

DEPARTURES AND RETURNS IN THE NORTH

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue of the Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics is compiled on the basis of papers presented at the 3rd International Arctic Workshop of the University of Tartu, titled World Routes.¹ The aim of the workshop, held at the beginning of June 2012, was to bring together presentations that discuss the movement of people, physical objects, identities, ideas or the idea of movement in the context of the Arctic in a way that opens new horizons or initiates exciting discussions.

The Arctic is often seen as an isolated empty area covered with snow. However, the Arctic has been inhabited not just for centuries but for thousands of years. These inhabitants have been in constant movement. The Arctic is a region with huge distances where more or less everything needs to be constantly imported. This means that movement is more significant in the Arctic than in many other regions. The movement of people in different parts of the Arctic is linked with various environmental factors, changes in the economy, political processes, state policies and the movement of ideas, to name but a few. Apart from this, physical movement is often accompanied by identity shifts, the creation of new identities, the consolidation of existing ones or adaptation of new (*sibiriaki* in Siberia). These multiple factors and different modes of movement and identity change have – contrary to human movement in other continents of the world – received little continuous attention from scholars. Moreover, the movement of people in the Arctic is often studied as the movement of two separate groups, native and incomer populations, but we should see it as interconnected on different levels. Moreover, space and movement in the Arctic has found little analysis in a comparative perspective, whether as a comparison between different Arctic regions or with non-Arctic territories. The workshop wished to explore these and other aspects of movement. The main theoretical framework of the workshop was that the movement of people in the Arctic, both past and present, is multi-layered, has a complex background and content, and several initiators. We liked to discuss these different levels and aspects of movement in the Arctic. Herewith we do not limit discussion to one discipline, region, ethnic group or economic form (mode).

Similarly to earlier workshops,² presentation topics appeared to be rather diverse. As the organisers had proposed quite fluid subjects, scholars who gathered at the meeting interpreted the initial task in a variety of ways. This was in accord with the organising team's strategic plan, which was to inspire free academic interpretation of the concept of 'movement in the Arctic'.

In his paper "Coming Back to the Same Places: The Ethnography of Human-Reindeer Relations in the Northern Baikal Region", Vladimir Davydov analyses the results

of his recent fieldwork among Evenk reindeer herders. Davydov challenges earlier Russian ethnographies that approached domestication as a one-time social event and demonstrates that complicated movements of animals and people make this social change ambivalent. Davydov presents a fascinating ethnography of how people try to facilitate reindeer return by feeding reindeer with salt, producing smoke that enables the reindeer to escape insects and binding calves to stakes and poles. On the one hand, animals periodically come back to a camp. On the other hand, reindeer herders know the places to which the animals return outside a camp, helping them to find reindeer. Davydov argues that one cannot claim that reindeer domestication in the northern Baikal is actually finalised but is a relative and on-going process.

Olga Povoroznyuk's article "Belonging to the Land in Tura: Reforms, Migrations, and Identity Politics in Evenkia" aims to explore a different aspect of movement in the Arctic. The author demonstrates how the long-term influence of administrative reform, migration and cultural and identity construction policies have created a diverse pattern of territorial identity in the Evenk territories around Tura town in Central Siberia. Although the state reforms and indigenous policies have framed the indigenous identity construction processes, a sense of "belonging to land" can be distinguished as a major culture-specific factor that shapes vernacular identity narratives and discussions.

Patrik Lantto contributes to the Arctic movement topic with his discussion concerning indigenous land rights. His paper "The Consequences of State Intervention: Forced Relocations and Sámi Rights in Sweden, 1919–2012". Putting his arguments into the framework of international law (the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Lantto explores the way in which forced relocations of Sámi in Sweden have affected the discussion on Sámi rights. The author elaborates on historical analyses of ideas and actions of national and regional authorities and the way the Sámi groups have acted in the long-term conflict that has developed.

A rather different approach to the problem of movement in the North is proposed by Aimar Ventsel in his paper "Sakha Music: Selling 'Exotic' Europeaness in Asia and Asianness in Europe". This article is focussed on various forms of Sakha music and how these different genres match the concepts of Europeaness or Asianness. Ventsel demonstrates how these categories are manipulated to produce success among audience of different natures and from different regions. In this processes, the geographical distance between the artist's origin and the audience plays the primary role by confirming the authenticity of the music. To offer the audience music by labelling it exotic is a strategy that Sakha artists use to market their music and earn income and prestige.

Laur Vallikivi's article "On the Edge of Space and Time: Evangelical Missionaries in the Tundra of Arctic Russia" is dedicated to the discussion of Protestant missionaries' conceptualisation of the coastal areas of the Nenets tundra in the biblical framework. According to Vallikivi, various missions and ideologies (Russian Orthodox, Communists, Evangelicals) have attempted to rearrange the worldview of the indigenous peoples in the North. Although agents of change have been driven by various agendas, from an ideological point of view they appear similar to the natives "in their search for productive edges, constructing 'remote' time-spaces, all these being woven into a major narrative in which the past and present are heroic and the future will be joyful" (p. 113). These utopianists have interpreted the northernmost areas of human habitation as the edge of space and time and concentrated on paying specific attention to efforts of change in these regions.

On his turn, Victor Shnirelman discusses the peculiar way in which some social groups in Russia construct a new national identity. In his article "Hyperborea: The Arctic Myth of Contemporary Russian Radical Nationalists", Shnirelman explores attempts by ethnic Russian nationalists to establish a "pure Russian country", or at least a Russian state in which ethnic Russians hold a privileged position. Shnirelman analyses the main features of the contemporary Russian Aryan myth developed by Russian radical intellectuals. These nationalists deny medieval and modern Russian history, saying instead these were periods of oppression implemented by "aliens". According to radical nationalists, Aryans are identified with the Slavs or Russians and are suffering from alien treachery and misdeeds. This myth is meant to replace former Marxist state ideology and contributes to an escalation of contemporary xenophobia in Russia.

Topics touched upon in this special issue include spatial movement in the taiga, territorial identity claims, forced relocations, the movement of music in the north, biblical motivation of missionary practices, identity changes and the northern dimension of the ideology of national radicals. In a more abstract vein, these themes cover discussions of real movement practices, imaginary geography and the Arctic component of global movement trends. This collective intellectual effort is concerned with interpretation of the ways in which real, imaginary and metaphorical journeys are combined.

Particular movement actions always include the potential to evolve into a more general cognition of environment and an abstract sense of place and space (see Ingold 2011: 147–148). As the aim of our workshop was rather broad and all participants were able to elaborate on the northern movement concept through their own analytical routes and associations, a shared conceptual framework can be detected at the end, at the level of theoretical abstraction. This does not mean that our workshops did not have a distinctive focus. The first workshop was more ethnographically centred, the second concentrated on metaphorical discussions, while the third articulated most distinctively the contradictory nature of practices, ideologies and perceptions of movement in the Arctic. The third workshop also changed the spatial dimension: while earlier meetings focused mainly on Siberia, in the last one several presentations focused on Scandinavia.

Feeling about the Arctic as a source for the production of specific cultural traits is most distinctively expressed in abstract, distant ideological approaches. But as human existence is bound to place to a certain degree (see Ingold 2011: 148–149), it is reasonable to explore specific geographical dimension of culture. As places and areas are huge and connections somehow vague in the Arctic, movement may be a more fruitful concept on which to concentrate (cf. Ingold 2011: 149–153). The nature of movement differs according to whether it is physical movement, conceptual, illusory, or whether it is initiated by an outside force or planned and calculated by the person him- or herself. Several presentations demonstrated that distance and movement often define place and its image. Movement makes abstract theoretical effort intriguing in regard to the Arctic, as space and people can be connected to distinctive traditions, cultures and social groups through specifically peculiar movement patterns. It is rather complicated to reconstruct other people's engagement with their native places and landscapes, as well as movement-related identity because of "the complex feelings of affinity and self-assurance one feels" (Lopez 1986: 255).

Intellectual perception of the North is challenged by cognitive "preconceptions and desire" (Lopez 1986: 257). This puzzle of feelings thoroughly penetrates our scholarly

efforts even if we do not recognise any special excitement while travelling or thinking about the Arctic. Scientists may become used to the North and the initial emotional motivation silenced, although despite this a background of feelings is present in the research. Thinking about movement may be one possible motivation that directs us away from a vague cognitive pattern of the Arctic as a mystic space.

We hope that this collection of papers inspires scholars studying the Arctic or movement-related cultural practices. Although this special issue is paradoxically diverse, presenting a thematic and conceptual plurality of approaches to Arctic movement, a certain unity can be detected in the overall treatment of this theme. This coherence occurs in the cognitive conformity of this multiplicity with cultural reality that does not allow itself to be caught in its actual totality. However, there are certain ways to reflect this unrealisable Arctic dream.

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NOTES

1 The workshop and this paper were supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT).

2 About earlier workshops, see Leete, Ventsel 2011; 2012.

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