

NENETS FOLKLORE IN RUSSIAN: THE MOVEMENT OF CULTURE IN FORMS AND LANGUAGES

KARINA LUKIN

MPh, PhD student

Institute for Cultural Research: Folklore

University of Helsinki

P.O. Box 4, 00014, Finland

e-mail: karina.lukin@helsinki.fi

ABSTRACT

In this methodological article the question of authenticity of folklore material is discussed. The article deals mainly with the research history of Nenets folklore studies and examines critically two of its paradigms, namely the so-called Finno-Ugric paradigm and the Soviet studies. It is argued that in these paradigms there existed biases that prevented the students to study certain kind of folklore material. The biases were related to the language and the form of the material: due to these biases folklore performed not in Nenets and not in forms defined traditional were left outside collections and research. Furthermore, it is shown that Russian speech and narratives embedded in speech are part of Nenets everyday communication and thus also material worth studying and collecting. Instead of the criticised paradigms the Nenets discourse is examined within the notions of communication centered studies that have gained attention since the 1980s.

KEYWORDS: Nenets • authenticity • folklore studies • narrative • discourse

The Kolguev¹ Island lies in the Barents Sea, Northern Russia. Hunters, scientists and priests, visiting the island, have usually described it as an enclosed, isolated place². Its inhabitants have also been characterised as an isolated group of reindeer herders living on their own. The notional isolation was, I must admit, one important factor when I decided which area to choose as a point of departure for my fieldwork in 2000³. When the administration of the Nenets autonomous district (*okrug*) named Kolguev as one possibility to stay in, I was excited. For somehow, it seemed clear, that there should be things more “traditional” and “authentic” in the island if compared to the mainland. My strong assumption was that the language and customs would have survived better in a marginal island.

Combining authenticity and traditions with isolation is not a very original thought. Quite the opposite, it's something that has always been done in ethnography and folklore studies. Moreover, this point of view has been widely deconstructed and criticised in recent debates on the nature of culture or tradition (e.g. Handler, Linnekin 1984; Sahlins 1985). Still the idea of authentic culture waiting for a researcher to find, or save, is very enduring and cunningly positioned in the back of many research practices. In this article, I will look briefly at the ways Soviet folkloristics, and the so-called Finno-Ugric paradigm, have created and still create authentic cultures as their research objects. Finally, I will argue that the material I have collected in the Kolguev Nenets' community – not considered to be authentic by the previously mentioned paradigms – might also still represent something worth studying for a folklore student.

I haven't been the only one to be surprised at the level of russianization – for that is the term used for the change – among the Nenets in the Kolguev Island. All the so-called traditional features of material and immaterial kinds seem to have disappeared. E.g. the peculiar dialect of Kolguev Nenets⁴ is rarely heard in Bugrino; most of the people wear Russian clothes and reindeer fur is only used for boots; even in the tundra the conical tents aren't used anymore and the people live in shabby houses made in the fifties; only a few elders know traditional epic songs but are reluctant to perform them; at first glance religion also *seems* to be totally forgotten, be it paganism or Christianity. All in all, if one did not know that Bugrino is administratively called a “national” village, which means that most of the population is indigenous, one would think Bugrino as a typical post-Soviet Russian village in the periphery of the federation. On the surface level nothing points to the fact that most of the villagers are Nenets.

The way of living has nonetheless changed very fast among the Kolguev Nenets. About a hundred years ago an English biologist, Aubyn Trevor-Battye, visited the island and found the Nenets living in a way, which today would probably be described as traditional. I.e. they moved around the island, herding reindeer, hunting, fishing, living in conical tents, singing the epic songs and worshipping their own gods – and also Russian ones. And as Trevor-Battye writes (reproducing the representation of an isolated group), “The Samoyeds are prisoners on their island” (Trevor-Battye 2004 [1895]: 384). About a hundred years after Trevor-Battye, Vasilij Golovanov, a journalist from Moscow visited Kolguev several times and in his impressive book describes a totally different kind of community living in the village (Golovanov 2002).

What is common between Trevor-Battye and Golovanov is the strong emphasis on the isolation and the so-called island paradigm. Thus Golovanov, leaving Kolguev and his friends, Alik and Tolik, writes:

Alik and Tolik stayed on the Island. The breaking of the circle of time did not succeed; breaking of this circle that had fallen to them, or was an ancestral heritage. Hanging in this they will dwell the Island until the end of time, hunting and collecting the messages in bottles smashing on the shore (Golovanov 2002: 279, my translation – K.L.).

Golovanov's ironic and aware notion of an island and its exotics on the one hand and Trevor-Battye's descriptions of isolated prisoners produce an impression of the culture and the way of life as an “island”. These conceptions have been criticised in ethnography since the beginning of the 1980s. It has been argued that the peripheral and isolated communities only appeared as such in the eyes of Europeans finding new lands. Moreover, it has been discovered that these communities have always been more or less in flux or at least part of some networks of communication and change (cf. Hylland-Eriksen 1993).

Thus, as bound as the Nenets were, and have been, they never were isolated. Even Trevor-Battye's book and also archive materials indicate that the Nenets had constant contacts with the mainland Russians and Nenets – and also Komi reindeer herders. A priest came once a year from Archangel and stayed the warmer summer months performing his religious duties: the first church was brought to Kolguev in 1875 and

the Nenets were desperately demanding a new one after the first one burned down in 1908 (GAAO 29-1T.1 684: 344–348; Kozmin 1926: 762)⁵. The contacts with Russian⁶ merchants were rather intense: Nenets were herding merchants' reindeer, selling them geese, mammals (e.g. Arctic fox and polar bear), and sea mammal meat and pelts for food and supplies from the mainland. Besides the merchants some Pomor hunters also visited the island every summer. The administration of Archangel's government also showed interest towards Kolguev and even the governor himself visited the island, not to mention other officials, teachers and nurses. But also the Nenets themselves, not only Russians, were moving between the island and the mainland (Trevor-Battye 2004 [1895]: 301; 352; GAAO 29-2T.6-684: 12; Kozmin 1926).

All this is very clear in the minds of Kolguev Nenets nowadays: they are aware of their scattered roots and scattered relatives in the mainland. Accordingly it was not a surprise for me, but for Trevor-Battye, when he, on his way back home on the shores of the mainland, met a Samoyed who "seemed strangely familiar" and then was told that "he was a brother of Mark Ardeoff, an old Samoyed whom I had known upon Kolguev Island, who was in many ways an interesting character [---] He informed me that he had been brought away from Kolguev as a boy, had found a wife on the mainland, and had not seen his brother since" (Trevor-Battye 1898: 15). According to my own impression based on Nenets' own accounts, moving between the island and the mainland – e.g. because of marriages or work – has not been uncommon.

So even this marginal island never lived on its own. Clearly there has also been flux going on before Soviet times, although Soviet propaganda wanted to be given credit as the one ultimately "civilizing" the Kolguev Nenets. And of course the pace of the change snowballed in the Soviet times, at least after the Second World War. The forced settlement and the boarding school system were the most effective factors changing many spheres of social and cultural life⁷. The new kinds of settlers were certainly also bringing new kinds of changes: some of the Novaja Zemlja Nenets' households were settled at Kolguev in 1955–57 and Russian and Ukrainian migrants kept moving to "bring civilization" among the Nenets⁸. Many of the Soviet policies based their ideas on an ontological level to such different thoughts, that they clearly contradicted the local ways of thinking and required enormous effort on behalf of the local people. They had to adapt and reshape many reforms so that they could be applied in local conditions. This brought many changes and new principles in everyday life, which had to be negotiated with local officials⁹. As Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov interestingly proves, even if constantly failing, or backfiring, the Soviet policies were implemented and the reforms reformed and the century of perestroika legitimised the state and its practices little by little (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 86–89, 135–137).

All in all, the Soviet policies created a huge space where we can observe very similar ways of acting, thinking, knowing – but people still localizing their belonging to specific places, traditions or structures, as David Anderson has showed (Anderson 2002: 55, 149). The difference in the post-Soviet space is not, although, only a matter of politics of belonging or identity and of different kinds of traditions performed as in Soviet times. The difference still lies in very basic structures of thinking and knowing and interpreting although a comprehensive post-Soviet culture can also be found. Despite the unification efforts some structures always survive and make the difference. The lasting structures are not always the ones the researchers would like to see surviving, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

The study of Nenets' folklore has its roots in 19th century Finland. The texts collected by Matias Aleksanteri Castrén, and later by Toivo Lehtisalo, have the honor of having been the basis for further collection in the Soviet Union and even nowadays in post-Soviet Russia¹⁰. The most esteemed, at least by folklorists, genres have been the epic songs *syudbabts*, *yarabts*, and *khynabts*, which are also the most collected and studied ones (see, e.g., Kuprijanova 1965; Pushkareva 2001; Pushkareva, Homich 2001). Also prose (*vadako*, *lakhanako*, *va'al*) has been widely collected and published. Lately, Elena Pushkareva has also studied prose (Pushkareva 2003). The lyrical individual songs have been studied only recently, although they have been collected only here and there, every now and then¹¹.

As a whole, the study of Nenets' folklore can be seen as a Finnish-Soviet/Russian joint project, as there are not many students from other countries, Hungary being an exception (e.g. Simoncsics 2001 and 2002). Earlier studies offer an enormous body of knowledge to lean on, and both Finnish and Soviet/Russian studies have been of inestimable importance for me. Both of them also have weak points or biases that have directed the study to certain genres, themes and interpretations. I will now have a look at some of these points, especially those that have been "on my way" when collecting or analyzing.

The Finnish studies on Nenets' folklore have their biases which are related to ideas about common Finno-Ugric heritage. The paradigm can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when Finnish nationalism was in the making and the roots of Finnishness researched, or rather found, among speakers of cognate languages. Along the way, common traits have been sought with different methods and theories and among different social and cultural groups. The main argument was (or is) that besides linguistic similarities there are historical and cultural relations between speakers of Finno-Ugric languages, or the so-called Finno-Ugric peoples. These have been studied comparatively which, as Pertti Anttonen has remarked, further consolidated the idea of common heritage. In addition, the Russian traits in Finno-Ugric cultures are thought as borrowings, whereas similarities between Finno-Ugric peoples just relate about family relations. Although among scholars it is nowadays widely accepted that a same language (family) does not denote a same culture, this seems to be forgotten once in a while by the same scholars (Anttonen 2005: 166–169).

I here use the term Finno-Ugric paradigm to refer to Finnish¹² practices of tracing a common heritage for peoples representing very different kinds of cultures, livelihoods, traditions and religious thinking, but speaking cognate languages. Explicitly, there is no such paradigm but one can anyway discover this tradition in the undercurrents of Finnish studies on peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages, even today. It is also very important to note that these assumptions of the Finno-Ugric paradigm are presented by different scholars in different times and research collectives: it is not a unified field of research.

The simple fact, that many of the forefathers of the Finno-Ugric paradigm were linguists, is very important. It meant that an emphasis on the right language and proper kind of language has been stressed. Arno Survo, e.g., has discussed Finnish interpretations about Ingrians, a Finnish-speaking minority in Russia. He concludes that the ones

describing Ingrian culture have forgotten or basically ignored the part of the population, which did not know the authentic folklore or did not acknowledge the problems related to language change. In addition the so-called trivial material – which Survo names as apoeury was ignored until recently (Survo 2001a: 16–19; 74–78; Survo 2001b: 185–188)¹³. These descriptions served and undoubtedly still serve Finnish nationalism and can be met in descriptions of other minorities speaking Finno-Ugric languages.

The political implications of these practices have been discussed quite extensively when related to the study of Karelians and the images constructed of them, and of Karelia, by Finnish intellectuals from the 19th century on. The politics of folklore studies are acknowledged widely in the histories of Finnish folkloristics and among contemporary students. In the most radical moments folklore students were also part of the movement demanding a Greater Finland, an area even beyond the Ural Mountains. Not forgetting these past excesses it is, although, much more important to note other political implications of the past and contemporary Finno-Ugric paradigm (cf. Tarkka 1989)¹⁴. Not only Karelians, but also e.g. Nenets, or Samoyeds were seen as part of Finno-Ugric family – although a little more backward in evolution, if compared to Finns. Castrén often cited notes of Samoyeds being filthy, childish and unbearable, but still part of *our* history serve as an example of the Samoyeds being *'the Other'* for Finns. This is how Castrén describes his feelings when after long journeys among Western Nenets he arrives in Asia and at Obdorsk:

... after arriving at Obdorsk I felt happy and lucky for I was at last in the respected land of Mother Asia; that I was breathing the air that cast the first spark of life in the breasts of our forefathers and still kept alive many of their pitiful brothers. [...] their intellect is chained with chains almost as tight as the ice that ties the spirit of nature in their surrounding fatherland. This chain is the one of brutality, darkness and wildness. There exists though many beautiful and lovable characteristics among these brutal ones and I have sometimes thought that the clean instinct, innocent mind and kindness of these so-called primitive peoples would in many ways put to shame the European kitsch around the wisdom. But during my journeys besides the many things beautiful, good and noble, I have unfortunately discovered so much horrendous and beastly brutality that in the end I love them less than pity. Nevertheless this experience did not diminish the joy, when I at last found myself in the land of my dreams, in the midst of the folk who was the closer or more distant descent of the mother of Kaleva (Castrén 1870: 288, my translation – K.L.)¹⁵.

As unjustifiable it is to summarise so quickly the practices of the Finno-Ugric paradigm, it is also very rude to briefly characterise Soviet folkloristics, which I will do now¹⁶. The "Folklore Studies" in the Soviet Union have not been a unified field of research in any phase. Moreover, the discussions among folklorists shortly after the October revolution seem very lively, fruitful and without prejudice. New genres and new objects were studied, e.g. oral history and autobiography became important objects for collections. The context and the role of performance and the narrator producing the text were also emphasised (Howell 1992: 146–221). It was not until the end of the 1920s or the beginning of 30s that folkloristics was also harnessed to serve Party politics. The 1920s' debates, despite this, left a strong legacy, e.g. the study of worker's lore and oral history which were revisited later in Soviet folkloristics, when the ideological pressures were not so strong (ibid.: 427; Melnikova 2006: 4).

The study of Nenets' folklore in the Soviet Union concentrated on collecting and describing the material gathered. Not surprisingly these studies seem to reflect the general tendencies in Soviet folkloristics. Most of the collecting was done by amateurs¹⁷, who were mainly locals working in the field sometimes alone, sometimes with a professional folklorist. This is one of the reasons, why the material is so poorly available nowadays: individual collectors have archived their notes either at homes or scattered it in the archives of the big cities all over Russia.

Another feature of Soviet folkloristics on the Nenets has been the limited interpretations, which of course relates more about ideological restrictions than about the researchers' abilities to make interpretations (Oinas 1973: 58). The easy way was the historical interpretation that very often was based on Zhirmunskij's ideas about the different socio-economic layers possible of being seen in folklore texts. Thus, the *syudbabs* are said to represent and tell about an earlier stage of the "patriarchal-family structure" than the *yarabts*. Elena Pushkareva has noted that the so-called *khynabts*, also epic songs, can be interpreted to represent a still later phase in the life of the Nenets and thus informing about quite recent stages of their history (Kuprijanova 1965: 55; Pushkareva 2000. See also Vasil'ev 1984). Pushkareva's study was already published ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus we can see that the Soviet studies have naturally their legacies in recent Russian studies. It must still be noted that researchers have been active in searching for new directions and Pushkareva has a few years ago completed her motive index of Nenets' tales in accordance to Aarne-Thompson (Pushkareva 1994; 2003)¹⁸. This of course represents an opposite view on the life of folklore – the one of borrowing (not polygenesis), which was basically banned in Soviet years (Oinas 1973: 57).

The two unexpressed assumptions behind the Soviet/ Russian folkloristics on Nenets have been first, that the Nenets' folklore is always performed in (Tundra) Nenets. I have seen no material that would include performances in Russian. Folklore is usually collected among the so-called good tradition bearers who are well known in their community for their performances and who are themselves interested in preserving the traditional¹⁹. Another hidden assumption lies in the first pages of Lehtisalo's collection on Nenets' folklore, in the table of contents. Lehtisalo has arranged his material intuitively, not following his own or his informants' genre systems. Still, Lehtisalo's table has been taken as a description of genre system on the basis of which Soviet studies were made. Categories have been merged and criticised, but very rarely new ones have been suggested (Kuprijanova 1965: 12).

One new genre, the so-called narratives of contemporary life, has appeared, but it clearly represents something marginal and is not studied at all²⁰. Obviously, this kind of speech has existed, but the marginal space given to them in descriptions and collections indicates that they have been constructed in the field with the "collaboration" of the collector and informant. It also indicates that they are not *really* thought of as folklore, but mentioned as it was demanded²¹.

Thus, Nenets' folklore studies have been emphasised in old and archaic (epic) genres and performances only in Nenets. The demand for authentic form is reflected, e.g. in the way lyrical individual songs are still treated nowadays. After having described their poetic features Elena Pushkareva doubts, whether the songs represent folklore at all, or are they just "facts of individual artistry" because "the author is permanent in

the process of performance" (Pushkareva 2001: 33–39). Working from another point of view I have also collected another kind of material if compared to Castrén's, Lehtisalo's or Soviet/ Russian scholars'. Instead of searching for the traditional form of Nenets' folklore I have tried to piece together the life and speech in Bugrino more holistically. As the places, and the complex connected to the perception of landscape, became a focus of my attention, the material has gathered around this theme, not around Tundra Nenets' language or any particular kinds of speech acts. My questions are thus not related to the right kind of material as such, but rather to the possibilities of folkloristic analysis.

THE MOUNTAIN WITH SEVEN PEAKS

As an example of my material I represent a conversation between an approximately 35 year old son and his father and mother who both are in their sixties. Besides myself there were also other family members taking part in the communicative event (Briggs 1986: 44–58). We were eating, drinking and chatting around the kitchen table after the helicopter had arrived at Bugrino. A helicopter from Nar'jan-Mar flies to the village every other or third week with visitors, islanders, post and everything possible, advertised in the local magazine. This postal day (*pochtovyj den'*) is always an occasion to gather around a table and have a chat with family and friends. It is not only because of fresh groceries, but mainly because of new faces and information, e.g. gossip from the city community, that are consumed. Usually *hynts*²² are also sung in these occasions. For me the postal days have been invaluablely important moments to hear narratives and make notes of them. This conversation was engaged in Russian and all the family members joined recalling places of the island and their journeys in the tundra.

Son: And there is also another place, *Si'iv ngèva*. It means with seven peaks. There is a grave of a shaman in there and the whole place is bewitched. No matter if you believe or don't, but when you go by the place you will stay there unless you throw some cigarette. Who was the one caught there? Was it Aleksandrov? He went by the place and suddenly a thick fog came and he did not find [out], [got] lost. Went round the mountains and thought where he was, but then a fog came again.

Father: Maybe he did not have cigarette?

Son: No, no, he just did not get it first. When he threw a cigarette, the fog cleared right away and he returned to the village. And also we, when we were little, were lost in that place. We did not smoke and we walked around and realised that we returned to the same place. The fog was very thick. We walked again onwards and again we were in that same place. And a third time we tried to get out of the fog, walked, walked, but again we were in the same place. Well, we did not smoke at all, we were still young. But then I smoked some and threw it there and suddenly we found our way out of the mountains

Mother: We have here that kind of places. There are shamans buried and the places are bewitched. All the powerful shamans here are buried in the mountain *Paarkov*, but there are shamans' graves all over the tundra (Fieldwork materials 2004).

One can find two narratives which can be classified as *memorates* and an explicit *metacomment* of the narratives in this excerpt. The first narrative seems to be a summary

of a memorate heard before, but it begins with some contextual information about the Mountain with seven peaks. The first narrative, functioning as an orientating abstract leads to another one, which describes an experience of the teller himself with his sisters. The mother, who has always been most concerned about me understanding the meaning of the speech, then explains to me some important moments of shamans' graves in general. This is a metacomment which can be analytically separated from the narrative, but nevertheless is an organic part of the narrative in the communicative event in question. The mentioning of Paarkov led eventually to narratives about events there and thus the narratives can be seen constituting sequences²³.

Representing this kind of speech as an example I am not suggesting that my material would be more authentic or free of biases unlike Soviet or Finno-Ugric studies on the Nenets. Quite on the contrary, I see my material to be gathered in a process where I have negotiated with Kolguev islanders, what kind of speech I would be interested in. In the fieldwork I have mapped both the ways of speaking and the contents of speech. A common interest towards the island, its places and histories is a product of the mappings and negotiations.

The process of communicating what kind of material is suitable for me has been a long one. It began when I tried to speak to some young Nenets students in St. Petersburg, and then to the representatives of the Nenets intelligentsia in Nar'jan-Mar, that I wanted to study Nenets' culture and everyday life. Not wanting to live in the tundra with herders – and thus being an anomaly among the ones studying Nenets – I was sent to Kolguev Island as the city intelligentsia, as well as myself, thought that an isolated island would serve as proper basis of material for an ethnographer. My first trip to Bugrino was somewhat hard as everyone recommended to me the same persons to visit. These persons sometimes literally ran away from me, as they did not want to perform folklore. In their experience, folklore performances were all that the outsiders, especially ethnographers and folklorists, wanted to hear and see. Little by little I was able to make clear what I wanted – mainly by denying my interest in folklore – and some kind of idea of what to do with me had been constructed in Bugrino. Still, my sometimes passive role, i.e. not moving around with a microphone and a mass of questions all the time, was a source of amazement.

My role in producing the material was not so passive and innocent as it would seem to be. I was not only the one to whom the narratives are told and explained thus being a big part of the process of evoking the performances. I was also the one selecting the speech events, speakers and utterances I wrote down, published and represented as examples. I also *entextualised* the speech as narratives and commented on them with folkloristic terminology thus being the ultimate authority to interpret the speech (Briggs 1993). I'd suggest that my emphasis on everyday speech and narratives within discourse would though lead to a new representation on Nenets' folklore in general. It was not anymore about ephemeral tradition and vanishing people, but of a speech community with their ways of communicating and constituting their lives meaningful.

HARDSHIP WITH LANGUAGE AND FORM

From the point of view of the above mentioned paradigms my material would not be folklore or a proper kind of object for folkloristic analysis at all. The texts would have two unsolvable problems: the one of the language, the other of the form. They are not performed in traditional language of the Nenets' tradition and their form is unlikely to evoke any feelings of heritage, i.e. they wouldn't find their place in a book about genres of Nenets' folklore. My material consists mostly of narratives told in Russian, in every-day and in interview situations. Some of them are fixed in nature but never demarcated as performance as the epic songs, for example, are. I have been trying to collect same kind of stories also in Nenets, but my informants simply avoided speaking Nenets when I was around. This is due to my poor knowledge of the language: the Nenets have anyway the feeling of "in vain trying to tell me", so they don't want to confuse me anymore with the language.

As already mentioned, it has been a relief for many that I am not forcing them to perform folklore or Tundra Nenets. Russian has never been a problem. Quite the contrary, as someone has tried to tell me a fairy-tale in Nenets, it has soon come to an end because of the arbitrariness of the situation. Communication has to be effective, and speaking Nenets to a Finn not knowing the language very well, would make the situation awkward. The narratives are anyhow told in Russian also for Nenets listeners. So the demand for Nenets clearly is a demand made by researchers and also by the intelligentsia. It is a matter-of-course that changing the language changes the folklore. The Russian narratives are not anymore the same ones as the narratives previously told in Nenets, although their content – in some sense – might be the same. But the context is also very different every time when the narrative is performed. A different language does not prevent the Nenets from communicating their life and culture and try to bring out some meanings and interpretations.

It is not though only my poor knowledge of Nenets that has led myself and Kolguev islanders to "Russianise" the material. One must also remember that the language change has already been going on for decades in Kolguev. The superior status of Russian was for a long time some kind of taboo in Soviet sociolinguistics. According to Nikolai Vakhtin, although the shift was clearly perceivable in the Russian North already in the 1960s the researchers kept turning the situation another way around:

"There is no observable language change or shift, rather a development of symbiosis of native and Russian languages. They are serving in different situations and there is no conflict, battle or displacement of one by another. Moreover, there exists a friendly assistance and brotherly living together between the languages" (Avrorin 1975: 237, cited in Vakhtin 2001: 98, my translation – K.L.).

The scale of the use of Russian was not acknowledged until the 1980s and the end of the decade was colored by an awakening to the problem of the change that had already happened, among other severe problems in the North (Vakhtin 2001: 160).

Tundra Nenets is the biggest of the languages of the so-called small nations of the Russian North. Moreover it has served as a *lingua franca* among the ethnic groups in North-Western Siberia even until the revolution. In 1989 almost 80% of the Nenets named Tundra/Forest Nenets²⁴ as their mother tongue. In addition, the amount of

Nenets has increased since the 1989 census from about 34,000 to approximately 41,000 in 2002 (Perepis' 2002). The overall situation doesn't tell very much, which is clearly demonstrated also by Vakhtin, though not in relation to Nenets. When comparing e.g. Nenets and Jamal Nenets' districts, the difference in language use is huge: some 32% of the Nenets living in the Nenets' district claim to know (Tundra) Nenets, whereas in the Jamal Nenets' district the figure is 85% (Salminen 1998: 517–518; Perepis' 2002). If in Siberia the children might still learn Nenets as their first language this is a rarity in most parts of the Nenets autonomous okrug. At schools, Nenets is only a subject taught twice a week, an elective one from 5th grade along with English.

At least in my experience, it is clear that Russian is the language of everyday communication and Nenets is used only by elders or in performance situations by the intelligentsia²⁶. The tendency to use Russian is very strong although everyone, in a given communicative event, would be fluent in Nenets. Nenets is said to be purposeless. This situation seems to connect more generally the villages of the Russian North (Vakhtin 2001: 117; 186). At the local level, some are worried about the situation, others are not. The language is thought to carry some important moments of being a Nenets, on the one hand. But on the other, the language is not any more the factor defining one's ethnicity in Kolguev – some other aspects are: e.g. reindeer herding has symbolic value, but also family lines, ways of speaking and the practice of eating raw reindeer meat with blood are considered defining moments of Nenets' ethnicity.

Needless to say, Tundra Nenets does carry at least some moments not possible to communicate in Russian. It would be impossible to sing epic songs in Russian, e.g., and their performances are nowadays really rare. Translating Nenets' narratives in Russian, just like so, would not produce the same narratives, but new ones. Some of my informants have done it when trying to communicate the way of living in the tundra. The "interpretation performance" seems to get interrupted every now and then as the teller must not only translate words, but utterances and meanings and even contexts related to them²⁷. This has led more than once to a frustrated snort: "Oh no, haven't I told you already about it? Well, remind me of telling you how it is." The stories seem to extend word by word, as the teller realizes how inexperienced I am in their world and culture. For some it has been a great possibility to try to communicate everything, for others an exasperating experience of not being able to (cf. Cruikshank 1998: 46; Huuskonen 2004: 67).

As these interrupted narrative performances could, with regard only to form (but not to language) represent "proper folklore", some of the texts I have collected represent merely apoetry in Survo's terms, i.e. speech acts not performed, but discussed or spoken in everyday life. Predefining this speech outside my folkloristic study would leave a huge area of communication and experience outside the interpretation. Besides, this kind of material forms the bulk of my notes. Despite the notional apoetic features of my notes one can find also patterns in them. The speech is formed around "the magnetic effect of discourse," i.e. also everyday speech is organized according to certain cultural discourse patterns (Urban 1996: 63, 97).

TO CONCLUDE

The authentic forms and languages of folklore or tradition have been largely dealt with in Western folklore studies recently and the questions or demands for them often tend to rise when we are dealing with current issues of indigenous politics²⁸. However, these concepts have not been problematized in Russian or Soviet folkloristics as widely as in the West. Also, in the Finno-Ugric paradigm, these concepts continue their existence and almost no reflexive interpretation of the practices is done. This can be perceived in several ways; the most clear being the practice of documenting certain kinds of phenomena and ignoring others. Examples were given already earlier in relation to Nenets' folklore studies: the old and archaic epic songs have been studied the most, whereas prose and texts in Russian have been left outside the studies.

The question of authenticity has been one of the basic questions for many folkloristic scholarly traditions around the world. Concentrating on both German and US folklore paradigms, Regina Bendix shows how defining a proper, i.e. authentic material for folklore studies has been crucial in the development of the subject (Bendix 1997). The emphasis on the right kind of material has led also to some *metadiscursive* practices when representing material in cultural studies in general. Tracing the *metadiscursive* practices of the Grimms, Charles Briggs illustrates how the brothers actually made the collected tales "more authentic" than they were in actual speech situations. The scholars tend to think of having a better understanding of the authentic nature of folklore and when representing it, they think they also serve informants by bringing out the tales in a correct way (Briggs 1993, especially pp. 395–397).

Nikolai Vakhtin describes the more than one hundred years of anxiety, about the death of Northern languages, as a paradox. After all these years, most of the languages are still spoken. Rather than a paradox, I think this should be seen as a textual practice and convention of researchers who thus legitimize their work, or even represent the students as cultural heroes saving something that soon would be otherwise lost. It is almost as if the best student is the one who can produce most melancholy for the readers, as the culture described is in such a devastating state. The cultures are to be saved, their representatives to be helped as they are so weak themselves (Clifford 1986: 112–116).

In this regard, Soviet practices have been clear: ethnography was a historical science and the ethnographies usually had the closing definer "until the beginning of the 20th century" denoting to the inexistence of the phenomena described at present. The existence of traditional form like folklore was always a difficult question and led to different solutions²⁹. For Finns the "Finno-Ugric cousins" in Russia have always represented a history, tradition to be saved or peoples to be helped. They are clearly "our own" Others, somehow like us, but under a constant threat of Russianization and total loss. Not denying this, I would still argue – along the lines of Clifford – that e.g. the Nenets are not to be studied only through traditional forms of folklore and Tundra Nenets' language. Doing this would be a colonial act keeping the authority among outside researchers.

To sum up, there are two problems with the opinions that maintain that Russian narratives or speech would not be folklore of the Nenets or suitable for folkloristic analysis. One is the view that the change of the language would remove the indigenous culture from the texts; another is the supposition that the texts performed are always the same.

I began my article by representations of Kolguev as isolated and enclosed and noticed that these were just notional ideas as the people have been moving around the Northern Russia with new families coming and old ones going out of the island. In the same way, the narratives keep moving from man to man, place to place and situation to situation – even language to language.

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NOTES

1 The Russian words are transliterated according to the so-called scientific transliteration system exception for names that already have a customary transliteration.

2 Of the 435 people living in Kolguev approximately 400 are Nenets. The Kolguev Nenets community though is somewhat bigger, as some of the Kolguev islanders live in the mainland, mainly in the city of Nar'jan-Mar.

3 After the first field trip I have also conducted fieldwork among Kolguev islanders in 2003 (two weeks), 2004 (three months), and 2005 (one month).

4 Tundra Nenets is a Uralic language and the biggest of the languages of the so-called Samoyedic branch. The Kolguev dialect represents the Western dialects. See e.g. Salminen 1998.

5 Still interestingly, when a little shrine was built for Russian oil and gas workers on the Eastern parts of the island a couple of years ago it was considered to be the first sanctuary in Kolguev ever (see Zaseckaja 2003).

6 Although also so-called Pomors made hunting trips to Kolguev, the Nenets traded with more Eastern Russians living in the in the Pechora region. Some scholars consider these Russians also to be Pomors, but I prefer a more narrow sense of the term, i.e. referring only to Russians living in the surroundings of the White Sea and Northern coast of the Kola Peninsula (cf. Bernshtam 1978: 75–80; Jasinski, Ovsjannikov 1998: 356).

7 See Bloch 2004: 89–111 for a discussion on boarding schools and change.

8 The history of Russia and especially the Soviet Union can be written as a history of migrations. However, these migrants often were left alone to settle and they have not been studied much. A pleasant exception being recently published *Moving in the USSR* (2005).

9 See Stammler (2005) for detailed description of Jamal Nenets' reinterpretations, which are considered creative and successful.

10 Toivo Lehtisalo has edited Castrén's collections and his own (Castrén, Lehtisalo 1940; Lehtisalo 1947).

11 Homich (2001: 19) mentions that Zoja Ivanovna Palchina concentrated mainly on collecting improvisational songs, i.e. the individual songs (see also Niemi, Lapsui 2004).

12 Obviously these kinds of paradigms can be found also in Estonia (cf. Kuutma 2005), Hungary and Russia at least among researchers of Finno-Ugric origin, but I am here concentrating only on Finnish practices. See also Leete 2000 for a comprehensive view on ways of describing Nenets, Khanty and Mansi.

13 Andreas Kalkun and Ergo-Hart Västriik discussed the topic related to Seto and Votian collections in ISFNR 2005 sessions (Kalkun 2005; Västriik 2005).

14 Tarkka importantly notes that the Finnish rhetoric of Karelia can be compared to the colonial one as it in the same way produces 'the Other', that is subordinated with the eulogies. These practices already existed before the geopolitical questions.

15 It is important to note that Castrén's texts also produce this ambiguous image about Finns. He e.g. compares Finns and Samoyeds (Castrén 1870: 237). Thus, the question is not only about 'Others' by ethnicity but also by social class (see also Lähtenmäki 2004: 222–224).

16 Probably faster than anywhere else, the strong political implications of Finnish cultural studies were noticed in Soviet Union. In 1931 Pal'vadre wrote in *Sovetskaya ètnografija* that the aim of Finnish ethnography is to "prove scientifically the unity of the Finno-Ugric peoples, creating the scientific preconditions for their unification by this to serve the idea of the Great Finland". (Cited and translated in Howell 1992: 368.) Interestingly enough, same kinds of accusations have been made only recently, although not in scientific publications. See RG.

17 A guide was made specifically for collectors of Nenets' folklore. Unfortunately, it is not available in Finland (Shcherbakova, Saper 1947).

18 Reading Toivo Lehtisalo's notes on Nenets folklore it is clear that he was also planning to make such an index. And indeed, Aulis J. Joki claims that Lehtisalo had already a draft version of the index, which was never published due to self criticism (SUS: Lehtisalo; Joki 1963: 380–381).

19 This is in no way only a Soviet/Russian practice.

20 The existence of the genre in collecting work and then studies representing Nenets' folklore can be seen as a legacy of the 1920s when speech about revolution, Civil War and new socialist life as well as autobiographies was collected (Howell 1992: 276–293).

21 About the demand for collaboration, see Howell (1992: 397–406).

22 The Kolguev Nenets use the term *hynts* (a generic term for a Nenets' song) for all their songs. They don't make a difference between epic and lyric songs, for example. I have recorded these songs only in special situations organised for me, not in their "natural" communicative context.

23 See e.g. Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996 for a discussion on narrative within discourse.

24 The statistics on the so-called Samoyed peoples are not very reliable, as the category of Nenets, e.g. has in different times included different groups of people. The group having suffered most of this is the Enets. See Siegl (2005) for refined discussion on the subject. Also the small group of speakers of Forest Nenets has always been included under the general category of Nenets. This not only makes the statistics an unreliable source but also tells how unsteady and bound in time the ethnic categories are.

25 The figure denotes to command in general. Thus, the figure is not comparable to 1989 figures (45% for Nenets and 94% for Jamal Nenets' district) which denote to first language speakers.

26 By *intelligentsia* I refer to a group of usually well educated members of the Nenets' community taking actively part in public discussions either through their work, art or writings.

27 Assuming that the stories are easily interpretable would be assuming a referential transparency (see Haviland 2003: 767).

28 I have dealt with this briefly elsewhere (see Lukin 2005).

29 See Howell 1992: 303–352 for discussions e.g. on folkloristics between literary science and ethnography.