant growth has been mainly powered by conversions in rural areas, in indigenous communities, and among lower classes.[7]

Since the path-breaking studies by Lalive d'Epinay (1968) and Willems (1964, 1967), and especially from the early 1990s onwards, Protestant growth has been claimed to cause profound socio-cultural changes in Latin America. Stoll (1990) and Martin (1990), for example, consider Protestantism in Latin America a 'vehicle of modernity'. Garrard-Burnett (1993) calls the rise of Protestantism

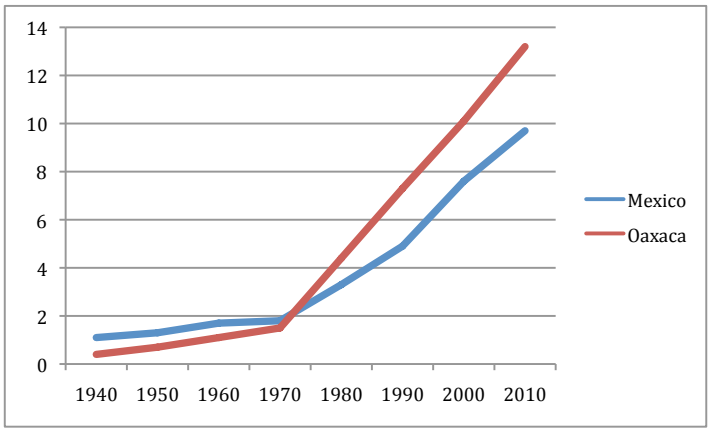


***Figure 1.*** *Protestant growth in Mexico and in Oaxaca.*[8]

on the continent 'Latin America's Reformation'. Patterson (2005: 155), in turn, claims that Protestantism in Latin America alters the societies' value-systems and increases political mobilisation. Mondragón (2005), focusing on Mexico, endows the Protestant social thought with various new values inculcating the Mexican society. Protestantism in rural Mexico has been regarded as a 'new social movement' (Montes 1997; Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2000). The following discussion, rooted in my fieldwork experience, assesses the alleged impact of Protestantism on the Zapotec villages in the Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca and consequently takes a more moderate stance than the above-mentioned approaches.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT: THE SIERRA JUÁREZ OF OAXACA

As argued above, Protestant growth in contemporary Latin America as well as in Mexico has been the fastest among the poor and indigenous populations. The State of Oaxaca, the broader context of this study, is the most indigenous and one of the poorest among 31 Mexican states, and hence an appropriate ethnographic setting for studying the implications of Protestantism. Although the percentage of Protestants in Oaxaca is not as high as in various neighbouring states – Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz especially – the increase of Oaxacan Protestant population during the past forty years has nevertheless been remarkable (Fig. 1).[9]

My research in Oaxaca focuses on the Sierra Norte, the mountainous northern part of the state, and more specifically on one of its regions called the Sierra Juárez. Although the economic and demographic conditions in the

contemporary villages of the Sierra Juárez vary, significant similarities allow the area to be regarded as a single socio-cultural entity. The majority of the population of the Sierra Juárez are indigenous Zapotecs[10], although Chinantec villages are also numerous in the north-western part of the region. The size of most communities ranges between 500 and 2,000 inhabitants. All villages are socio-politically organised on the basis of what locally is referred to as *usos y costumbres*[11] – a diffuse body of customs, norms, and practices that defines the administration of villages and regulates the relations between villagers. *Usos y costumbres* embrace religious practices rooted in (folk) Catholicism. The most significant among these is the *fiesta* organised yearly in honour of the village patron saint (*fiesta patronal*). But *usos y costumbres* also entail local modes of social and political organisation, most notably the system of *cargos*, which in Mexico and historically in all of Mesoamerica stands for a hierarchical system of communal responsibilities. Characteristic of the socio-political organisation of indigenous villages are also specific forms of political succession, modes of decision-making, and legal procedures. *Usos y costumbres* also embrace native forms of collective labour, usually called *tequio* and *guelaguetza*. The former stands for obligatory and non-remunerated labour for the general benefit of the village. *Guelaguetza*, in the context of the Sierra Juárez, refers to the voluntary

***Figure 2.*** *A procession during the fiesta patronal in Capulálpam. Photo by Toomas Gross 2009.*

economic collaboration between individual households on ritual occasions such as weddings, funerals, and fiestas.

All these practices are considered 'autochthonous' and they constitute an important source of communal pride and a strong basis for collective identity in the indigenous villages. The legitimacy of the *usos y costumbres* stems from the common perception that they are *native* practices, norms, and values 'inherited from the past generations', but also from the fact that most of these practices are believed to reinforce communal solidarity, unity, and stability. "Here *costumbre* is a law," I was often told by villagers in the Sierra Juárez. As an informant from the town of Ixtlán claimed, "*Usos y costumbres* are an important heritage that allows us to live in peace and secure respect between members [of the community]." Another informant from the village of Xiacui defined *usos y costumbres* as the 'brotherhood between people'. Villagers in the Sierra Juárez consider the preservation and protection of native cultural, economic, and administrative practices not simply as a moral responsibility but also as something that is vital for the survival of indigenous communities in the globalising world. The discussion of *usos y costumbres*, both in local contexts, scholarly texts (e.g. Aguirre 1991; González 1994; Gómez 1997; Durand 1998),

***Figure 3.*** Tequio *at the cemetery of Capulálpam during the Day of the Dead. Photo by Toomas Gross 2008.*

and since the early 1990s also by the state[12], is often linked to the topics of human, communal, and indigenous rights.

Inhabitants of most villages of the Sierra Juárez strongly identify themselves with the community as a place and as a corporate social entity. Berg (cf. Hi-

rabayashi 1993: 11) calls this phenomenon *pueblismo*. A number of anthropological studies from the 1970s onwards have emphasised the exceptionally strong feeling of communal identity in the Sierra Juárez. Kearney (1971: 331) emphasises the pursuit of harmony and peace in the community called Ixtepeji, which manifests in highly valued unity and internal solidarity. De la Fuente (1977: 210), studying the village of Yalálag, claims that "a Yalalteco […] expresses great affection and attachment to his village, the place that for him is unique although it is similar to [other communities] that he knows". Nader (1990: 3) in her well-known account of a Zapotec dispute settlement similarly suggests that the ideologies of harmony and solidarity are deeply embedded in the social organisation of contemporary Zapotec villages. Alatorre (1998: 79) has argued that the Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez are moral communities with "very intense interaction and very high level of acceptance of the same values by its members".

My own observations and interviews in the Sierra Juárez also confirm that according to the villagers' idealised perception, their native communities are socially and spatially bounded entities, exclusive in terms of membership, autonomous and characterised by high levels of intimacy, unity, homogeneity, and an uncompromising emphasis on solidarity. As an informant from Tabaa suggested, "Community [*la comunidad*] represents a group of people who are intimately related." A young man from Yojovi had a similar perception of his native village: "[A community] is a group of individuals who are very united (*muy unidos*)," he argued. "Community means living in a fraternal union with the ones who surround us, serving and helping each other in peace," another informant from Las Palmas claimed. Although these perceptions obviously represent the *desired* state of affairs rather than the *actual* villages, such idealisation affects the social reality in intricate ways. Most importantly, it determines the nature of the villagers' criticism of individuals, groups, and processes that are considered a threat to this idealised model. Protestants, as I will demonstrate below, are often regarded as one of such groups.

Like the rest of Oaxaca, most of the Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez have experienced a considerable increase of Protestant population during the past few decades. The spread of Protestantism fragments the communities as idealised hypothetical wholes into different and often antithetical religious lifeworlds. The discussions of Protestant growth and its impact in rural Oaxaca are by now multiple, ranging from the assessment of its influence on gender relations (Sault 2001) and economic development (Marroquín 1995b; Montes 1995; Sánchez 1995) to more general scrutiny of the links between Protestantism and modernisation (Gross 2003), or 'indigenous culture' (Gallaher 2007). My focus in the discussion that follows is more moderate – I will limit myself

***Figure 4.*** *A weekly meeting at the Iglesia de Dios in Capulálpam. Photo by Toomas Gross 2000.*

to critically scrutinising the local claims concerning the Protestants' impact on certain aspects of *usos y costumbres*.

## INCOMPATIBLE WORLDS?

In most villages of the Sierra Juárez, the Protestant population still constitutes a religious minority, despite its remarkable growth in recent decades. Nevertheless, many villagers consider the impact of Protestantism on communal life and customs to be substantial. In the local discourse this impact is often perceived in negative terms, although such claims are occasionally also present in scholarly analyses. Barabas (2006), for example, claims that Protestantism and transnational migration constitute the most serious challenges to the socio-cultural organisation of contemporary indigenous communities of Oaxaca. The spread of Protestantism contributes to the situation where traditional indigenous cosmologies are "discursively cancelled, prohibited, and demonised" (Barabas 2006: 127).

Central to the critical arguments against Protestantism, both locally and in scholarly analyses, is that the 'ideology of discontinuity' and 'born again' worldview of Protestant converts advocates a break with the past.[13] Customs and traditions – various elements of the *usos y costumbres* in the case of the Sierra

Juárez – are manifestations of the past and hence to be rejected. Protestants tend to regard customs (*costumbres*), especially those related to Catholicism, as a source of idolatry and paganism. My Protestant informants often thought of *costumbre* as the main obstacle to finding the 'truth' and the God. But customary norms and practices may also be criticised from the human rights perspective, due to their obligatory and collective essence.

The worldview and the values that Protestantism encourages are considered to be incongruent with the collective communal ethos in indigenous villages. For the majority of its native inhabitants, community, both as a social and as a geographical entity, its customary norms and religious (Catholic) practices constitute the prime foundation for collective identity and group solidarity. Protestant converts, however, switch from collective to more individual lifestyles and reject various communal practices, which have traditionally served as socially unifying mechanisms of an indigenous village. When converting to Protestantism, the emotional link between various communal symbols and the individual is broken. Protestants no longer need patron saints as mediators between them and the God. Their relationship with the transcendental is established through the *individual* study of the Bible and not through the *collective* veneration of a patron saint. "Our aim is to please God and not people," a Jehovah's Witness told me, emphasising his immediate relationship with God. Converts no longer regard various collective projects of the (Catholic) community as their own. Such communal responsibilities are secondary to their responsibilities to God and the converts' solidarity with other villagers is often weaker than the solidarity with their religious 'brothers' and 'sisters' of any congregation of their new church in the world.

The (negative) impact of the increase of Protestant population is considered to be most immediate and discernible on practices related to Catholicism, especially the *fiestas* organised in honour of village saints. The growth of Protestant population influences the organisation and the nature of *fiestas* in two ways – it leads to the decline in material contributions needed to finance the event, as well as to the decreased number of participants. In the past, *fiestas* were financed by individual sponsors (*mayordomos*), who were nominated by other villagers from among the most affluent men in the village. In recent decades, however, the collective financing of the *fiestas* has replaced the *mayordomía* system in most communities. This means collecting the 'festival quota' (*cuota*) from individual households. Ideally, paying the *cuota* is obligatory to all households but Protestants often refuse to do it. This has led to disputes and confrontations between Protestants and village authorities in numerous cases. Balthazar, a former Municipal President of one of the villages, recounted his experience with the Jehovah's Witnesses who had refused to contribute to financing the *fiesta*:

> Occasionally, some [Protestants] – those who were of another religion and did not like saints – did not want to pay the *cuota*. I, as the representative of the authority, had to talk to them. I said: 'I have seen you during the dances, playing basketball, during the fairs. Why don't you want to cooperate? The money that you are going to give is not for the saint, it is for the procession and other things, for the *fiesta* of the community.' You have to explain to them so that they will not misunderstand – not everything in the *fiesta* is religion.

In some villages of the Sierra Juárez Protestants have given in to the authorities' pressure, whereas in other villages they are exempt of paying. Capulálpam is an example of a compromise between these two extremes: Protestants are not obliged to pay the *cuota* for the *fiesta* but they are supposed to pay an equivalent sum of money for financing alternative communal projects. Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, have for various years allocated their money for purchasing light bulbs for street lighting.

Protestants refuse to participate in the Catholic *fiestas* not only because they consider worshipping saints idolatrous but also because such events are regarded as socially and economically harmful. *Fiestas* are associated with the consumption of alcohol and the 'burning of money' (*la quema del dinero*), as some Protestants call it. Owing to the fact that many villagers now reject the *fiesta* due to their new religious convictions, the meaning of the *fiesta* has changed for everyone. The earlier 'communal event' has now transformed into a 'Catholic' one, associated not with the whole community but with only one, albeit usually the major religious group in the village.

The impact of the increase of Protestant population on the religiously more 'neutral' communal practices, such as the system of civil *cargos* and *tequios*, is generally considered to be weaker. Although claims that *all* Protestants reject *all* aspects of *usos y costumbres* are not uncommon among the most severe critics, the truth is rather that *some* Protestant groups refuse to participate in *some* of the customary practices, if these go against their religious convictions. The Seventh Day Adventists would refuse to participate in the *tequios* that are held on Saturdays. The Jehovah's Witnesses would not accept highly ranked *cargo*s, since their religion forbids them to get involved in politics. Victor, a Jehovah's Witness in his mid-twenties, described his attitude towards different *cargo*s:

> I never served as a *llavero*[14], because it is a religious *cargo* and entails responsibilities in the Catholic Church. It might well be that someday the village will decide that since I have not served as a *llavero*, I have to do it. They say that everyone has to do all the *cargo*s. But I won't do it. One has to follow the orders of village authorities, but as Jehovah's Wit-

> nesses we cannot always do so – when the orders go against the Bible. They force us sometimes, but there are also human rights. We, Jehovah's Witnesses only accept *cargo*s up to the level of *regidor*[15]. Anything further up from there is already politics.

All this is considered by critics to have culturally destructive consequences. Mario, a middle-aged Catholic man from Ixtlán, lamented over the devastating impact, in his opinion, of Protestantism on local customs and the difficulties that the village authorities had to face nowadays, when trying to force Protestants to obey the customary norms:

> [The Protestants] do not participate in *tequios*, but you cannot force them. If we incarcerate them for not participating or not cooperating for the *fiesta*, the human rights activists come and criticise us. Why do we punish the Protestants, if Mexico is a free country, they ask. The customs and traditions are vanishing as a result of all this.

An example of such a community in the Sierra Juárez, often singled out by my informants as a prototype of the culturally destructive consequences of Protestantism, is Madero, a tiny Zapotec village of approximately 300 inhabitants. Protestants belonging to four different churches clearly outnumber the Catholic population in that village. The social life in Madero is centred solely in religious congregations, and most ritual practices that used to unite the whole village, including the *fiesta* of the patron saint, have disappeared. Catholics in other villages often referred to Madero as an alarming example of the adverse impact of religious fragmentation on local customs and communal solidarity. The situation in Madero was often used to justify one's intolerance towards religious pluralism. As an informant from a neighbouring village argued, allowing Protestants to the villages would eventually lead to what had happened in Madero, where, according to him, "customs have disappeared and the community is dead."

Historically, Protestant growth has led to numerous religious conflicts in all of Oaxaca, especially in the 1990s. It is important to note, however, that actions taken against Protestants in the villages have generally not been caused and motivated by *religious* intolerance *per se*. What has usually mobilised the critics and village authorities is the Protestants' reluctance to participate in certain collective activities. Such reluctance goes against the idealised perception outlined above that many (Catholic) villagers have of an indigenous community and social solidarity. Various examples of religious conflicts in the Sierra Juárez in the 1980s and 1990s illustrate this eloquently. In San Pedro Cajonos, for example, the authorities closed the local Adventist church, deprived its members of electricity, and prohibited all village shops to sell goods to Adventists because

***Figure 5.*** *A Pentecostal church forcefully closed by village authorities in Solaga. Photo by Toomas Gross 2000.*

the latter had allegedly refused to participate in various communal practices.[16] In Teotlaxco and Tabaa, Protestants were attacked on multiple occasions for not taking part in *tequios*. In Capulálpam, according to various testimonies, the Jehovah's Witnesses were forced to participate in communal activities under the threat of being expelled. These are but some examples.

Although Chiapas is the state that has experienced the worst cases of religious intolerance in recent Mexican history, the actual *number* of religious conflicts in the past few decades has been the highest in Oaxaca. Mutual criticism, threats, fines, restrictions on preaching and proselytising, detentions and expulsions, destruction of Protestants' property, and the demolition of Protestant churches were recurring phenomena in many Oaxacan villages, also in the Sierra Juárez, in the 1980s and 1990s. This era was the height of religious intolerance in rural southern Mexico. Importantly, nearly two thirds of the cases of intolerance during that time occurred in relatively small villages of 500–2,500 inhabitants (Montes 1995: 33). This is not necessarily surprising, considering that the feeling of intimacy in such small communities is obviously stronger than in bigger ones. Consequently, the fears of the potentially disruptive effect of religious 'otherness' on communal ethos and solidarity are also stronger. It should also be emphasised that although occasionally some critics lump all non-Catholic churches together, their adverse impact on local customs is more usually regarded as being denomination-specific. Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, and Mormons are usually considered to be the most inflexibly opposed to local

customs, while Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches and especially the so-called 'historical Protestants' (e.g. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists) are perceived in a less negative light. The difference in the attitudes towards Protestant denominations correlates with the frequency of their involvement in religious conflicts (Montes 1997: 58).

The origin of the members of Protestant churches also affects the Catholic majority's attitudes towards them. In Capulálpam, for example, Catholics' feelings about the Seventh Day Adventists were generally less negative than their attitude towards the Jehovah's Witnesses. The former are mainly natives of Capulálpam while the latter are predominantly migrants from other villages. As a Catholic woman claimed: "Adventists are from here, […] one *has* to respect them because of that." The attitude towards the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, was often either condescending or worse. The fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses do not salute the national flag, reject not only Catholic but also many civic and patriotic rituals, and refuse to be nominated for higher *cargo*s enabled the village authorities and the Catholic majority to criticise them on nationalist grounds.

But the 'nationalist card' is often also played against other Protestant denominations, especially when trying to present Protestantism as a 'foreign influence'. Many of my Catholic informants justified their intolerance towards Protestants with the claims that Protestantism is 'a conspiracy of other nations' (*complot de otras naciones*). In Capulálpam, almost a quarter of the Catholic respondents (86 in total) to my questionnaire on various issues related to religion and the village believed that Protestant growth in the Sierra Juárez was mainly explainable by the US influence. The converts into 'foreign religions' were accused of deceiving Mexico and making 'pacts with the *gringos*'. The religious conflict in the village of San Juan Yaeé, pending throughout the 1990s, illustrates well how the nationalist as well as culturalist arguments against Protestants have been employed. The conflict in Yaeé was probably the most heated and long-lasting confrontation among many comparable cases of religious intolerance during that era in the Sierra Juárez. The conflict began in 1991, when various members of the local Pentecostal church were detained by the village authorities, allegedly for practicing a non-Catholic religion without the authorities' consent. Although an agreement was soon signed between the Pentecostals and the authorities, regulating and restricting Protestants' religious practices in the village, detentions, threats and fines continued for years, culminating in 1996 in the expulsion of 52 Pentecostals from the village and the destruction of their church building. The municipal president justified the authorities' forceful measures in the following manner:

The Protestants come here with the ideology of the *gringos* and only constitute a hindrance to social peace. There is a conflict because we organise ourselves by *usos y costumbres* and they impose the law of the *gringos*.[17]


***Figure 6.*** *An anti-Protestant sign on the entrance to a house in Ixtlán. Photo by Toomas Gross 2008.*


***Figure 7.*** *An anti-Protestant sign in a shop in Capulálpam. Photo by Toomas Gross 2008.*

Not only are Protestants accused of disseminating foreign ideas and ideology, but it is often also believed that their activities are financed with foreign money. As Pablo, an ardent Catholic, suggested:

> I think that the Protestants are paid for converting. This money comes from the United States. They always travel around proselytising here and there with a Bible in their hands, but they do not work like us – where else do they get money for food?

Such 'nationalist' and 'culturalist' critique of Protestant growth is occasionally backed up by economic reasoning. The spread of Protestantism, by fragmenting the communities ideologically, undermining communal solidarity, and affecting local customs, is feared to eventually enable foreign countries, especially the United States, to appropriate and control Mexico's natural resources. Judging by the articles published in the Oaxacan and national media, this was a common argument in Mexico in the 1970s among many – also anthropologists – who lobbied against the activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a controversial faith mission. But similar fears were expressed also by some of my informants in the Sierra Juárez. As the Catholic priest of Ixtlán claimed:

> Protestantism is an incentive by *gringos* to divide our nation and our villages. They want us not to be united and not to guard our natural resources, and their intention is to divide and conquer. For example, various American missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics came to Yagallo to study local languages, customs and culture – everything that unites the people. But their real aim was to do away with the cultural roots of the village.

## THE CULTURAL DESCTRUCTIVISM ARGUMENT REVISED

Although it is undisputable that joining the Protestant churches transforms the converts' worldview and leads to their rejection of certain local customs and practices, especially those related to the Catholic Church and the Catholic faith in general, the argumentation and claims presented above need to be critically reviewed. Judging by my field experience from the Sierra Juárez as well as research by other scholars, I would suggest that the claims about the sweeping destructive impact of Protestantism on indigenous culture and traditional practices are often exaggerated. It would be erroneous to argue that Protestantism is incompatible with the traditional culture *always* and *everywhere*.

One could start with revising the putative opposition between the *collectivist* communal ethos of indigenous communities and Protestants' *individualistic* worldview. Various classical studies have assumed that individualism is an inherent characteristic of most Protestant doctrines. It was one of Weber's (1976) main arguments in his account of the Protestant ethic, and the idea was famously also employed by Durkheim (1952: 158–159) in the study of suicide. But the rigid juxtaposition of the Catholic 'communal ideology' and Protestant 'individualism' in the case of Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez would be misplaced. Protestants very seldom oppose themselves to the communal mode of living as such but only to its Catholic premises. According to Enrique Ángeles Cruz (personal communication), a Pentecostal lawyer and the director of an organisation called the Christian Defence of Human Rights[18] in Oaxaca:

> For Catholics, the true manifestation of collective communal life is the *fiesta* where saints are honoured, money is spent and alcohol is consumed. The fact that Protestants and others do not want to take part in this, does not mean that they are necessarily against communal ideology.

Escalante (unpublished) has even argued that individualism does not suit the indigenous community regardless of its religion composition. Even if the majority of the village population are Protestants, the ideology of a 'closed corporate community' based on territoriality tends to be maintained or recreated, he claims. There are, indeed, numerous examples of this, especially in cases when Protestants, expelled from the villages, have formed their own communities elsewhere (e.g. Barabas 1994; Robledo 1997). Hence, even though the individualist elements of Protestantism have been taken for granted since Weber, it would be flawed to regard Protestants as being unconditionally antagonistic towards collectivism. On the contrary, Protestant congregations, in rural Oaxaca especially, have a rather intense ideology of 'communitarianism' of their own, characterised by a strong feeling of solidarity between congregation members, as well as by various collective activities.

The claims that Protestants undermine national symbols and that Protestantism always has a destructive impact on native socio-cultural practices also beg for critical revision. Protestants in the Sierra Juárez, with the possible exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, rarely oppose themselves to national and patriotic symbols. On the contrary, because communal authorities and Catholics often mistakenly attribute this Jehovah's Witnesses' particularity to all non-Catholic religions, many Protestant churches endeavour to express their nationalist feelings and patriotism as explicitly as possible. In various communities of the Sierra Juárez, Adventists and Pentecostals, for example, have a national flag permanently exposed in their churches to differentiate

***Figure 8.*** *The Adventist church of Capulálpam with a Mexican national flag. Photo by Toomas Gross 2008.*

themselves from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Mexican flags are raised on church buildings also during patriotic holidays. As an Adventist informant argued, trying to draw a clear line between his faith and that of the Jehovah's Witnesses:

> The Jehovah's Witnesses do not salute the flag, although nowhere in the Word of God is it said that one should not salute the flag. […] They confuse respect with adoration.

As for the Protestants' relationship with traditional cultural practices, various Protestant churches are capable of adapting to if without assimilating elements of indigenous religion and culture. Many scholars studying Protestantism in Mexico have clearly shown that Protestant presence in the traditional communities does not necessarily 'destroy' local culture (e.g. Sullivan 1998; Cahn 2003). Pentecostalism in particular has been demonstrated to successfully blend with various aspects of indigenous cultures in rural Mexico (e.g. Garma 1998), but the same has also been argued about other Protestant churches. Sánchez (1995: 117), for example, shows that the new religious ideology of Presbyterian converts has not caused drastic changes in the cosmology and everyday practices of Tzeltal villages in Chiapas. Presbyterianism, Sánchez suggests, has instead evolved into a new form of popular religion, from which the Tzeltal-Presbyterian identity is constructed. Gros (1999: 193), in a comparative study of various cases from Latin America, similarly claims that Protestantism does not necessarily erode the ethnic and cultural particularities of indigenous groups, but can actu-

ally empower them. Protestantism can take indigenous forms, and its impact on local cultures is often not very different from that of folk Catholicism, Gros concludes. Parker (2002) makes a similar argument when suggesting that Protestantism can contribute to the recovery of ethnic identities in Latin America.

In a more recent study from Oaxaca, Gallaher (2007) argues that contemporary Protestant churches have managed to establish a more compatible relationship with indigenous customs, owing to the altered conversion strategies and styles of proselytising by Protestant missionaries. Conversion to Protestantism no longer means rejecting the key aspects of indigenous and rural culture, Gallaher concludes. She pays particular attention to *tequios* and *fiestas*, demonstrating that the missionaries' increasingly flexible approach towards these communal practices allows Protestant converts "to be able to continue to function as part of the village rather than stand in opposition to it" (Gallaher 2007: 104).

Not only do most Protestant groups adapt themselves to local cultural contexts, but such adaptation is reciprocal – with time various villages in the Sierra Juárez have 'learned to live' with religious pluralism. An example of this is the community of La Trinidad, the population of which is almost evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants. Many of my informants in other villages often referred to La Trinidad as a model for religious tolerance, pluralism, and collaboration between different religious groups living in the same village. Allegedly, communal authorities in La Trinidad had contributed to the construction and renovation of all church buildings in the village and affiliates of all religious groups had served high-ranking *cargos*. This does not mean that religious fragmentation has not affected La Trinidad, but its social impact was considered to be mainly positive. Protestantism was claimed to have led, for example, to the decline of alcoholism and corruption.

Although critics accuse Protestantism of undermining the *usos y costumbres*, much broader and more general processes are often behind the transformation of contemporary indigenous communities. The spread of Protestant churches and changes in the local socio-cultural practices discussed above might be interpreted as being the parallel results of various modernising and globalising forces, such as migration, monetarised economy, neoliberalism, and 'Westernisation', to name a few. These forces have been shaping the Mexican countryside significantly for the past few decades. *Tequios* in the indigenous villages have traditionally been based on solidarity and collective participation of all villagers, but due to the increasing role of money in local economy, socio-economic stratification and unemployment in rural areas, villagers' relationships with each other are nowadays more monetarised and less based on solidarity. This leads, in the worst cases, to the disappearance of *tequio* as a collective practice,

or, like in most communities, to the situation where richer villagers prefer not to 'waste their time' and opt to pay the poor to participate in *tequios* for them.

Various changes in the system of *cargos* are likewise a result of the changing socio-economic conditions and the integration of rural communities into national and global economy. In the situation where villages and households are losing self-sufficiency, *cargos* are increasingly often regarded as a burden, rather than a means of gaining prestige and recognition or expressing one's solidarity with the community. Complaints that non-remunerated *cargos* are burdensome are equally common among Protestants and Catholics. The municipal presidents (29 altogether) of the villages of the Sierra Juárez, who contested to one my questionnaires, spent nearly ten hours a day on average to fulfil the tasks of their generally three-year *cargo*, for which none of them received any payment. Only three contestants claimed that working as a Municipal President did not have an adverse effect on their household's welfare and income. Nearly half of them relied on relatives' support, held multiple jobs, or used personal savings and loans to maintain themselves and their families. Although lower-ranking *cargos* are less time-consuming and hence economically less demanding, evading *cargos* has become a common reason for out-migration from the villages, as I was often told.

The cases when Protestants refuse to participate in *tequios* or serve *cargos* for religious reasons are actually rare. On the contrary, Protestants often regard performing such tasks as a religious obligation, claiming that "the Bible obliges [one] to obey the authorities". Negative reactions to the *cargo* system and *tequios*, as argued above, are very specific and determined by the particularity of religious convictions or the nature of the responsibility. Even the transformative impact of Protestantism on *fiestas* and other religious events, which are central to the cultural and collective identities of indigenous villages, is not as straightforward as generally expected. Olga Montes, an Oaxacan anthropologist and of Zapotec origin herself, has argued that owing to the changes in religious practices and the spread of new modes of faith, indigenous collective identities are reformulated but not destroyed. In my personal communication with her, Montes brought an example of the village of Yatzachi. Although many people in Yatzachi have converted to Pentecostalism in recent years, various religious events like celebrating Christmas have retained their local features. "The Pentecostals feel themselves as much Zapotec as Catholics do," Montes emphasised.

Moreover – like in the case of *tequios* and the system of *cargos* – the transformation of *fiestas* nowadays might be triggered by more general changes in the socio-economic conditions in rural areas. In a thought-provoking analysis, Montes (1995: 27) has suggested that the decline of the *fiestas* in recent decades can be explained by the changes in agricultural practices, especially by the

drop in cultivating traditional crops like corn. Most *fiestas* honouring village saints in Oaxaca take place in summer or in autumn, traditionally the periods of sowing and harvesting corn. Since the middle of the twentieth century, cash crops like coffee and bananas have increasingly replaced the cultivation of traditional crops. Importantly, the cultivation period of these new crops does not coincide with the dates of most *fiestas*. Villagers have consequently fewer financial resources at hand during the time of the *fiesta*, which has an adverse impact on the organisation of the event. Moreover, the new crops are generally less dependent on weather conditions and hence do not require the patron saint's blessing, Montes (*ibid*.) also claims. Apart from the changes in agricultural practices, massive out-migration from the rural areas in search for work and increasing inequality within the villages also contribute to the decline of traditional *fiesta*s.

And finally, even though the Protestants' new faith and worldview often *do* encourage a break with certain traditional practices, it has to be emphasised that the rejection of *costumbre* in contemporary indigenous villages is not an exclusively Protestant feature. Many of my Catholic informants similarly criticised customary norms and traditions, considering various aspects of the *usos y costumbres* as "obsolete, conservative, and authoritarian." Although it was acknowledged that customs serve to unite the villages into corporate wholes based on a strong sense of solidarity and an ideology of collaboration, the *usos y costumbres* were also perceived as a normative system that forces people to participate in costly *fiestas*, hold burdensome *cargos*, and work for no compensation.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this article has been to discuss, using the ethnographic example of the indigenous Zapotec communities of the Sierra Juárez in Northern Oaxaca, the complex relationship between Protestantism, traditional culture, and collective communal identity. I have mainly been concerned with the perceptions of the impact of Protestant growth in general on various customs (*costumbres*) in the indigenous villages, rather than with how conversion to Protestantism transforms the lives of *individual* converts. This is not to claim that the aggregate impact of many individual transformations has no potential to modify entire communities or societies. On the contrary, it has been convincingly demonstrated that sufficiently many individual conversions may, for example, alter gender relationships in a society (e.g. Brusco 1995; Loreto & Das Dores 1998) or encourage entrepreneurial mentality (e.g. Annis 1987; Garma 1987).

As I have demonstrated, Protestant growth in the rural areas and indigenous communities of Oaxaca is often regarded as a cause of profound and significant socio-cultural changes. In the Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez, the local population's perception of the impact of Protestant growth on customs, cultural practices, and communal identity has often been negative. Protestant converts are accused of switching to a more individualistic worldview, which is at odds with the collective ethos of an indigenous community. Protestants are claimed to reject various local customs and Protestants' presence is regarded, by most severe critics, as a threat to the cultural integrity and autonomy of the villages.

Although such claims are justified in some cases, it would be erroneous to extrapolate them to all Protestant churches and to all circumstances. I have used the general category 'Protestant' throughout this article as a cover term comprising all non-Catholic biblical churches, because the Catholic majority seldom differentiates between various denominations. From the analytical perspective, however, Protestantism – when it comes to its relationship with local customs and culture – is a multifaceted phenomenon. The impact of 'Protestantisation' on customs and culture is situation- and denomination-specific, and in this context the analytical value of the umbrella category 'Protestant' could even be called into question.

As I have endeavoured to show, critically revising the conventional arguments about the adverse impact of Protestant presence in the villages of the Sierra Juárez, the devastating impact of Protestant churches on local traditions and identities should not be exaggerated. This does not mean that Protestant faith in these traditionally Catholic villages should be regarded as an "old wine in new wineskins", to use Sundkler's (1961: 240) metaphor. Nor should one minimise or deny the transformative effects of conversion, as some anthropologists have done in other ethnographic contexts (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 248–252). It is evident that Protestant growth changes contemporary communities in the Sierra Juárez. Above all, the religious fragmentation of the traditional villages leads to a certain liberalisation of the 'monolithic mode of communal thinking' rooted in Catholicism. The plurality of religious affiliations and worldviews forces communities to 'think' and 'act' differently in order to come to terms with such novel heterogeneity. But in order to assess the actual impact of Protestantism on more tangible social and cultural phenomena than a 'worldview', the potential role of broader forces behind the changes in contemporary villages should also be considered. Customs and traditional practices

might change not only due to the fragmentation of the religious field, but also owing to various more general globalising and modernising trends. Moreover, the rise of Protestantism and the socio-cultural changes it is claimed to trigger might, after careful scrutiny, turn out to be co-variants caused by the same underlying processes.

## NOTES

[1] 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).

[2] I first arrived in Oaxaca in the summer of 1998 as a visiting researcher at the Centre for the Advanced Study and Research in Social Anthropology (*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* or *CIESAS*). Altogether 18 months of continuous fieldwork in the Zapotec villages of the Sierra Juárez produced ethnographic data from 39 communities. I have returned to the Sierra Juárez for shorter periods of fieldwork on multiple occasions, most recently in June 2012.

[3] For the sake of consistency, I am using the term 'Protestant' instead of 'evangelical' throughout this article. In common discourse in Mexico, the categories 'Protestant' (*Protestante*) and 'evangelical' (*evangélico*) are often used interchangeably. And, to further simplify the otherwise complex religious terminology, I will use the label 'Protestant' here as a cover-term comprising all non-Catholic Biblical churches, thus including also Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the Seventh Day Adventists.

[4] This does not mean that the Catholic Church in Mexico has always enjoyed state support. After the proclamation of the 1857 constitution and Benito Juárez's Reform Laws of the same decade, and especially during and immediately after the Mexican Revolution, the position of the Catholic Church in the Mexican society was seriously undermined by the state (see, for example, Aguirre 1992; De la Torre 1995).

[5] The alleged link between Latin American Protestantism and the US influence has been extensively discussed (e.g. Lalive d'Epinay 1968; Bastian 1994). 'The US conspiracy' argument has been particularly prominent in the studies of the activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Latin America and elsewhere (e.g. Hvalkof & Aaby 1981; Stoll 1982; De la Torre 1995).

[6] In 1900, the percentage of Protestants in Mexico was 0.4 percent and this figure increased at an average rate of two tenths of a percent per decade, reaching 1.8 percent by 1970. Since then, the growth of Protestant population has been considerably faster. According to the latest general census of 2010, 9.7 percent of the Mexican population professes a non-Catholic Biblical religion. A concise overview of the expansion of Protestantism in Mexico can be found in Dow (2005).

[7] For example, 12.9 percent of the indigenous population in Mexico identified themselves as non-Catholic believers in 2000; the equivalent figure for the whole country was 7.6 (Garma & Hernández 2007: 211).

[8] The figure is based on the data from Mexican general censuses. It must be noted here that the religious categories used in the censuses have changed over time, thus rendering the longitudinal comparison difficult. Until 1990, the censuses distinguished between five religious categories: 'Catholic,' 'Protestant/evangelical,' 'Judaic,' 'other' and 'non-religious' (earlier 'atheist'). Non-evangelical biblical religions (the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons) were included under the category 'other,' together with various other religious groups. Since the census of 2000, however, non-evangelical biblical religions are listed as a separate category ('biblical other than evangelical').

[9] Until the 1970s, the percentage of Protestants in Oaxaca was lower than the national average but grew rapidly from 1.5 to 7.3 percent in 1970–90. Within these twenty years, the total population of Oaxaca increased by 50 percent, the number of Catholics rose 15 percent, whereas that of Protestants grew an astonishing 531 percent (Marroquín 1995a: 10). By 2010, the percentage of evangelical Protestants in Oaxaca had risen to 10.6 percent and that of all people belonging to a non-Catholic Biblical religion to 13.2 percent.

[10] The Zapotecs are among the biggest indigenous groups of Mexico. Most Zapotecs live in the State of Oaxaca, although Zapotec-speaking communities can also be found in the neighbouring states. Zapotec languages and dialects are multiple, but the Zapotec peoples of Oaxaca are generally divided into four groups. This article is concerned with the communities of *serranos*, as the Zapotec peoples living in the mountainous northern part of Oaxaca are often referred to.

[11] The term lacks a good equivalent in English. Its direct translation 'habits and customs' would conceal the multiple meanings that the phrase has, being used simultaneously as a cultural, sociological, and legal concept. See, for example, Stavenhagen (1992), Gómez (1993, 1997), and Sierra (1993) for theoretical analyses of various aspects of customary law in the Mexican context.

[12] In 1992, for example, an amendment was made to the fourth article of the federal constitution, which stipulates the multicultural composition of the Mexican nation and secures the plurality of judicial practices and customs in the country (Valdivia 1994: 17).

[13] Protestants' urge to break with the past has been eloquently described by anthropologists in multiple ethnographic contexts (e.g. Meyer 1998; Robbins 2003, 2007; Engelke 2004, 2010).

[14] *Llaveros* are generally responsible for different tasks in the local Catholic church.

[15] *Regidor* is a *cargo* roughly in the centre of the hierarchical 'ladder' of *cargos*. Villages in the Sierra Juárez usually have many *regidor*s who are responsible for a certain sector of communal affairs, such as education or construction of roads.

[16] En la Sierra, graves conflictos religiosos. *Noticias*, 28 May 1989.

[17] Afirma edil de San Juan Yaeé: el pueblo y no yo, es el que castigó a los evangélicos. *Noticias*, 3 July 1996. In June 1998, the village authorities finally allowed the expelled families to return.

[18] *DECRISDH* (*La Defensa Cristiana de los Derechos Humanos*) was founded in 1991 in response to mounting religious intolerance against Protestants in Oaxaca.

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# IN MEMORIAM

## KAILASH DUTTA (1976–2012) AND PARAG MONI SARMA (1967–2012)

Indian folkloristics suffered a great loss on April 28, 2012, when two young Assam folklorists were killed in a traffic accident on Guwahati – Tezpur road. Kailash Dutta worked as Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University, and Parag Moni Sarma was Professor at the same department.

Kailash defended his doctoral degree at the Department of Folklore Research at Gauhati University in 2011, his thesis providing an overview of the relations between ethnicity and folklore on the example of Thengal Kachari community. As in 2009 and 2010 Kailash was a visiting doctoral student within the DoRa programme (Doctoral Studies and Internationalisation Programme) at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia, his thesis also comprises a comparative chapter on Seto folk culture. Parag's doctoral thesis completed at Gauhati University in 2000 is an ethnopoetic comparative analysis of the folk songs of Assam tribes and Native Americans in the United States. Later on Parag delved into social and cultural theories and became one of the leading Indian folklorists in this area of research.

We have lost two good friends, who maintained close connections with Estonia and were willing to cooperate with us. They were both dedicated to their research and their students. Unfortunately, their lives ended prematurely, but we will cherish their memory and highly value everything they accomplished and were able to initiate.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## PRESIDENT'S FOLKLORE AWARD AND THE YEAR 2011 IN THE COLLECTION WORK OF THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES

On March 13, the eve of the Mother Language Day, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia, presented prizes for collecting folklore at the Estonian Literary Museum. In the same event the Estonian Folklore Archives summarised the collection work of 2011 and recognised the best volunteer collectors. The Folklore Award of the President of the Republic of Estonia is a monetary award to recognise the voluntary contributors to the folklore archives, and its predecessor dates back to the years 1935–1940, when the head of the state rewarded the best folklore collectors.

The keywords for the past year's collection work were the multiplicity of cultures and different facets of culture, and the laureates of the President's Award in 2011 recorded material relating particularly to these issues.

**Leelo Kund** and **Margit Korotkova** from the non-profit organisation Cooperation and Development Chamber Võhandu handed over to the Estonian Folklore Archives 277 pages of text, 217 digital photos, 61 sound files with interviews and 6 video files, which were collected during fieldwork in Setumaa (2008–2010) within the framework of the project "Orthodox and Folk Tradition in Setumaa and its Neighbouring Areas". The project was supported by the PRIA (Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board) Leader programme. Territorially fieldwork covered two communes in Setumaa, and both Setus and Russians were interviewed, focussing on religion and customs – church and congregations, folk beliefs, celebration of holidays – as well as heritage and biographical background.

**Age-Kristel Kartau** recorded the biographies of the people engaged in Thai massages in Estonia and interviewed both those practising it and those running courses. During the years 2010 and 2011 Kartau handed over to the archives 48 hours of sound recordings and 300 pages of written material. The material is extremely interesting and provides an overview of the evolution of one of the trends in alternative medicine. However, as is customary for biographical material, it is intertwined with social issues, this way also discussing Estonian life in a more general key. As this is a specific field of lore of a small group of people, we would have to emphasise here the necessity for collaborators from the archives, as this kind of interviews cannot be conducted without preliminary knowledge and contacts.

**Triin Kusmin** has done a remarkably good job in recording and preserving heritage culture by collecting place lore while exploring and mapping lore in the recreational areas and nature centres of the State Forest Management Centre. Besides mapping, the researcher has also been interested in biographical and ethnographical material as well as folklore on a larger scale. On the basis of the collected material, she has compiled an overview of the place lore of several Estonian counties, in all 23 hours of recorded material.

*Laureates of the Folklore Award of the President of the Republic of Estonia together with the President: (sitting from the left) Leelo Kund and Triin Kusmin, standing Margit Korotkova, Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Age Kristel Kartau. Photo by Alar Madisson.*

During the past year the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives were supplemented as a result of voluntary collectors' contribution, the work of schoolchildren and university students as well as the collecting action relating to a dancing event called *TeateTants* (Relay Dance). In all, over 8000 pages of material was added, and in addition to that numerous sound and video recordings as well as photos both on old-fashioned and more modern carriers.

The event called *TeateTants* was organised in August 2011 on the initiative of the Estonian Folkdance and Folk Music Association, and it covered the whole Estonia, lasting for eight days. Different groups participated with 6000 people altogether, who passed the baton in an uninterrupted show, dancing through fifteen counties (1000 kilometres).

As part of the relay dance, an action for collecting dance lore was organised, and the baton was exchanged for a memory stick onto which the groups recorded their group lore, embellishing it with photos, videos and other materials. In all, the event yielded 189 memory sticks (77 GB) full of material.

Diverse high-quality lore material has been collected from all regions of Estonia. Kaie Humal and Vello Kütt continued collecting the lore, history and cultural history of the villages near Lake Võrtsjärv, and Arvi Liiva recorded tradition in Palamuse parish.

The Rebala Foundation under the leadership of Triin Äärismaa, curator of the Rebala Heritage Reserve Museum, conducted fieldwork in Jõelähtme parish from July to November 2011. The project was targeted at the culturally minded local youth, in order to generate and maintain interest in lore and its collection. The project was supported by the PRIA Leader programme. Seven young collectors participated in fieldwork and

seventeen local inhabitants were interviewed and recorded. The topics focussed primarily on the important places in Jõelähtme parish as well as subject matter related to village and personal stories. The material amounting to 277 pages has by today reached the digital manuscript collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives.

Anni Oraveer contributed 180 pages of blind people's lore and dialect stories, and Kaleph Jõul handed over 102 pages of material. Arvi Liiva sent anecdotes and digital photos from Palamuse parish, Anna Rinne – her contribution about theatre, Maret Lehto – songs from Muhu Island and reminiscences about local people. Ellen Randoja recorded stories, songs, wedding descriptions, etc., Anu Soon – contemporary wedding customs, sayings and beliefs, and Jaan Malin – web jokes.

Voluminous substantial contribution is the manuscripts of Oskar Raudmets (1914–2003), who studied local lore (249 pages of folklorist writings on Harjumaa County), and Vassili Kolga's legacy – songs, material on the history of Simiste village, self-creation, etc., which was handed over to the museum by his daughter Esperinda Meikar.

Eda Kalmre mediated the writings from children's story-writing competition "It Happened on Toome Hill".

The collections of the folklore archives are continuously supplemented by the materials from different cultures and ethnic groups, for example, the Estonian diaspora. Igor Tõnurist handed over recorded materials from Siberian Setus and Estonians from the 1980s, Aivar Jürgenson – materials related to Siberian Estonians and Setus in 1999–2000, and the tapes and sound files recorded from Estonians in Brazil and Argentina in the years 2007 and 2009.

This year university students also contributed to the archives. Eleene Sammler donated the letters that children had written to Santa Clause in 2009–2010 and posted in a special mailbox in Tartu. The letters were full of sentiment and spoke about children's and also adults' hopes, wishes and dreams.

Students of the Department of Choreography of the Institute of Fine Arts of Tallinn University led by Sille Kapper filmed and described in their collection diaries the spontaneous dancing activities at the Viljandi Folk Music Festival. The students of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre under the supervision of Janika Oras carried out fieldwork in Kihnu Island and Setumaa and handed over to the archives film material on various festivities as well as interviews and other fieldwork materials.

The Estonian Literary Museum has completed a major job, which is definitely of interest also for the general public: all the 162 volumes with the total of 115,000 pages of Jakob Hurt's folklore collections have been digitised and made available on the Internet. The file repository created within the framework of the same project (http://kivike.kirmus.ee – the Virtual Cellar of the Literary Museum) enables the safe preservation of the gradually increasing digital collections of the museum according to today's requirements and significantly improves the online accessibility of the collections. The project leader is Kadri Tüür, and the IT-solutions come from AS Piksel.

However, the digitising of materials does not free us from responsibility to follow the rules for the preservation of those in paper form. Recently, there was a leak into the museum depositories and a number of publications and manuscripts in the Archival Library and the Estonian Cultural History Archives were damaged by water. Yet, this unfortunate incident proved that people cared and appreciated voluntary work. The museum's appeal for help was answered actively by many, and people from different

spheres of life – former employees of the museum, pensioners, university students and alumni, schoolchildren with their teachers, as well as many others came to render help with the damaged materials. The Literary Museum is grateful to all the former and future voluntary assistants and its own staff members.

Astrid Tuisk

## JAPANESE CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND YOUTH SOLIDARITIES IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

### Higher School of Economics – St. Petersburg, December 5–6, 2011

In today's world no culture remains isolated and only within the borders of its original country. It is especially obvious in the case of popular culture. At the beginning of December a group of scholars gathered in the Higher School of Economics to discuss different aspects and features of Japanese culture in post-Soviet space. The conference was organized by Dr. John Schoeberlein, Program on Central Asia and Caucasus, Davis Center, Harvard University, Dr. Elena L. Omelchenko, Head of the Department of Sociology HSE - St. Petersburg, Director, Center for Youth Studies, and Guzel A. Sabirova, Deputy Director, Center for Youth Studies, HSE - St. Petersburg, with participants from the HSE but also from Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine.

It appeared that Japanese culture is strongly present in the post-Soviet space, sometimes even in forms we do not see anymore as distinctively Japanese, for example ikebana or Japanese martial arts. Sushi and some elements of Japanese religion have also been incorporated into various forms of everyday or popular culture in Eastern Europe. This and many other aspects of the movement of Japanese culture into former Soviet space were highlighted by one of the organisers – John Scheberlein – in his opening keynote speech. The majority of the presentations on the first day discussed the anime culture, which is extremely popular in Russia, especially in St. Petersburg. Several talks dealt with different features of this culture, from festivals to anime clubs. As nearly all presenters introduced their current MA research projects, their talks were sometimes not very theoretical, yet, full of interesting details. To sum up, anime culture in Russia seems to be quite paradoxical. While Japanese fans stress through this culture their relation with Japanese culture and traditions, then Russian fans learn the Japanese language and traditions to become "real" anime fans.

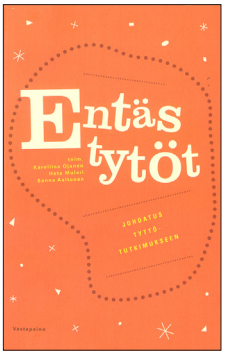
The second day of the conference was dedicated to different elements and features of Japanese culture and their meanings in post-Soviet countries. Aimar Ventsel started the day with his analysis of the wide spread of the Japanese youth fashion among Asian people in Russia, especially in Eastern Siberia, arguing that this way young people emphasise their Asianness. The following discussion was very intensive and the participants agreed that the Japanese youth fashion is a hip and elitist way of showing the race identity spread from Kazakhstan to St. Petersburg. Vadim Stetsyuk, Senior Lecturer

of the Kamenets-Podolsky National University named after Ivan Ogienko (Ukraine), presented an interesting talk about the samurai clubs and their activities in Ukraine, discussing also their controversial position within the Ukrainian reconstructionist club movement. We heard that samurais constitute a minority among the clubs that focus on reconstructing historical events and army uniforms. In the following discussion several participants also argued that such clubs greatly reflect the situation in society where rich people join clubs where one has to spend much money on clothes, while their not so wealthy fellow citizens prefer cheaper clubs and can make a political statement out of their preference. Some less spectacular features of Japanese culture were discussed by Alina Zakirov from the HSE and Sergei Sakuma from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Healing, ikebana and other elements of Japanese traditional culture have long been adapted into Eastern European everyday culture and live "their own life" in a new cultural context.

The conference proved to be very fruitful and gave many inspiring ideas to the participants who agreed that Japanese cultural forms in the post-Soviet setting should be studied on a larger scale. In order to do that, they created an interest group "Japanese Eurasia" in Facebook to maintain and develop contacts and cooperation. Everyone interested is free to join this group.

Aimar Ventsel

# BOOK REVIEWS




## BUT WHAT ABOUT GIRLS? INTRODUCTION INTO GIRLS' STUDIES

***Entäs tytöt. Johdatus tyttötutkimukseen*. Edited by Karoliina Ojanen & Heta Mulari & Sanna Aaltonen. Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura, Julkaisuja 113. Osuuskunta Vastapaino, Tampere 2011. 320 pp. In Finnish.**

Already from the early 1990s the strong and clear-cut traditions of Finnish gender studies have influenced folklorists, literary scientists and educationalists, sociologists, psychologists, social anthropologists and others in their research into girls' culture. My own bookshelf stores *Letit liehumaan. Tyttökulttuuri murroksessa* (Shake your Hair. Girls' Culture in the Process of Change) edited by Sari Näre and Jaana Lähtenmaa and published in 1992, which is probably the first collection of articles published in Finland that focuses on girls' issues to such a great extent. Ulla Lipponen is the only folklorist represented in this collection, and her article discusses love theme in girls' personal poem collections. Other articles deal with girls' worldview, their sexuality both in real life and in fiction, friendship, their visions of heroes, fan culture, kleptomania, etc. I have repeatedly referred to these articles in my research and regard it as excellent, substantial and necessary material for everybody studying youth and especially girls' culture.

Yet, in Finland hair was still flying in the wind, and research continued; in 2006 the Finnish national network for girls' studies was established, which assembled numerous scientists interested in the field. This association became part of the extensive all-Finland network of youth studies, and *Entäs tytöt* came out as its 113th publication. This collection denotes a kind of intermediate stage, which summarises the nearly twenty years of research into girls' culture in Finland.

As of its establishment, the network has been active; the introduction to the collection states that due to its activities panels and working groups have participated in several scientific seminars and conferences: women's studies conferences in 2006 and 2007, and the Nordic Youth Research Symposium in 2011. In the spring of 2008 separate girls' studies days *Entäs tytöt* were organised, which also gave a name to this book.

The collection that is meant to be an introductory textbook-anthology for the exploration of girls' culture in Finland comprises nine articles from twelve authors, which summarise the corresponding research and its results in Finland so far. Karoliina Ojanen's introductory article about the history of girls' studies in Finland applies a methodical approach, starting from the explanations of concepts, subject matter and topics as well as different research methodologies. The author maintains that usually girls', children's and young people's position with respect to mainstream culture (i.e., men's and women's culture) tends to be marginal. Research into girls' culture might expose special practices, which emphasise and enlighten the structure and approaches to mainstream culture, and also discloses various interesting elements both in modern culture and history. Ac-

tually the whole book is meant to stress that in this light feminist girls' studies become more and more important.

The remaining eight articles in this collection focus on topics significant in girls' studies from different viewpoints. For instance, Anna Anttila, Karoliina Ojanen, Helena Saarikoski and Senni Timonen's co-authored article "Girls' Stories" summarises, in a way, the former folkloristic researches into girls' culture, highlighting their activities in different situations, spaces and experience worlds. The article presents the results of Leea Virtanen's research on girls' and boys' outdoor games carried out in the 1960s–1970s, Ulla Lipponen's gender-based treatments of children's clapping games from the 1980s–1990s, Anna Anttila's studies of girls' love predictions, Helena Saarikoski's research into girls' fan culture, Karoliina Ojanen's analysis of girls' culture in the context of horse-riding and stables, and so on.

Besides folklorists, the collection presents articles from social scientists, an educator, a literary critic and a historian, who are all dedicated to women's studies. They dwell upon different topics, such as girls and reputation, girls' literature, past treatments of girls, girls' studies from the perspective of their body evaluation, girls and the media, school in girls' studies and other relevant issues. The collection can be highly commended as all the presented treatments here are both comprehensive and concise.

This textbook-like collection inevitably makes you draw parallels with Estonia; yet, things here seem to be somewhat different. Firstly, studies of gender aspect are less popular in Estonia and certainly more recent than those in Finland. Secondly, leaving aside the gender aspect, we have not established such an interdisciplinary network for studying youth culture, which joins researchers from different spheres – it seems that we all potter by ourselves. However, we cannot but admit that something has been done in the field. For instance, sociologists from Tartu University study young people's social networks on the Internet, and the linguists of Tallinn University and folklorists from the Estonian Literary Museum – their language use and narratives. The studies on youth subcultures are led by Airi-Alina Allaste, professor of sociology at Tallinn University. Also, we have a non-profit organisation Estonian Youth Institute established in 2001, which is, however, targeted at young people themselves and which presents on its Internet site (http://www.eni.ee/) various information about researches and projects related to them (employment, education, study opportunities, leisure time, alcohol and drug problems, etc.).

Eda Kalmre

# *THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE:* AN INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS

**Wolfgang Mieder. Proverbs. A Handbook. Westport & Connecticut & London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004 (reprinted 2011). 304 pp.**

Proverbs are in the sphere of interest of the general public as well as scholars specializing in various fields: folklorists, linguists, psychologists and social scientist, to name but a few. Proverbs can be discussed and studied in many ways. Wolfgang Mieder's book *Proverbs. A Handbook* serves as a fairly wide perspective to proverbs in various contexts. The book primarily offers an overview of Anglo-American paremiology. It focuses on the period from the beginning of the 17th century until today. The presented case material is mostly connected to the American continent. The book mainly comprises the author's previous publications and articles beginning from the 1970s. The first mentioned article dates from 1971 and is entitled *'Behold the Proverbs of a People': A Florilegium of Proverbs in Carl Sandburg's Poem Good Morning America,* and was initially published in Southern Folklore Quarterly.

In the introduction the author highlights his motives for writing this book and making a handbook of it. He expresses his gratitude to three earlier scholars and their works: Richard Chenevix Trench (1807–1886) and his book *On the Lessons in Proverbs*, published in 1853; F. Edward Hulme's (1841–1909) *Proverb Lore: Being a Historical Study of the Similarities, Contrasts, Topics, Meaning, and Other Facets of Proverbs, Truisms, and Pithy Sayings, as Explained by the Peoples of Many Lands and Times* (1902), and Archie Taylor's (1890–1973) *The Proverb* from 1934. However, as the author points out, even the newest one of these volumes is 75 years old. After reprinting Taylor's book in 1985, some 50 years after the initial publication, it was the time for "a fresh look at proverbs", as Mieder says. The author himself situates this handbook somewhere between Taylor's scholarly oriented volume and Trench's and Hulme's publications meant for a wider readership. Mieder writes: "My book is intended for the educated general reader with emphasis on Anglo-American proverbs in English-language context."

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As the name implies, the book contains articles focusing on proverbs. The book is divided into four sections, each of which further comprises two or three subsections and several chapters. The first section is titled *Definition and Classification*. This section could be regarded as the most interesting one in this handbook. Those who are familiar with proverbs and paremiology are sure to have some expectations for this chapter with its bibliography. However, it is very difficult to be relatively short and provide an exhaustive account of the phenomenon called 'proverb'. This part of the book deals with the definitions of the proverb. As the author points out very clearly, it is not an easy task to define the proverb. Possibilities for doing this are endless. The second part of the first section deals with various classification systems. This part might have been one of the most difficult ones to write. On the one hand, it has to be clear and simple enough to be meant not only for experts. On the other hand, it ought to be quite informative for students and scholars to get the possibility to go on with paremiological studies. In

each case, the author takes part in the discourse considering the research focusing on proverbs or the research using proverbs as material. It has to be accepted.

The second section is named *Examples and Texts*. The first subsection consists of six case studies by which the author wants to illustrate the ways in which proverbs have been connected with history and actions. The case descriptions are abbreviated and this means that the context information is quite incomplete and the reader has no possibilities to evaluate the studies without going deeper into Mieder's 50 original articles. The author calls the second part "a small florilegium of foreign, American, regional, and ethnic proverbs". For the reader this part of the second section might serve as an enjoyable way to find out about the lives of proverbs – or it might seem to be a slightly nebulous collection and the meaning of this part might seem to be inaccessible. One thing that could have been discussed more is the question of what is regarded as American tradition. Native Americans did not speak English. People as well as languages came or were brought (or sent) here from other continents – Europe, Africa and Asia; the new settlers spoke many languages and represented various cultures as well as subcultures, and brought their own traditions and proverbs with them. "The Anglo-American, English proverb" was created from this background. As the author mentions when introducing the proverb lore of American minorities, it is not easy to decide which groups were the most essential ones. This section represents the two main areas in Mieder's scholarly activities quite well. As the first part of this section shows, he has done a huge number of detailed proverb studies, which have also involved comparative paremiology, connecting folkloristics and linguistics as can be seen later on.

The third section is named *Scholarship and Approaches*. The author draws attention to three categories of paremiology both in the past, present and future. In the first part of this section, the book gives an overview of the existing paremiological journals, essay collections and bibliographies. In the second part the reader learns something about proverb collections and in the third one the 21st century is combined with proverbs and various contexts. The last part includes 12 chapters, each of them focusing on some special features of paremiological research or diverse surroundings, for example paremiological minimum, proverbs as art, proverbs in popular culture and so on.

The fourth section of the book is entitled *Contexts*. As the author focuses on literature and some considerable people's literary works, some other title could have been more informative. The first part includes proverbs connected with literary works, especially with political writings. Two of them date back to the 18th century, two to the 19th century and two are from the 20th century. The proverbs of considerable persons are of primary importance here. Even if this kind of information were interesting, the reader would expect to be guided to some problematic nature of proverbs. The second subsection treats proverbs as messages in various, mainly contemporary contexts.

Actually *Bibliography* is the fifth section. It is the last one but not the least from the reader's point of view. It is hardly all-encompassing but easy to start with. A more comprehensive bibliography of paremiological articles and publications can be be found in another Mieder's double-barrelled publication from 2009, *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

As to the proverb in the title of this review, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree", it is one of those proverbs that is often understood as an authentic American proverb. However, according to Mieder, the proverb has come to America from Germany.

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In *Proverbs. A Handbook* the author underlines the continuities between oral and written modes and connects proverbs of the past, present and future. He sees proverbs as part of culture and, as such, also reflections of all those conceptions, phenomena and visions being valid in society. However, he does not count them as part of the nation's mythical past. Proverbs can be found in today's lifestyle and in urban contexts, for example, in newspaper columns and advertisements; proverbs are also used in graffiti and cartoons. Even if economy, culture and techniques have changed and caused some changes in performance contexts, the tradition is still alive.

Although the book under discussion introduces proverbs in one linguistic and cultural area, all the ideas can be found and the methods applied anywhere. In this way, the book is an interesting source of information not only for Anglo-American English-language orientated scholars. When writing about international proverb collections, the author expresses his respect also for two Estonian paremiological scholars, Arvo Krikmann and Ingrid Sarv when he discusses the national Estonian proverb collection, *Eesti vanasõnad*.

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It is difficult to say with certainty whether Wolfgang Mieder's *Proverb. A Handbook* is an "easy-to-read" and "for-everybody" or a scientific book. Written by one of the best-known authorities on proverbs, the book gives a comprehensive overview of proverbs to students, the general public as well as academic readers. The volume fulfils the needs for a semi-popular handbook of proverbs. The book contains the author's articles written from different research perspectives and sheds light on various aspects of proverbs. For proverb scholars specializing in folkloristics, linguistics and many other disciplines, this handbook is a good one to start with when looking for sources of information. The book is informative and the text is well readable, which makes it very suitable for people interested in proverbs. The book is beneficial also to scholars that do not specialize in paremiology. The book can be recommended to anyone interested in proverbs, no matter in what language the main interest lies.

I hope that the next handbook will be compiled for scholars. It should contain, in addition to concentrating on fascinating proverbs, some more references to the contexts with a complete bibliography. I also hope that Wolfgang Mieder will continue publishing for the general public, as he has a nice and readable writing style and people do love proverbs!

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The author of the *Proverbs. A Handbook*, Wolfgang Mieder, is Professor of German and Folklore at the University of Vermont, USA. Since 1984 he has been the editor of *Proverbium, Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, dedicated to the variety to be found in international research focusing on proverbs. *Proverbium* has become an indispensable tool for today's research as it covers all research areas. The author's home page with the list of his publications is available at http://www.uvm.edu/~grdept/?Page=WolfgangMieder.php.

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