RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND NENETS *BRICOLAGE*:

MAKING MODERNITY IN THE POLAR URAL TUNDRA

TATIANA A. VAGRAMENKO

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by:

Dr Patty A. Gray

NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Department of Anthropology

Head of the Department Dr Mark Maguire

February 2014

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of post-Soviet Evangelical conversion among the Nenets people living in the Polar Ural tundra.

In the post-Soviet period new opportunities have been created for cross-cultural interaction, revealing a global religious market place and opening up Siberia to an 'army' of missionaries from different countries, making the Polar Urals a 'battlefield' of competitive missionary principles and life strategies. The Nenets people turned out to be open to religious change, and during the 1990s and 2000s many Nenets, both nomadic and settled, were converted into various types of Protestant Christianity. Moreover, on the emerging religious spectrum the most conservative form of Baptism, claiming from adherents the most rigorous alienation from their pre-converted past and social surroundings, appeared to be most authoritative in the region and the most successful in regard to its missionary initiatives among the rural Nenets.This appeared unexpectedly, given that Siberian Nenets are usually represented both in public discourse and ethnographic research as a stronghold of 'traditional culture', who have successfully resisted 'the coming modernity'.

Based on ethnographic research of a Nenets religious community in the remote village of Beloyarsk and the surrounding tundra, this study seeks to develop an understanding of conversion as a part of wider process of indigenous peoples' engagement with global society and what they call 'modernity' and 'modern life'. The main argument of the dissertation is that conversion experience develops into a *Nenets bricolage*, which appropriates and recycles practices, values and concepts of both Protestant culture and Nenets 'tradition'in the construction of Nenets 'ritualized resistance' and in the elaboration of their own shape of modernity.The dissertationargues that, as a native response, the converts transform new religious practices into a strategy of empowerment, as a new foundation for Nenets authenticity, as a return to the true Nenets 'traditional lifeway'.

To my father Alim Vagramenko,

my mother Nadezhda Vagramenko,

and my son Feodor.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

Within the text two types of foreign lexica are used: Russian and Nenets. Russian and Nenets words are indicated in *italic*, and Nenets words additionally are indicated by (N.). The Library of Congress transliteration system of Cyrillic script is used with the following exception, as modified by David G. Anderson (2000): the iotised vowels (Я, Е, Ю) when they appear at the beginning of words are transliterated as Ya, Ye, Yu respectively.

Soft signs (ь) from the Russian language are recognized with one apostrophe, hard signs (ъ) – with two apostrophes.

A Nenets nasal consonant *Ӈ/ӈ* is indicated as *Ŋ/ŋ*. Nenets *taser'* (guttural fricative sound) is indicated by one apostrophe (for example: *mania'*; *si'iv*).

The ethnonym for the Nenets (Rus.: *Nentsy* (pl), *Nenets* (sing); Nen.: *Nenei nenets'*) is used both as plural (for people) and single (for a person), as well as the adjectival form (Nenets culture).

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CHAPTER ONE

THE RELENTLESS RETURN OF CONVERSION

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*
>
> Acts 1:8

This study is grounded in the field of anthropology of Christianity and elaborates on the phenomenon of Protestant conversion among the rural Polar Ural Nenets (*Priural'skieNentsy*). The research is based on my fieldwork among the Nenets in the Arctic village of Beloyarsk and surrounding tundra. The village is located in the Priural'skii district of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO), in the tundra of the eastern foothills of the Polar Ural Mountains, North-Western Siberia, Russia.

The Nenets people are popularly viewed as strongholds of 'native traditional culture', successfully resisting outside influences. Against the background of a general post-Soviet decrease in indigenous traditional economy, the Nenets provide the most striking example of flourishing nomadism. They reveal one of the highest levels of engagement in nomadic lifestyle and subsistence economy (reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting), of native language competence and finally of preserving 'traditional religious practices'.

However, since the post-Soviet period, the territories of the Polar Ural tundra have become a zone of intensive international Evangelical missionary activities and frequent cases of conversion into Protestant Christianity among nomadic and sedentary native people. And while 'traditional' Nenets customs and beliefs, sacred sites and ritual practices were being promoted on a public level as a foundation of Nenets survival, the rural Nenets often eagerly embraced the Christian Evangelical missionary message, challenging commonsense perspectives of the resilience of Nenets traditional culture.

Beloyarsk village has become a significant frontier site in terms of cross-cultural encounters between native people and missionaries. Located a relatively short distance from urban centres (Salekhard, Labytnangi, and Vorkuta), Beloyarsk is, at the same time, the gateway to the tundra, with numerous nomadic and semi-nomadic native populations living near the village and frequently visiting this sedentary space. Hence, it

attracted numerous missionaries from all over the world, which made the area a 'battlefield' of different missionary principles and strategies.

Since the late 1990s, the village became a base for different Evangelical missions, the platform upon which different conversion principles, social attitudes and life strategies were being elaborated. And the religious landscape of Beloyarsk and the Polar Ural tundra has undergone a series of rearrangements. A number of missionary 'crusades' were followed by conversions and re-conversions, mostly among the native population of the village and the tundra. A key concern of the research is a group of Nenets (both settled in Beloyarsk and living as nomads in the surrounding tundra) who initially established the first religious community based in Beloyarsk and followed a complicated pathway of re-conversions.

Beloyarsk also turned out to be at the epicentre of many scandals associated with Protestant missionary initiatives and became a place of heated conflicts between missionaries, converted and non-converted natives and local authorities. New religious experience triggered numerous tensions and conflicts within the local society, mostly because the first native converts often rigorously denied some patterns of what they usually called 'traditional Nenets culture': they burned native sacred articles and breached numerous nomadic ritual and everyday regulations, regarded by new Christians as 'heathen'.

In 2006 when I first arrived in Yamal I was surprised by the level of agitation – in public discourse and everyday life – concerning the issue of religious conversion in the tundra. Everyone discussed the appearance of 'sects'. From everywhere I could hear stories about wandering missionaries who burned Nenets 'idols' and destroyed Nenets culture, about Nenets converts who had given up their ancestors' gods, violated tundra traditions and hence would soon die in poverty being punished by gods or people. The village authorities were alerted to visiting missionaries and local militia (police) carefully watched the activities of newly established religious communities. There was gossip about weird sectarian meetings in homes, about tundra Nenets children in residential schools who gathered in bathrooms to pray and read the Bible. Others talked about conflicts in the tundra and about newly converted Nenets who sacrilegiously violated tundra traditions and burned Nenets 'idols'.

What was even more challenging was that on the emerging religious spectrum the most conservative form of Protestant Christianity – the Baptist Brotherhood – claiming from its adherents the most rigorous alienation from their pre-converted past and social surroundings, appeared to be most authoritative in the Polar Urals and some parts of

Yamal peninsula and the most successful in regard to its missionary initiatives amongst rural Nenets.

The aim of this dissertation is to answer the primary question: why do those brave defenders of their 'traditional knowledge' so eagerly embrace Evangelical missionary initiatives nowadays? Why do the Nenets opt for one of the religions on the market over another, choosing as a result the most fundamentalist Baptist movement, which claims the most radical changes over the convert's life? The dissertation also aims to explore how, through conversion experience and daily encounters with the missionaries, in a local context where anti-conversion activism and anti-sectarian discourse are prevalent, Nenets negotiate their indigenous identities, 'native tradition' and 'culture', and what response they elaborate in the situation of broken authenticity and cultural continuity.

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1.1   CONVERSION SAGA: THE STORY OF BELOYARSK COMMUNITY

> *Obdorsk is located on the edge of the world; seven versts further hell already begins.*
>
> An old saying

A Russian 'Pop'

The story begins as far back as 1998, when an Orthodox priest from Tobol'sk city arrived for a few days' visit to Beloyarsk. At the local House of Culture he undertook an all-night service and the next morning baptized some people. Some Nenets were also attracted by a visiting Russian '*pop*' (vernacular name for an Orthodox priest). 'He wasn't saying anything', says a Nenets woman about her first conversion experience, 'but singing some songs, Orthodox ones, and reading the Bible in a strange language, in Slavonic perhaps or I don't know. He was remitting sins [*otpuskal grekhi*], and then baptizing everybody one after another in a basin [*v tazike*], and selling crucifixes. Then people were given birth certificates [meaning baptism certificates]'. Some Nenets said that by that time they were more interested in getting metal crosses for free, which they regarded as adornments, while others were buying Orthodox icons, which historically were a crucial part of Nenets ritual practices, alongside traditional ritual images, vernacularly called 'idols'.

Plate 1.6. An Orthodox priest baptizing native children in the Polar Ural tundra.
Photo by Sergei Anisimov.

The next year, in Spring 1999, everybody was talking about a new '*pop*' who had arrived in Beloyarsk and who healed people. Nadia, a Nenets tundra woman from the Baidarata tundra, at that time briefly visiting Beloyarsk, decided to visit the '*pop*'. She had been recently widowed, bringing up many children alone, and her six-year old son was seriously ill with cerebral palsy. When she heard about a '*pop*' that healed, she took her son and secretly went to his prayer meeting. She was surprised when instead of a bearded man dressed in frock she met a young man in his early twenties, dressed in jeans. It was a Charismatic missionary from Novyi Urengoi (an industrial city in Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug). He was preaching and reading the Bible, telling about God and the healing power of prayer. The next day Nadia came again, this time with her sister Marina, whom she was hoping to save from drinking. Over the next three months, they and several of Nadia's children visited prayer meetings every day. The evangelizing work appeared to be successful and in August 1999 the missionary baptized some fifty people in the local river Yunga – new members of the independent Charismatic Church '*Novyi Svet*' (New Light), based in Novyi Urengoi and Salekhard. Among the newly converted were Nadia and her family. After the missionary had left the community continued to gather, praying, reading the Bible, and speaking in tongues (the Pentecostal practice of glossolalia).

The next summer, a boat with new missionaries arrived. This time it was the Church of Evangelical Christians '*Blagaia Vest*'' from Salekhard, recently separated from the

Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and correspondingly discarding the term 'Baptist' from its title. Liberal, young and enthusiastic, the mission-church aimed its missionary zeal purposefully towards the indigenous population in the sedentary and tundra space, and Beloyarsk was among their primary targets. Their evangelization was public and visible: missionaries held concerts in a local sports hall, organized Christian camps, and distributed humanitarian aid. After the first concert, a few Nenets came up to the missionaries, proudly saying that they were believers too, waiting for new missionaries for a long time. This was Nadia and her relatives.

The arrival of new missionaries to Beloyarsk caused tensions between the two churches – Charismatic and Evangelical – and eventually led to a split in the Beloyarsk religious community. Nadia describes that period in the following way:

> When all these Charismatics and Pentecostals, and these Baptists arrived, one pulled us over to their side, the other pulled us over to their side. And we were like these [Holy Spirit] tongues – we were between heaven and earth. Cannot rise, nor go down. So we dangled [*boltalis'*] like that. We didn't know who and what to believe in.

Plate 1.7 Christening in Ob' River.
Photo from the archive of the Evangelical church *Blagaia Vest'*, Salekhard.

After religious rearrangements, accompanied by a series of tensions, the majority of the newly converted changed their religious affiliation and joined the Evangelical church. It was the only Protestant community that throughout the Beloyarsk conversion saga had been officially registered (in 2002) under the name 'religious organization "*Zhivaia voda*" (Living Water), as a branch of the Salekhard Evangelical church

'*Blagaia Vest*''. The Evangelical group leader (though not ordained as a minister) was Arkadii – a man in his early thirties, originally from Ukraine, who arrived some years before in Yamal as a migrant worker and then married a local Nenets woman. He had been converted a year before his arrival to Beloyarsk and therefore did not seem to be an experienced religious leader with unquestioned authority. The prayer meetings took place in an apartment owned by a Nenets nomadic family, who frequently visited the village.

The Brotherhood

This was not the end of the conversion saga, and in 2006 new religious rearrangements triggered new tensions, conflicts and debates in the community of the converted. This time agitation came with the arrival of new missionaries calling themselves the Baptist Brotherhood, officially named the International Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (ICCECB) – *Mezhdunarodnyi Soiuz TSerkvei Evangel'skikh Khristian Baptistov.* It was an unregistered religious organization known as one of the most conservative and nonconformist religious movements in Russia.

The Brotherhood missionaries arrived in quite an unusual way – not from Salekhard or other northern towns, but from the tundra itself. The church targeted its missionary work precisely among the tundra population, and before its first arrival in Beloyarsk village, the mission-church had already established a religious community on the European side of the Polar Ural tundra amongst Nenets herdsmen (see Vallikivi 2001; 2012). The Brotherhood missionary base was located in Vorkuta city (Komi Republic), yet its main missionary zeal was aimed toward establishing religious communities throughout the Bol'shezemel'skaia (European Far North, Nenets Autonomous Okrug), the Polar Ural, and the Yamal tundra regions amongst Nenets herdsmen. Thereby, while traveling in the tundra, missionaries found out about traditional migration routes across the Urals, from the European to the Siberian side. Using these routes they arrived to the Siberian part of the Polar Ural tundra – Baidarata tundra (the Priural'skii district of Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug). And one of the first groups they met there was the campsite of Nadia's sister – Sveta. Her 18-year-old daughter Evdokiia soon became the first guide for newly arrived missionaries in the Baidarata tundra. In this way, Brotherhood missionaries were introduced to Nadia's family and *Nadia's church* and in this way they reached Beloyarsk as the sedentary base for Nadia's family and church.

Hence, from the perspective of the Beloyarsk community, the Brotherhood had arrived from the tundra, not from the sedentary space, and thereby it was a *tundra church*.

When the first two Brotherhood missionaries arrived in Beloyarsk in March 2006, they were greeted with hostile treatment from Evangelical leaders, who arrived at the same time in Beloyarsk from Salekhard, once they heard about the appearance of 'strange missionaries'. The first meeting was followed by a conflict between the two groups of missionaries. 'Don't touch our flock [*stado*]! These are our lambs [*ovechki*]! We won't let you go into the tundra!' argued Evangelical leaders. But then there was a decision to solve the conflict by voting. The Nenets community gathered and was asked to decide whether to let the new missionaries head into the local tundra or not.

Nadia remembers that day:

> D. [an Evangelical missionary] gathered us and then said, 'You are the only ones who can choose whether to allow these missionaries into your tundra or not. Please raise your hands, those who wish them to go into the tundra'. We all agreed. He of course was offended, saying 'Well, it's your choice. You've made your decision. We don't force [our company] on you'. And then we took these two missionaries and brought them into a chum. We heard that they [missionaries from the Baptist Brotherhood] frequently visit chums, and [believing] sisters stay in chums for a long time, teaching [Nenets] women how to wash and clean, how to cook, how to read, to pray, to sing. So we got interested in all these things too.

So, after debates and arguments in the Beloyarsk community, followed by on-going tensions between Charismatic, Evangelical and Baptist missionaries, the Beloyarsk community was converted again – into the most radical type of Baptism.

The conversion drama calmed down with the establishment and reliable authority of the conservative Baptist Brotherhood in the Polar Ural tundra and the growing disillusionment of Pentecostals and Evangelicals with their missionary outcomes. Still, Charismatic and Evangelical missionaries consider the religious rearrangement of those days as 'seizure of power' and 'occupation of territories'.

Plate 1.8 Baptist community in Beloyarsk. 2011.

Plate 1.9 Missionary trip to the tundra. Beloyarsk, 2011.

During my fieldwork in Beloyarsk two religious communities existed – Charismatic and Baptist. Both village religious communities were small, about 10 and 20 people respectively, though the rest of the members were dispersed in the vast Yamal, Polar Ural and European tundra regions. Neither of the communities had a permanent pastor, and the intensity of the communities' religious life pulsated with frequent visits by

missionaries from different parts of the post-Soviet space and abroad. With the arrival of a missionary, numerous tundra believers would come to the village to join prayer gatherings, and visiting missionaries usually headed into the tundra, reaching the remotest nomadic campsites by snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle or reindeer team.

Conversion as a 'Native Affair'

Initially, the first missionary initiative was not ethnically targeted and people with various ethnic identities (Russians, Nenets, Khanty and Komi) participated in the first christening. However, over time the Beloyarsk religious communities became almost entirely native, consisting mainly of Nenets and Khanty. Such ethnic division of communities seemed not to be accidental, due to existing tensions between these historically neighbouring groups. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, though living closely for a long time in the same sedentary space, natives and 'Russians'[1] establish cultural boundaries between their worlds. In Beloyarsk, half populated by Russians, cases of intersections of these two cultural universes (native and newcomer) – be it interethnic marriages, joint business affairs, etc. – were usually marked and discussed as odd. While staying in Beloyarsk, I was often asked by local Russians why I, a Russian woman, behaved so strangely, dealing with Nenets, living at their houses and travelling to their chums in the tundra. Similarly, the first religious conversions were popularly perceived as a breach of common boundaries, and some missionaries reported that ethnically mixed religious communities triggered the most heated conflicts. An Evangelical missionary who worked in Beloyarsk during 2000-2004 said:

> This was the biggest problem – they didn't want to meet with each other. The village is tiny, but when I invited doctors [mostly Russians], they refused to go with the Nenets. The same with club workers [also Russians], they didn't want to either. So I had to carry out several services during a day. First for Nenets, then run to doctors...

This was one of the reasons why Protestant conversion in Beloyarsk has ended up as a 'native affair'. Moreover, as an outcome of re-conversions, the remnant of the Charismatic community turned out to be composed entirely of Khanty. Meanwhile, the Baptist community consisted mostly of Nenets. As I will argue in Chapter 5, religious conversion strategies in the Polar Ural tundra correlated with traditional kin systems of the Nenets and Khanty people, since missionary trajectories significantly depended on existent kin networks, clans and family relations, and could not break out of this

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[1]In the Russian Far North, the term 'Russian' popularly refers to the incoming population in general, rather than to a particular ethnicity.

network. This resulted in the reorganization of religious landscapes according to ethnic and kinship principles and the creation of 'clan churches'.

A Note on Continuity: Orthodox and Protestant Christianity

It is worth noting, that missionary initiatives during the 1990s and 2000s were not the first cases of evangelization among the Nenets. As far back as the 17th and 19th centuries the Nenets had already experienced encounters with Russian Orthodox missionaries. The project of Christianisation of Siberian natives was part of the Russian state politics of Siberian colonization (Bazanov & Kazanskii 1936; Ogryzko 1941; Toulouze 2011b). The Russian Orthodox Church organized missionary expeditions, established permanent missions, and founded church parishes and monasteries in Northern Siberia with the purpose of baptizing native 'pagans'.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries special Orthodox missions were established targeted at evangelizing among the Nenets people. One of the first mass conversions amongst the European Nenets was undertaken by the Russian Orthodox archimandrite Veniamin (Smirnov) in 1825-1830, who wrote his diaries and notes about his work among the Samoyeds[2] (Veniamin 1850; 1851; 1855; Toulouze 2011a). In 1832-33 the Obdorsk[3] Orthodox Mission was founded, and the last head of this mission, father Irinarkh (Shemanovskii), was the most influential figure in the history of evangelization of the Siberian Nenets. During 1898-1910 father Irinarkh preached among the tundra reindeer herders and fishermen, founded missionary residential schools for the Samoyed and Ostiak[4] children, as well as the Missionary Brotherhood, a library and a museum, conducted historical research and wrote notes and diaries full of ethnographic observation (his work was recently reprinted and united in two volumes [Shemanovskii 2005; 2011]).

Similar to contemporary Protestant missionary initiatives, Russian Orthodox education and baptizing in Siberia often accompanied the burning of 'idols', destroying sacred sites and the struggle against 'heathen' culture. Evangelization of the nomads also raised the question of authenticity, and missionary school leaders were usually considered by Nenets society as Russified (*obrusevshye*) and often converts had to break ties with their families and move to Russian settlements (Slezkine 1994:43).

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[2] Prior to the 1930s, the Nenets people were called the Samoyeds.
[3] Now Salekhard.
[4] The old name for the Khanty people.

At the same time, similar to Protestant missions in Siberia in the 21st century, Russian Orthodox missions in the 19th century also elaborated more sophisticated principles of evangelism, which required learning languages, culture, local beliefs, and lifestyle of the native people (Alekseenko 1979; Grachëva 1979). The idea of contextualization and translation of the Christian message within local cultures was also at issue for both 19th-century Orthodox and contemporary Protestant missionaries (cf. Vallikivi 2003; see also comparative analysis of Orthodox and Protestant missionary strategies in Toulouze 2011a).

However, the analysis of Russian Orthodox missions among the Nenets is not among the goals of the dissertation, mainly because there is no continuity between the two movements. And nowadays, Nenets see no links between the Orthodoxy and Protestant Christianity, regarding them as completely different and unrelated religions. The long and complicated Soviet history of struggle against any religious beliefs and practices, including Orthodox Christianity, created a gap between 'before' and 'after'. And nowadays, those traces of Orthodox tradition (like Orthodox icons or the image of St. Nicholas as one of the gods in the Nenets pantheon) are now regarded by many Nenets as part of their 'traditional Nenets beliefs' (cf. Shrenk 1855:363ff).

1.2 *NADIA'S CHURCH: MISSIONARY GUIDES*

Throughout a series of religious re-conversions, the Beloyarsk Nenets religious community was vernacularly referred to as *Nadia's church*. Despite the fact that the group was initially led by a Ukrainian man and later by a frequently visiting Russian missionary, the rest of the community consisted of Nenets, and Nadia – a tundra Nenets woman in her early fifties – was an informal guide for the community.

Usually there was a native female leader who became an inner missionary within her extended family network. In general, Nenets conversion in the Polar Urals was mostly a female phenomenon. Such gender disproportion reflects the general situation for Russia: social surveys show that religiosity in Russia has mainly a female face (Krindatch 2004:128); and across the globe, 'religion as women's work' is the modern world trend (Robbins 2004b:131-134; Stark 2002).The Beloyarsk Nenets community also had predominantly female believers, with only three baptized young men.

The role of informal female leaders was crucial in Nenets conversion and determined the strategies and social outcomes of Protestant missionary initiatives in the Polar Ural tundra. Women became guides for missionaries in their tundra 'crusade' –

guides who were supposed to open up the logic of the tundra with its nomadic trajectories and herding and fishing campsites. Simultaneously, they established a sort of framework for missionary activities that missionaries usually were not able to break. Due to the quite frequent inter-clan and inter-family quarrels in the tundra, Nenets were cautious about how missionaries should keep to the proposed channels in the tundra and should observe given social and geographical boundaries. Eventually missionaries became deeply plunged into existent native kin and neighbourly networks and depended on its internal logic.

The role of guide was quite typical in a colonization frame. As far back as the beginning of Russia's colonization of Siberia, one of the obligations of the natives was to serve as guides and interpreters, as well as to provide transportation and participate in spreading the *yasak*[5] system further, for example by participating in military campaigns against those who did not pay *yasak* yet (Slezkine 1994:23-24). In the contemporary missionary case too, the agent and her family were responsible for providing transportation, providing access to people for preaching, as well as working as interpreters (be it linguistic translation, or social interpreter – a person who introduced in advance the missionary aims and provided a general friendly atmosphere for visiting missionaries). Her social function was to be an informal leader and inner missionary within her own kin network.

She achieved the role of missionary guide, and coordinated missionary movement in the tundra and villages. Her social role was to direct missionary trajectories within a clan network. She was responsible for the selection of clan members, families or entire clan branches for conversion. This woman selected which relatives, families, or descent groups were ready and worthy of conversion, and who (according to some inner cultural logic) were not ready. This practice entailed power redistribution, partly working as the practice of exclusion/inclusion of kinsmen from kin networking reciprocity. As a result, missionary movement in the tundra was determined by native social structures.

Nadia

With Nadia the story of the Beloyarsk conversions began, and the Beloyarsk church I observed consisted mainly of the members of her extended family.

Nadia had been living in the tundra all her life. She had a difficult and tragic life. She was a child of a poor Nenets reindeer herder-fisherman who drank and a Khanty

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[5] Fur tribute collected from the indigenous peoples of Siberia during Imperial Russia.

woman from a shamanic family in Southern Yamal. She did not have the opportunity to finish secondary (residential) school; after eighth grade she was called by her parents back to the chum to help in the household. The family was large, with twelve children, and the parents were happy when a rich reindeer herder from the Priural'skaia tundra proposed to marry their daughter. Thereby in 1976, at age seventeen, she was given in marriage. Her husband worked in the Baidaratskii *sovkhoz* (based in Beloyarsk), and the father-in-law was a head of a *sovkhoz* reindeer brigade and a people's deputy.

The family was rich and respected and could not accept this marriage to a poor girl. For Nadia, this meant that an unwanted and unloved daughter-in-law received the hardest work in the chum and was treated badly by her new family. Nadia's married life was hard. She gave birth to fourteen children, and only nine of them survived to adulthood. Most of her children were born in the chum. She often told the story how she gave birth to her first child. While heavily pregnant she got lost in the tundra for seven days, and nobody was beside her when childbirth began. With no food and water she spent several days lying with her new-born baby on the ground, until her husband found her unconscious. Along with the sequences of pregnancies, childbirths, childhood illnesses and deaths, Nadia was a state chum-worker (*chumrabotnista*, professional house-worker, usually the wife of a reindeer herder – a job category institutionalized during the Soviet period), for years engaged in reindeer herding and fishing.

Her husband was hard-drinking and eventually in 1986 had to leave the *sovkhoz*, living as a fisherman near Beloyarsk. Their private herd was given for pasturing to a relative, and with the course of time it significantly decreased. The story of the end of her marriage was tragic: in 1996, while drunk, the husband went off on a reindeer team and never returned. His body was found half a year later. Widowed, Nadia was left alone with nine children, and the youngest was eight months old at that time. During the following years she struggled with poverty, working hard as a fisherwoman in summer and herding the remnant of reindeer in winter to set her children on their feet.

Nadia's parental family had a no less tragic story. It is believed that the family was cursed by a relative named Lakure. A family legend tells that he made seven anthropomorphic images dressed in *mal'tsia* (N., male deerskin overcoat) and sacrificed them on a sacred site *Tivteŋeva* (N., Walrus Head) on the Kara Sea shore. Soon afterwards, all male members of Nadia's family tragically died. Nadia's father died of throat cancer and within a few years five of Nadia's brothers tragically died too, most of them committing suicide. There were only seven sisters left alive, so with no male kin

the clan was believed to be dying out. Two sisters were settled, the rest maintained a nomadic lifestyle.

By the time I first met Nadia in 2006, she was a 48-year-old woman living in a chum with some of her grown children. The family had a small herd and during summer time they worked as fishermen for Baidaratski *sovkhoz*. Nadia had an apartment in the village – a wrecked two-bedroom place in a tumbledown house, with no water or sewerage system, and with holes in walls. It was supposed to accommodate Nadia's large family, including her six married children with their families (some 30 persons in total). So the apartment was used as a temporary sedentary base for Nadia and her relatives.

Nadia and her children frequently visited the village. Sometimes she stayed there for a week or two every month. She had no reason to migrate for a long distance, for her tiny herd did not require that. So her chum was usually located an hour's distance from the village. She was living a half-nomadic, half-settled life like many other Polar Ural Nenets.

In many respects, Nadia remained a centre of gravity for her large kin network. Being a model of a brave struggler with life hardships, one who never gave up the 'genuine Nenets lifestyle', and who never sank herself in alcohol (a common asylum for arctic natives and for many of Nadia's relatives), she was held in high esteem by her extended family.

Simultaneously Nadia became a symbolical centre for the Beloyarsk conversion saga. She was the first one who accepted the Christian message and was baptized, then brought her entire family into the church. As a result, the structure of the newly created religious community is almost identical to the structure of Nadia's kin network (six of seven sisters with their families were converted and became members of the Brotherhood church). Hence the power relations within the church remain the same as they are in the tundra kinship network.

Marina

Marina is Nadia's elder sister and her stronghold in both sedentary life and religious activity. With Marina's story begins my ethnographic path in the Ural tundra. Her life story and conversion career[6] always seemed the most eloquent to me. Throughout many

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[6] I use the concept 'conversion career' according to definition of the notion provided by Henri Gooren (2005; 2010): the member's passage, within his or her social and cultural context, through levels, types, and phases of church participation.

years of conversations with her, while living at her hospitable house, it was by listening to her never-ending stories I tried to understand Nenets life in the tundra and in the village, their social expectations and beliefs.

Marina was a short, thin and sickly looking woman in her early fifties, never married and childless. Ill from cirrhosis of the lungs, she spent some years of her childhood in hospitals and health resorts. She survived, and after school, in the late 1970s, she returned to the tundra, to her parents' chum. But some years later she decided to try her luck in sedentary life. Marina spent a few years in the settlements of Yar-Sale and Salemal (Southern Yamal), working as a cleaner in hospitals or doing manual work at a fish processing factory. 'These Nenets and Khanty fishermen always live between village and the tundra', explained Marina, but at the same time she regretted her life decision of that time. 'I shouldn't have gone there. I would have been better staying in the tundra'. Living in Yar-Sale she lost a child born out of wedlock, who died soon after his birth. There she started drinking – a trouble following her entire life. Marina's parents finally took her back to the tundra, where she lived until her parents' death.

As was common for the Polar Ural Nenets, Marina's family was herding during winter and fishing in summer, giving the herd for pasturing to their relatives. When the father died in 1990, the family gave up reindeer herding and began fishing on the Ob River. During 1996-1998, Marina buried her mother and two brothers. She was still living in the tundra for some time with her younger sister, but soon in 1999 she decided to finally settle down in Beloyarsk village, where she was working as a nurse's aid and a cleaner in local hospital up to and during the time of my fieldwork.

It is when talking about Marina's life that the issue of a shaman in a family of converts arises. Nadia's and Marina's grandfather was a Khanty shaman, and Marina was believed to have inherited the shamanic gift, and some of her relatives treated her as a person capable of foretelling the future. Her childhood illness sometimes was interpreted as actually a shamanic illness. Besides this, her father always prevented her from getting married, insisting that Marina should stay unmarried. And for Marina's family this was a sign that she might be a *Numd' siarvy ne* (N.) – a woman promised to the god Num, who therefore should not get married. No less significant for Marina's kin was that she was ritually pure, for her menstrual cycles stopped when she was in her early thirties, making her as pure as *khasovo* (N.), i.e., a man, thereby allowing her freely participate in all Nenets ritual activities.

In addition, since she was the only unmarried sister of the family – the only one among her siblings who kept her father's family name – she inherited the clan's sacred sledge (N.: *khe khe' khan*). This supposedly made her responsible for keeping the clan 'gods' and correspondingly for safeguarding the clan's wealth and luck.

All of this created an aura of a knowing person around Marina, even though she usually denied her designated status. 'They think I am a shaman, always ask me to tell them something. But I don't know who I am. I don't beat the drum, what can I tell'em? If I were a shaman I would shamanize [*nashamanit'*] something better for myself, I wouldn't be so lonely', she argued.

She, however, remained a symbolic hub and a point of junction for her kin network located both in the tundra and in sedentary space. Her power as a *knower* made her a significant nexus in the clan network. Moreover, Marina was a knower in the sense of acquaintance with Russian habitus: she had outstanding skills in spoken and written Russian language and a natural ability for Russian talk ('Marina talks good'); she had a permanent job in the village, and two rooms in a relatively new communal house, at the same time keeping strong ties with nomadic kinsmen. All this made her a channel of communication between her tundra family and the Russian sedentary world.

After Marina's conversion, her social role within the religious community was to be a node in the missionary flow from the village into the tundra. Although she gave up nomadic life and during the last 15 years settled in the village, she nevertheless remained an expert regarding the tundra.

During my stay in Beloyarsk I spent much time at her home. At one point I realized that in order to be at the centre of all religious, social and economic activities of the Beloyarsk community I had only to sit in Marina's kitchen, drinking countless cups of tea, and to listen, observing this continuous pendulum of motion from the tundra to the village and back – the movement of Nenets and missionaries, goods and ideas, values and meanings.

Sitting in her kitchen, I witnessed how she expected missionaries' visits, interacted with them once they arrived, and how together they prepared missionary trips to the tundra. They cooperatively drew strategic plans, mapping nomadic routes of particular campsites, rivers and bogs, choosing jointly a better place in the tundra for future Christian summer camps. Missionaries wrote down every detail on family composition, migration and location of Nenets campsites, thus animating the tundra for themselves.

Marina would describe where particular families were located that year, what new developments had happened during the missionaries' absence, who died and who was

born, who had fallen away from community life and who, instead, expressed a desire to join it. Simultaneously she advised on new directions and new relatives as potential missionary targets. For example, Marina advised missionaries to visit a particular chum, or to talk to a particular person that in her opinion was ready to accept the Gospel. In fact, Marina was responsible for choosing particular families or family members of her clan as missionary targets. She directed missionaries according to her cultural understanding of the tundra, and according to the internal power relations within her extended family. As a result, missionaries often depended on existent kin networks as well as on nomadic ways, the geographical location and internal relations of particular families.

And eventually Marina's image of a bearer of 'traditional knowledge' was being converted too. The family legend on the shamanic gift that she inherited along with the notion of *Numd' siarvy ne* were also being translated into Christian terms. 'You will be happy', were the last words of Marina's father to her, before he died. 'I don't know why he said that, "you will be happy". Maybe, he might have had a revelation, because I am with God now, and *Num'd' siarvy* means a bride of God. Truly, a believer is a bride of Christ. Maybe that was the prophecy, that I will be chosen by God and become a believer', Marina now says, legitimizing her distinctive status in the family of converted.

Both Nadia and Marina have become missionary guides, in many respects providing missionary success in the tundra. Their complicated religious experience radically challenged the very foundation of a particular Nenets kin network. Conversion in this frame is not an entirely personal experience, but rather a communal activity, evoking re-assemblage of Nenets social relations against a new cultural background.

Valia

According to the same logic, similarly to *Nadia's church*, the Charismatic Khanty community was referred to as '*Valia's church'*, where Valia, a Khanty woman in her forties, was an inner clan missionary. Valia's church was located in Aksarka, the village next to Beloyarsk, and the Beloyarsk Charismatic group was regarded as an extension of *Valia's church.* She was an informal leader of her extended family too. A married woman, a wife of a reindeer herder and a mother of six, she lived for most of her life in the Polar Ural tundra as a state chum-worker in a *sovkhoz* reindeer brigade.

As a child, Valia displayed her keen interest in studying and finished residential school as one of the best school-leavers. Her greatest dream was to continue her study

in a big city and never return to the tundra. Despite her family's strong objections, she nevertheless went to Salekhard and entered a local college with the intention of continuing her education in Leningrad. She was a talented student with a retentive memory and a great desire to study. However, her family insisted on her return to the tundra. So when her mother got sick, Valia gave up her education and returned to her parents' chum, and soon after married a reindeer herder. Nevertheless, her leadership ability and her social respect as a person 'who knows' have played a significant role in her life. When her daughters grew up and entered residential school, Valia convinced her husband to settle down in the village of Aksarka, where her children were studying. Living in the village, Valia became a people's deputy and a published poet and writer.

As far back as during her tundra life, she met Charismatic missionaries, and since the time of her conversion she became an inner missionary for her extended family. By the time of my fieldwork, there were more than fifty of her kinsmen who eventually followed her religious way. Valia was a knower, both in a native and a 'Russian' sense: she was a keeper of the family history, the one who knew best what is called 'traditional wisdom', a famous shaman's granddaughter. At the same time, she gained proper skills and social abilities to be *equal* in the sedentary 'Russian' world. She became a crucial person in guiding Christianity into the tundra. And the shape of Charismatic Christianity in the Polar Urals in many respects is obliged to her personality.

1.3   MODERNITY TENSIONS AND NENETS *BRICOLAGE*

The introduction of Evangelical Christianity to a society such as the Polar Ural Nenets is inseparable from the wider processes of their incorporation into larger political and economic systems. Scholarship stresses that conversion often unfolds in a changing social environment, and the Nenets case is no exception. The initial point for my research has been John and Jean Comaroff's study of Tswana conversion (1991), in which they argue that Christian missionaries profoundly reshaped and changed the everyday world of indigenous people, and restructured 'the native conceptual universe' in such a way that it furthered natives' incorporation into the colonial order.

In this research I also analyse political and social premises in religious conversion, and examine Nenets religious change that is forced to cope with modernization and general social changes. As I will show, Nenets religious change is interwoven with social and political interplay, social inequalities, and power relations. International

missionary movements open up the global shape of 'modernity' and stimulate Nenets to reappraise their perspective on their place in the globalizing world.

At some point the conversion experience exacerbates a sense of inadequacy, bringing to the surface historical contradictions between Nenets native society and the Russian state. It entails many conflicts and brings ambiguities into the convert's life due to the fact that the Christian message has been brought by the Russians – the people identified as entitled to power and privileges. Within these tensions the concept of 'modernity' is revealed, for 'modernity' in the Nenets commonsense view is ethnically coloured, embodied in Russian people and reified in goods, ideas and a set of practices associated with Russian social space.

As I will show, the Nenets imagination of modern life and globalizing modernity, as something to adapt to or confront, has become the ideational foundation for their conversion experience. Hence, I seek to understand how 'modernity' has emerged as a conception in Nenets culture and how Nenets perceive, adapt, respond to and resist the increasingly blurred boundaries between spaces, times, cultures, and moral systems.

I base my analysis of Nenets conceptualizations of 'modernity' in the methodological framework of *multiple modernities* (Giddens 1991; Appadurai 1996; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Englund & Leach 2000; Knauft 2002a; Sahlins 1999a; 1999b; 2000; 2001a; van der Veer 1996; Geschiere & Meyer 1998). The concept of multiple, alternative or vernacular modernities stresses the experienced asymmetry of 'modernity' and 'tradition' (the experience that often carries a sense of inequality and disempowerment); simultaneously it highlights native creative agency in the two-way process of cross-cultural encounter.

The main argument of the dissertation is that in the situation of the mismatch between their social expectations and their actual experiences of what they call 'modernity', Nenets – through religious conversion into conservative Baptism – elaborate their response and the way to become *differently* modern. As involved actors, Nenets are highly selective in what they accept and what they reject in international Evangelicalism; they seek to indigenize new meanings and practices in ways that allow them to enforce their own cultural order in a drastically changing world.

This is a study of Nenets *bricolage* – the process of appropriating and recycling heterogeneous values, concepts, and practices in the construction of alternative versions of modernities (cf. Sahlins 1999b, 2000; Comaroff 1985). Converted Nenets become *bricoleurs* of alternative images of modernity, hence, *bricoleurs* of a revised and reassembled Nenets meaningful universe. Throughout the dissertation I examine those

native and appropriated meanings and practices that Nenets recycle in their *bricolage,* i.e., in the construction of their response and in the elaboration of their own shape of modernities.

I will furthermore posit that the success of the Nenets *bricolage* is rooted within the intersection of a Nenets imaginary of the world and of Baptist social attitudes. Having undergone a series of re-conversions, the Nenets of Beloyarsk have ended up choosing one of the most fundamentalist Baptist movements in Russia, and as I will demonstrate, it is by appropriating Baptist social, political and existential orientations that the Polar Ural Nenets renew the foundation for their previously failed projects 'to be modern'. Equipped with new identities, they develop new tools for resistance either to *Russian* modernity, or to globalizing capitalistic culture, hence, for becoming *alternatively* modern. I eventually adduce two types of modernities – '*old-fashioned*' versus '*haute-couture*' modernity – as an opposition by which the Nenets concretize their 'modernity-tension' and their response to it (see Chapter 4).

In such Nenets *bricolage* the common Western perspective on centre and periphery is being inversed, and converted Nenets no longer perceive themselves as marginal to imagined modernity, but central to it. '[O]ld margins are becoming new frontiers' (Comaroff &Comaroff 2012:121) – from a converted perspective the tundra social space and Nenets culture become an axiological and ontological front for world-building. As I will show, Baptist spatial orientations and social attitudes eventually lead to sacralisation of the tundra space, making it the centre for the production of a 'genuine Christian church'. They re-localize or re-root Nenets in this sacralized space, hence shifting the commonsense centre-periphery perspective.

However, it is worth noticing: this particular *bricolage* is a gamble and not always crowned with success. Nenets conversion as a way of becoming alternatively modern sometime fails, hence brings social destruction and conflicts, double marginalization and a sense of humiliation, and ultimately the exclusion of converts from the 'Nenets world'. I examine such cases of failed attempts to be alternatively modern and how Nenets seek to solve and to avoid these threatening situations.

To sum up, in the following chapters I explore Nenets expectations of modernity, and their predicament, failure and success in becoming locally or alternatively modern. I observe Nenets adaptation, unmaking of and resistance to Russian modernity, and the role of new religious experience in the production of a Nenets alternative vision of modernity. As I posit, new religious experience both provides new tools and an ideational foundation to explain, predict and control the global social order into which

the Nenets are drawn, as well as creating revitalization potency and maintaining a platform upon which the project of alternative modernity is being created. In other words, through conversion the Nenets are not merely adapting to or being changed by it – they use their new religious experience as a means to resist the dominant system and the 'coming modernity'. This is not a political resistance, but rather what Jean Comaroff (1985:194-196) calls a mode of 'ritualized resistance' – though tacit and never explicitly expressed – resistance not as political action, but resistance as consciousness.

Tradition versus Modernity

The framework in the research is the dualism of 'tradition' and 'modernity' that determines Nenets' expectations and cultural tensions.

Handler and Linnekin stress that 'one inadequacy of the conventional understanding of tradition is that it posits a false dichotomy between tradition and modernity as fixed and mutually exclusive states' (1984:273). The Nenets, however, are hostages of this dichotomy, which in their converted life reveals its vital complexity. Their social expectations and imaginary, as well as their new religious experiences, are imprisoned within this conceptual split, 'tradition vs. modernity', which becomes a hierarchical grid through which Nenets look at themselves and the world they live in.

I use the notions of 'culture' (*kul'tura*) and 'modernity' (*sovremennost'*) as *emic* terms, and aim to unpack what meanings, social practices and expectations underlie these meanings. The commonsense meaning of the concept 'culture' (*kul'tura*) in Russian is twofold. It refers to a 19th-century sense of culture as a synonym for civilization, contrasted to barbarism (Anderson 2000:188ff; cf. Abu-Lughod 1991). Caroline Humphrey points out that the term is linked with a nexus of ideas which Soviet ideology tied together: scientific, productive, correct, true, and communist (1983:364). In such a conceptual frame native people historically have been viewed as lacking culture or being 'uncultured' (*nekul'turnye*), i.e., 'uncivilized' or 'unscientific'. Another connotation derives from the notion of 'traditional culture' – the term essentialized for the concept of 'native'. As Lila Abu-Lughod rightly points out, 'culture' (as well as the distinction 'modernity vs. tradition'), initially has operated 'to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy' (1991:137-138, see also Appadurai 1988). The image of 'traditional culture' veils the notion of 'native' or 'indigenous' – 'a respectable substitute for terms like *primitive*' (Appadurai 1988:36). And both conceptualizations are instruments for 'making other': they reify a hierarchical self/other distinction, in which non-Western societies are objects and *others* to Westerners (or in this

ethnographic case Russians)– the difference that 'smuggles in hierarchy' (Abu-Lughod 1991:146; cf. Said 1979).

The notion of 'modernity' operates the same way: a 'Eurocentric vision of universal teleology' (Comaroff &Comaroff 1993:xxx), it puts Western societies in the centre of temporal and spatial system of coordinates, while locating non-Western societies on the periphery of time and space, hence on the outskirts of modernity. I will show that Nenets people often internalize the dominant perspective on periphery, i.e., on themselves (see Chapter 3). And this internalized perspective is what oftentimes exacerbates tensions and an awareness of inequality (which always exists between centre and margins), as well as exacerbates frontier experience, when people perceive themselves as living on a border: between Russian and Nenets spaces, between the tundra and village/town.

As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, both conceptions – 'culture' and 'modernity' – become the ideological foundation for Nenets religious change. Religious conversion exacerbates the question of modernity and (in)equality to it, and is framed within the cultural discourse of authenticity and *otherness*. Conversion to Protestant Christianity is interpreted as conversion to 'Russian faith' and 'modern life', and hence as discontinuity from Nenets genuine tradition. Nenets religious conversion, and those discourses and practices it entails, is always based on such a dichotomy. It occurs against the background of the process of interpretation of culture change, and 'modernity' versus 'culture'/'tradition'. Being stuck within this dichotomy, I will argue, Nenets view their new religious experience as both an adaptation to what they call 'modern life' and simultaneously as a new foundation for the re-assemblance of their 'Nenetsness', a reinterpretation of 'culture' and 'tradition'.

1.4   NOT TRUE NENETS: AUTHENTICITY LOST

'Yonei' ter' – Living in the Middle: thePolar Ural Nenets

The notion of the 'Nenets phenomenon' is a much-publicized image that stresses the unique stability of Siberian Nenets 'traditional culture', under which is usually understood Nenets nomadic subsistence, particularly reindeer herding, material culture, Nenets language, rituals and the network of sacred sites.

The Nenets people[7] belong to the group of the so called 'indigenous less-numerous peoples of the North of the Russian Federation' (*korennye malochislennye narody severa Rossiiskoi Federatsii*) (one of 44 listed in this group). According to the All-Russian census in 2010, the Nenets number 44,640, with 78% classified as rural population. Historically they inhabit the tundra of the European North, North-Western-Siberia, and the Taimyr Peninsula, with smaller groups living in taiga of the Polar Urals and the territory between the Ob' and Taz rivers. The largest groups of Nenets live in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (29,700 Nenets, comprising 5.9% of total population) and in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (7,500, comprising 18.6% of total population), while smaller groups are dispersed in the Taimyr Dolgano-Nenets district of Krasnoiarski Krai, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, and the Komi Republic.[8]

Map 1.1   The breadth of the traditional habitation of the Nenets people.

Geographically the Nenets are divided into European and Siberian groups, and the Polar Ural group of the Nenets live on the border between the two, migrating across and

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[7] Traditionally the Nenets are divided in two groups – Tundra and Forest Nenets. The Tundra Nenets are the majority (only 1500 Nenets belong to the Forest group) and generally are engaged in reindeer herding.

[8] Materials on the final results of the national census in 2010http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1612.htm (accessed on 15.06.2013).

on the eastern flank of the Polar Ural Mountains.[9] In the group of the Polar Ural Nenets should also be included those European Nenets and Nenets of Khanty origin who have been migrating on the eastern (Siberian) side of the Polar Urals and on the Ob' River valley since the 17th century, and more intensively since the late 19th century (Krupnik 2000:129,143; see also Volzhanina 2010:115-116).

About 50 % of the Nenets of the YNAO are engaged in nomadic economy. And nowadays, more than 640,000 reindeer are concentrated in the YNAO, which is the largest local reindeer population in the world (data as of 2006, Mukhachëv et al. 2010:10).[10]This is against the background of sharply declining domestic reindeer herding in other Siberian areas (among Evens, Evenkis, Yakut, Chukchi, and Koryak) (Gray 2001; Stammler 2005a:66ff)[11]. Siberian Nenets also demonstrate the highest level of native language competence among native populations of the Russian North (by 1989, 95.8% of the Nenets of the YNAO considered Nenets their native language) (Liarskaya 2003; Vakhtin & Liarskaya 2004).

However, the Polar Ural tundra and particularly the social space of Beloyarsk village, where the religious community I observed is located, is perceived as the place on the edge between the tundra and sedentary space, between 'traditional Nenets culture' and 'modern Russian lifeway'. Located closer to 'civilization' and 'Russian' urban centres, historically experiencing more intensive cross-cultural interactions with the incoming population, the rural Nenets of the Polar Urals live on a symbolical 'half-way point', in between the imagined 'pure traditional Nenets culture' and the 'Russian' world. The Nenets of Beloyarsk I have worked with are often referred to as *yonei' ter* – a Nenets term for those living in the middle, neither as true nomadic reindeer herders, nor as settled Russians – on the frontier between *Nenei nentsie' il'* (N. 'genuine Nenets life') and the Russian settled world. They are frequently stereotyped as not pure Nenets anymore, a mixture of everything – Nenets, Khanty, Komi, Russians, as those who have lost their ethnic, cultural, thus axiological authenticity. I was often told by both Russians and Nenets, 'If you really want to study Nenets culture you should go to the North of Yamal or to the Gyda, only there can you meet the real Nenets. But why are you going to the *Priural'skie* Nenets? You won't find anything worthwhile there!'

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[9]The Polar Ural Nenets historically were not administratively marked and were included from the 17th to the 19th centuries into the so called '*kamennye* Samoyeds' (*kamen'* (stone) refers to the Ural mountain ridge) – the Yamal and Ural Nenets (Krupnik 2000:128-9).

[10]The reindeer stock in YNAO during the last two decades has increased 26%, and in general, by 2000 the size of reindeer stock on the territories of Nenets reindeer husbandry was equal to that in 1927 – i.e., the period preceding mass collectivization during the Soviet period (Mukhachëv et al. 2010:90).

[11] In those areas reindeer stock decreased to 30% of that before the collectivization in the 1930s.

'The *Priural'skie* Nenets are entirely different [as compared with the Yamal Nenets]', argued a Northern Yamal Nenets man. 'They've ended up in-between two civilizations: they have left the one, but haven't entered the other one. They have already lost their own comfort [*uiut*], but haven't found another one'.

It appears that even the Polar Ural Nenets themselves internalize the image of being non-authentic. A Polar Ural Nenets woman recently settled in Beloyarsk said, 'Doctors came here the other day, and they did blood tests among the Nenets. And it was revealed that the Nenets do not have pure blood anymore – everything is mixed: Nenets, Khanty, Russians.'

Plate 1.10 A herder crossing a railway in the tundra. Photo by Sergei Anisimov.

Plate 1.11 Tundra Nenets visit a settlement on Reindeer Herder's Day.
Aksarka village, 2008.

Plate 1.12Reindeer Herder's Day in Aksarka, 2008.

Plate 1.13 The Polar Ural Nenets. Aksarka, 2008.

The Polar Ural Nenets: Social Background

The nomadic population of the Polar Urals and lower Ob historically lived close to settlements and trading posts, had relatively small reindeer herds and fished during summer time on the Ob and smaller rivers. Located in the remote tundra, the region of the eastern flank of the Polar Urals, however, is a zone with a relatively dense population, leading to intensive inter-ethnic contacts (European and Siberian Nenets, Khanty, Komi-Zyrians, Russians), with high rates of inter-ethnic marriages, and multilingualism (Kvashnin et al. 2006; Vasil'ev 1985; Volzhanina 2005; 2010:114ff).

The Siberian Polar Ural tundra historically has been the territory of strong Komi-Nenets and Khanty-Nenets communication, as well as the place of interactions between European and Siberian Nenets. Since the 16th-17th centuries and particularly since the mid-19th century, seasonal and permanent migration, trade relations and culture contacts across the Polar Urals have been quite intensive (Dunin-Gorkavich 1910:286ff; Vasil'ev 1985; Kvashnin et all 2006). The area of the lower Ob River historically revealed a high rate of Khanty-Nenets intermarriages, resulting in a general historical and cultural Khanty-Nenets community (Perevalova 2004; Volzhanina 2005; Zuev 1947). Here, some Nenets clans are regarded as Khanty in origin (Verbov 1939; Dolgikh 1970:74ff, 106ff; Vasil'ev 1979:211).

Nowadays, administratively the Polar Ural Nenets live on the northern border of Komi Republic and Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and in the northern part of the Priural'skii district of the YNAO. In the European North approximately 500 Nenets migrate on the western flank of the Polar Urals (the so called *Gorskie*, or Mountain, Nenets), and during winter time some of them migrate across the mountains to the Siberian part of the Polar Urals.

In the Priural'skii district of the YNAO the Nenets number about 2650 people, comprising 33% of the total population (data as of 2002 Volzhanina 2010:89-90; see also Priural'skii 2005:236). Most of them inhabit the Aksarka and Beloyarsk municipalities of the district (the village of Beloyarsk is the administrative centre for Beloyarsk municipality).[12] The second group living in the district and designated as indigenous is the Khanty (about 2,270, which is 28% of the total population).[13] Approximately 1,400 of the Nenets population here are nomadic, engaged in traditional economy – reindeer herding, fishing and hunting, migrating in the tundra and forest-tundra of the eastern flank of the Polar Urals, in the Kara, Baidarata and Shchuch'e rivers basins, and up to the Kara sea shore (Baidarata Bay).

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[12] Since 2006, the Beloyarsk municipality has united two rural districts: Beloyarsk and Baidaratski (Laborovaia trading post and Shchuch'e settlement). The Aksarka municipality before 2012 united the following settlements: Aksarka, Tovopogol, Yambura, Chapaevsk, Zelionyi Yar.

[13] Data according to statistics of the Beloyarsk and Aksarka municipality administrations as of 01.01.2011.
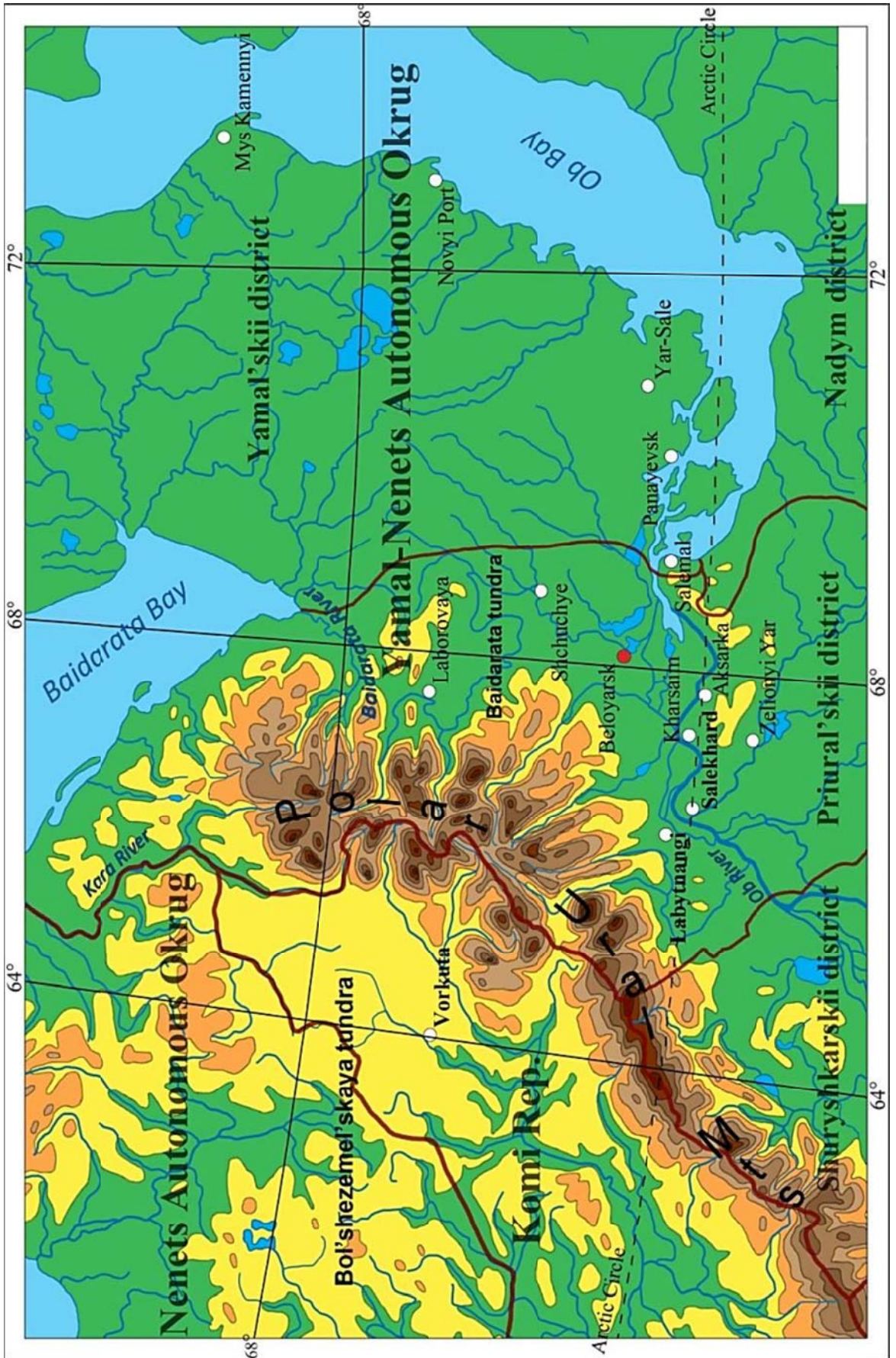
Map 1.2   The Polar Ural region.

The northern part of the Priural'skii district lies beyond, in the Arctic Circle, and as many other villages in the Far North, Beloyarsk village is not connected to railway lines or road systems and can be reached only by helicopter or by boat during summer and by a so-called *zimnik* – a winter road made in the snow, the operation of which is possible only in winter conditions. The village of Beloyarsk is relatively large with a population of 2000; half of them are indigenous – mostly Nenets (more than 900) and Khanty (about 300), while the rest are generally Russians and Komi-Zyrians.

Table 1.1 Population of the Beloyarsk and Aksarka municipalities

Data as of 01.01.2011

Settlements	Resident population	Including Indigenous population	Ethnic structure					
			Russians	Nenets	Khanty	Mansi	Selkups	Other (including Komi-Zyrains)
Beloyarsk municipality								
- Beloyarsk	2020	1255	264	923	332	-	-	501
- Laborovaia	662	656	5	655	1	-	-	1
- Shchuch'e	855	842	7	825	17	-	-	6
Aksarka municipality	3956	1855	1262	711	1132	10	2	839

More than three-quarters of the territory in the Priural'skii district serves as reindeer pastures, and it is the third largest reindeer-herding region in the YNAO. Yet it is sometimes regarded as a peripheral region in relation to reindeer herding, compared to the Yamal'skii and Tazovskii districts of YANO, which are experiencing a boom in private reindeer herding (Stammler 2005a).Many nomadic Nenets and Khanty are employed by state farms, though the majority remain private herdsmen and fishermen.

**Table 1.2 Nomadic population and reindeer stock in private ownership
in the Beloyarsk and Aksarka municipalities**

Data as of 01.01.2011

Rural districts	Population	Among them indigenous (both Nenets and Khanty)	Private reindeer stock
Beloyarsk municipality			
Beloyarsk	270	265	8241
Laborovaia and Shchuch'e	1276	1276	49283
Aksarka municipality	344	344	8473

Since the 1950s-1960s the Priural'skii district of the YNAO has been a place of extractive industry, based on mining.[14] In recent years the mining industry is increasingly growing and becoming the priority of the district's economy. Yet, the district remains as one of the most poorly developed districts in the YNAO, 90% subsidized by the federal centre (Priural'skii 2005:268).

The capital of the YNAO – Salekhard city – is located within the borders of Priural'skii district, which gives the district the status of a capital area. The district has crucial geo-economic significance, since it contains the main transport links, connecting the western and northern territories of the Okrug with the European part of the country. Namely, this is the main transport hub Labytnangi (the 'gateway to Moscow'), as well as the industrial railway Obskaia-Bovanenkovo (the northernmost railway in the world, connecting the mainland with the giant gas-oil deposit Bovanenkovo).

The increasingly developing industry attracts migrants from all parts of Russia into the region, which results in accelerated population growth throughout regional settlements. In general, industrial development in the Russian Arctic, particularly in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug since the mid-20th century, has dramatically inverted the demographic landscape, such that the native population (though dwelling on the immense tundra space) has become an absolute minority in the region. In the YNAO the proportion of Nenets population, for instance, changed from 29.3% in 1939, to 22.4% in 1959, 4.2% in 1989, and to 5.2% in 2002, with the absolute majority being the incoming Russian population (Khomich 1970; 1972; Volzhanina 2010:82-82; see also Kvashnin 2010).

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[14] The district is rich in copper, lead, zinc, nickel, cobalt, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, platinum, gold and silver.

Plate 1.14 A Nenets tundra woman visits clothing market in Aksarka village, 2008.

Another feature is the high rate of sedentary native population in the Priural'skii district. The village of Beloyarsk, established in 1951 as part of the Soviet project of sedentarization of nomadic people, has become one such centre of gravity for tundra native people. In the Beloyarsk rural district the correlation of tundra and sedentary Nenets is 1:4.8 (Volzhanina 2005). One of the biggest issues for sedentary natives is the lack of work places and correspondingly unemployment. Nenets and Khanty living in northern settlements such as Beloyarsk are generally engaged in manual unskilled jobs, such as cleaner, nurse's aid, watchman, or laundress, whereas jobs in local administration, management, school education system, and public health services are mainly occupied by Russians and other incoming population. However, in recent years increasingly more natives have acquired the profession of tutor, teacher, medical assistant, zootechnician, fur farm worker, bootmaker and seamstress (Volzhanina 2005).

Yet still, poor living conditions and lack of infrastructure, crime and high mortality from tuberculosis, suicide, alcoholism, and violent deaths (often drink-associated) define the social landscape of northern villages – the so called 'ethnic settlements' (*natsional'nye posëlki*) (Pika & Prokhorov 1988; Pika & Bogoiavlenskii 1989; Pika 1996).

The boundaries between the tundra and the sedentary social spaces of the Siberian Polar Urals cannot be definitely demarcated. Tundra natives frequently visit villages; the close location of their campsites to settlements and reduced migration routes allow some of them to spend equal time in the tundra and in villages. Their sedentary relatives often help them in their tundra activities. During summer time many natives of the

Polar Urals (both nomadic and sedentary) settle on rivers banks for fishing – the practice is called 'to sit on sands' (*sidet' na peskakh*) (for more on pendulum temporality of sedentary and nomadic patterns of Nenets lives see Volzhanina 2013). Therefore 'the Nenets on sands' are often referred to as semi-nomadic.

Plate 1.15 Beloyarsk village.
Priural'skii district of Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. 2008

Plate 1.16 Typical yard in Beloyarsk. Tundra household is settled (possibly temporary): disassembled chum and household effects are packed in sledges and kept near the house. 2008.

Plate 1.17 New building for residential school is notable on the background of old private houses. Beloyarsk. 2006.

Plate 1.18 *TSentr Kul'turnogo Dosuga* – local club in Beloyarsk, 2011.

'Eluding' Culture and Authenticity Lost

A Nenets woman in her fifties, who works in the Beloyarsk residential school, expressed her understanding of losing authenticity as follows:

> The Yamal Nenets – they are far from civilization, so they are a little purer, unlike our [Polar Ural] Nenets. Ours are close to the centre, they are intermixed and already ruined [*isporchennye*]. They don't know their traditions and customs anymore. They already know nothing. […] Nowadays there is no longer culture in the tundra. The tundra has changed greatly. A reindeer herder can watch TV all day long instead of pasturing his herd. He doesn't migrate [*kochuet*] properly. All [tundra people] lounge close to settlements now [*tolkutsia vokrug posëlkov*], instead of looking for new pastures. Everybody in the tundra has electricity, televisions, videorecorders. Everybody calls the other with their names. But in the past nobody called someone with his name.[15] In my generation everything was much stricter.

Then she adds:

> And now even Baptists have reached the tundra! They come to the tundra and take reindeer meat as a tribute [meaning tithe] and prohibit drinking [reindeer] blood or eating raw meat.[16] The only thing they [Baptists] are interested in is money: they come and say 'You should pay a tribute!' But Nenets have no money in the tundra. So they slaughter reindeer. But if you slaughter your reindeer you'll remain with nothing... They are being cheated. And all these [troubles] have come from the city.

Hence the image of the loss of genuine 'nativeness' is further triggered by 'sectarian discourse' and the increasing number of religious conversions among the native population of the Polar Urals. This was one of the reasons why the religious landscape and social relations amongst the Polar Ural Nenets remained highly unstable in the frame of the indigenization and internalization of new religious concepts. Religious rearrangements required constant interpretation and re-interpretation of adopted ideas and identities and the production of certain mechanisms that allowed room for social stability and cultural integrity.

Immersing themselves in Christian disjuncture, converted Nenets face the problem of articulating and conceptualizing their own past and present, their cultural and ethnic 'purity' and genuineness, while balancing between an appropriated system of meanings and what they call their 'traditional culture'. The converts get involved in a negotiation of 'Nenets tradition', 'Nenets culture', 'Nenets religion', and Nenets authenticity while expressing and interpreting Christian discontinuity and the notion of being 'born-again'.

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[15] She refers to a series of Nenets prohibitions surrounding human names, particularly the Nenets practice to call an adult not by his/her actual name, but using instead a formulae 'the mother of [a name of her child]'/ 'the father of [a name of his child]'.

[16] Nenets use reindeer blood and raw meat for food as an important nutritional component.

As F. Laugrand suggests, 'studying conversion means to study an interaction, Christianisation being the result of a constant cultural negotiation' (trans. and cit. by Virginie Vaté 2009:39). In this study of Nenets religious conversion the process of interaction and negotiation of different meanings and values is a key concern. As I will show, this negotiation process implies a set of contradictions and conflicting beliefs, and does not necessarily produce successful outcomes. It is a gamble that could result in displacement and loss. And the dissertation explores how Nenets express, construct, revise, and justify their authenticity, their 'native tradition', as well as sometimes failing to maintain continuity in the process of change.

'If you are Baptists you are no longer Nenets'. This dichotomy becomes a foundation for most discussions and tensions aroused around religious conversion. A person who is 'no longer Nenets' is thereby under a threat of losing social continuity, losing ties with the native community and, consequently, the stability of his/her livelihood.

Having been accused of losing their 'Nenetsness', believers discover that they, however, do have 'culture' and 'tradition' – both terms are used mostly as synonyms and refer to an image of inherited beliefs and customs. As I will show, the dynamic of religious conversion brings what Marshall Sahlins refers to as 'a self-consciousness of indigenous culture' or self-conscious movements of cultural differentiation and essentialization, when new believers themselves become aware and defensive of what they call their 'culture' (Sahlins 2005[1992]; 1999; see also Robbins 2005). In such a context, previously commonsensual meanings – 'tradition', 'culture' or 'ethnicity' – as something given, are transferred into a field of continual discussions, questionings, interpretations, translations, and justifications (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Nenets converts revise and re-define the notion of 'Nenets traditional culture', while claiming to have rights to it. And this becomes a strategy to return their lost authenticity, where authenticity merges into the notions of power: 'They need the authority of authenticity to legitimate their power' (Gable & Handler 1996:568;see also Bruner 1994:400).

'[T]he quest for authenticity [Lindholm 2008] requires collective work to discover, recognize and authorize the 'real thing', as well as collective effort to thrust away its opposite', posit Thomas Fillitz and A. Jamie Saris (2013:2). Likewise, the danger of loss of ties with the 'Nenets traditional culture' entails an interpretive process that embraces both continuity and discontinuity issues. Hence, conversion evokes the process – often complex and wrenching – of identity development and 'the quest for

authenticity' – a way of being-in-the-world that needs to be justified and authorized (Fillitz & Saris 2013:1), or simply of being 'true to oneself' (Linnekin 1991:448).

But do these attempts to discover and authorize the 'real thing' eventually signal the process of invention of the 'culture'? Can we consider this culture re-assemblance as an 'authentic' or maybe as an 'authentic reproduction' of it (cf. Bruner 1994)?

The image of authenticity, lost or threatened, has long been a key concern in many anthropological discussions (Handler & Linnekin 1984; Linnekin 1991; Jolly 1992:59; Bruner 1994; Gable & Handler 1996). 'When *we* change', writes Marshal Sahlins after Margaret Jolly, 'it's called progress, but when they do – notably when they adopt some of our progressive things – it's a kind of adulteration, a *loss* of their culture' (Sahlins 1999b:ii). It appears that sometimes the role of anthropologist is to catch people red-handed and to reveal that something regarded as authentic, indigenous in fact is 'invented' or 'borrowed'.

Criticizing the distinction of the inventiveness of the tradition (from Malinowsky's 'mythical charters' to Hobsbawm's 'invented tradition'), Sahlins points out that all traditions are invented, constructed in the on-going process of negotiation between two or more cultures, because culture itself is strategically adaptable to the pragmatic situation, and is really instrumental (Sahlins 1999a:403). As Jocelyn Linnekin posits after Alan Hanson and Roy Wagner, culture is 'an on-going human creation', and symbolic invention is a general cultural process (1991:447).

Paraphrasing Margaret Jolly (1992:53), why shouldn't new Baptist hymns and prayers be seen as part of the Nenets tradition alongside the Nenets myths and shamanic songs? Why can't the new Protestant system of meanings, values and identities be seen as Nenets authentic tradition, if the latter can now provide alternative ways of living meaningful lives on a shaky foundation and can provide an understanding of the world the Nenets live in?

As Marshall Sahlins argues, tradition is the dynamic intellectual systems, capable of change, and indigenous people are active agents in this process of change. His statement 'cultural change, externally induced yet indigenously orchestrated' signifies that all externally imposed goods, wealth, ideas are used by people in the process of reproduction and creative transformation of their indigenous cultural order, because in the foundation of every change is the continuity and endurance of culture (Sahlins 1985:viii; cf. Geertz 1973). In other words, the cultural dynamic is the on-going dialogue between the 'received categories' and the 'perceived context' (Sahlins1985:144). Similar to Robin Horton's (1971) premise that people perceive new

meanings in terms of what they already know, assimilate new ideas into preexisting frameworks, Sahlins argues that people give significance to new objects and ideas from the existing understanding of the cultural order (1985:vii). In such an ideational framework, historical process is understood as 'functional revaluation of the categories', in which the latter stretch and acquire new functional values, but always as a logical extension of traditional conceptions (1985:ix, 138).

Plate 1.19 A Nenets family visiting a village, 2008.

1.5   CHRISTIANITY AND 'TRADITIONAL CULTURE'

> *Because we are Nenets, we used to think*
> *that the living God was only for Russians,*
> *and not ours. The Israeli God is for*
> *Russians. But we've got another god –*
> *idols'.*
>
> Nadia

One of the main research frameworks in anthropology of Christianity is focused on the relationship between Christianity and 'traditional culture' or 'traditional religion'. Anthropologists deliberate on the issue of translation, interpretation, indigenization or appropriation as the process of making heterogeneous elements one's own (see Robbins 2003, 2007; Meyer 1994; 2010; Friedman 1999:247). The issue of the cultural tension that conversion implies is also in the research focus of scholars who study the post-Soviet influx of foreign missionaries and religious dynamics (see, for example,

'Conversion after Socialism', edited by Mathijs Pelkmans [2009a], where the question of translation and interpretation of Christianity within local cultures is a key concern). Using terms like inculturation, indigenization, contextualization, vernacularization, creolization or syncretism, scholars are concerned to define an authentic, local expression of Christianity. As Meyer argues, this seemingly irresolvable dualism of Christianity and 'traditional religion' frequently leads us to a misinterpretation of local traditions as static, mission churches as alien, and local religious conversion as a syncretic mix of both (Meyer 2004:454). However, the discourse of syncretism – 'the politics of religious synthesis' (Shaw & Stewart 1994) – and the issue of challenged authenticity remain a basic conceptual background for Nenets religious conversion experience.

The Dynamic of Conversion

One of the first anthropological discussions of religious conversion and the culture change that it implies was sparked by Robin Horton's stimulating essays on historical and anthropological perspectives of religious conversion in Africa (Horton 1971; 1975a; 1975b; Horton & Peel 1976; Fisher 1973; 1985; Ifeka-Moller 1974; Comaroff 1985; Hefner 1987; 1993; Barker 1993). Who changes whom? And how do the two interact? Basing their arguments on the study of indigenous conversion to Christianity (and Islam) scholars discuss whether 'the world religion' has been indigenized by local cultures, or, on the contrary, have the converted themselves been reshaped by the key doctrines and practices of Christianity and Islam. The debates framing research in anthropology of Christianity focus on studying the balance between what John Barker (1993) calls 'internal' and 'external' conversion: either portraying native cultures as 'the proclamation of the Phoenix Knight', stressing their agency in the conversion process, or emphasizing the cultural 'Juggernaut' of Christianity (cf. Fisher 1973; Hefner 1993).

In his analysis of conversion, later called 'intellectualist' theory, Horton deliberates on the elasticity and adaptive potential of the 'traditional world-view' in the face of social and cultural changes (Horton 1971; 1975a; 1975b). Horton advances two arguments: he posits that people confronting new and puzzling situations tend to adapt them 'as far as possible in terms of their existing ideas and attitudes, even though they may have to stretch and develop them considerably in the process'. Second, he stresses that people assimilate new ideas 'because these ideas make sense to them in terms of the notions they already hold' (Horton & Peel 1976:482). Horton emphasizes native agency in the conversion process, portraying converts not as passive recipients, but as active

players in conversion encounters. His key statement is that, despite indigenous people themselves tending to represent their culture as unchangeable and stable, 'frozen for all eternity' (1975a:222), it is the dynamism and variability that characterize cultures, their flexibility in the face of wider social and political changes. And traditional cosmologies adapt and develop 'in response to *other* features of the modern situation' (1971:104, emphasis in the original). The culture is flexible in changing and developing its own categories to the extent that it will acquire again its explanatory function, as the means of prediction and control. Horton also stresses that crucial cultural variables are not the external influences, but the pre-existing thought-patterns and values, the internal variability of the culture and its potential for radical and enduring change (1975a:221). Conversion plays the role of 'stimulators and accelerators of change which were 'in the air' anyway', i.e., the ideational changes normally associated with Christian influences are likely to occur only in the presence of the appropriate internal social changes (Horton 1971:104; 1975a:220; Horton & Peel 1976:428). 'The belief and practices of the so-called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional cosmology to other, non-missionary, factors of the modern situation,' argues Horton (1971:104). This idea correlates with Emilio Willems' earlier observation of the rise of Protestantism in Latin America, in which he pointed out that concentrations of Protestants movements are correlated with changes strongly affecting the traditional structure of the society; conversely, Protestantism is relatively weak in those regions that have had little or no exposure to such changes (Willems 1967:13; for more on the deprivation factor in religious conversion see Calley 1965; Anderson 1979; Chesnut 1997; see also Robbins 2004b:123-127).

Horton's logic can be traced in scholarship focused on the adaptive potential of conversion. In different ethnographic cases, students of religious conversion stress that the appropriation of the Christian meanings is highly selective: what is accepted and what rejected is determined by native cultural logic and by the extent of its potential for adaptive change (Axtell 1982, Merrill 1993; Yengoyan 1993). In his essay on the ethnohistory of missions in colonial North America, James Axtell deliberates on the issue of native agency in conversion among Indians of New England in 17th century. He argues that religious conversion in this historical case was the means to preserve the social and cultural continuity of their lives in the face of drastic economic challenges, social displacement and epidemics (Axtell 1982). 'Cultures should be free to define their own goals, set their own course, and to survive in any way they can', posits Axtell,

and he interprets Indian conversion to European Protestantism as their ethnic and cultural revitalization (1982:40).

Likewise, closer to our case of research, Laur Vallikivi argues that conversion to Baptism among European Nenets reindeer herders (Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Russia) is an adaptation to new social and economic circumstances, one of the means for social integration (Vallikivi 2001).

Horton's analysis of world religions as catalysts for changes already 'in the air' and the adaptive potential can be revealed in Nenets conversion, too. This view partly explains why some groups of Nenets eagerly embrace Christian mission, whereas others reject it. The spread of Baptist and Pentecostal movements in Yamal and the Polar Ural tundra coincides with areas deeply affected by internal social and economic crisis, poorly developed social infrastructure, and high indigenous deprivation. In Yamal and the Polar Urals, those who appropriate the Christian message are often recently settled Nenets, who experience hardships in socializing in an alien ('Russian') environment, those who are socially marginalized, often unemployed or unskilled labourers, doing odd-jobs, or nomadic Nenets from the poorest regions and families. The majority of Beloyarsk converts are relatively poor semi-nomadic fishermen with small herds. A young (non-converted) Nenets man views religious conversion of his neighbours as follows:

> Let's say they [Nenets Baptists] are settlement women who work as cleaners, earn little money, live badly, not rich […] They are weak people. Well, who are easy to be convinced, easy to be directed onto something. Among the tundra Nenets [Baptists] come from those with a lot of people in the chum [meaning with large families], they don't do their own business [*svoiei deiatel'nost'iu ne zanimaiutsia*]. They are from poor families, psychologically weak. I'd say they [become Baptists] because of despair [*ot bezyskhodnosti*].

This also mirrors some scholarly opinions: for example, Yurii Kvashnin (2010) tends to represent the Baptist movement in Yamal in a way that it is mostly marginal people with an 'inferiority complex' that are influenced by Baptist missionaries.

At the same time, one can easily notice that Protestant missionaries are not as successful in the areas of Yamal and the Polar Urals with a stable social and economic situation and less affected nomadic culture. As a Nenets woman from Yar-Sale expressed it, 'Reindeer herders from Yamal brigades are strong enough to resist the Baptists, […] unlike the *Priural'skie* Nenets'.

However, such a perspective cannot be taken as definite, for there are also numerous successful tundra dwellers (with large reindeer herds in their households), as well as no

less wealthy sedentary Nenets and Khanty who are members of Protestant movements. And more importantly, if the notion of the adaptive potential of conversion is taken as a methodological framework, the question remains unresolved of why religious conversion in the Polar Urals has brought intense social tensions and often social displacement and marginalization of Nenets born-agains. And why is Nenets religious conversion regarded by Nenets themselves as a threat to their cultural and ethnic authenticity? Horton's theory fails to explain why Nenets conversion brings numerous conflicts and destruction, and why, in the name of Christ, the newly converted abandon their traditional cosmology, burn their ancestors' sacred objects, and sometimes even give up their tundra life. As I will show throughout the text, Nenets conversion further complicates Nenets relations with wider society, it draws an explicitly negative reaction from the side of native society, and it evokes double marginalization of converted Nenets within 'Russian' settled social space, where Protestant believers are stigmatized as 'sectarians' (on 'sectarian' discourse see Chapter 2).

In his critique of Horton, Humphrey J. Fisher (1973; 1985) posits that the former overestimates the survival of original African elements of religion, and underestimates the significance of world religion in reshaping the indigenous world and the willingness and ability of indigenous cultures 'to make even rigorous Islam and Christianity their own' (1973:27). While Horton stresses indigenous cultural structures in conversion, crucial variables that are not external influences, insisting that religious changes are not simply a product of material forces, Fisher, on the contrary, bases his argument on the idea that the worldview of an incoming world religion endows religious conversion with a breaking power (1985:153). Fisher points out that Christianity (and Islam) is not only being contextualized and indigenized within local contexts, but world faiths too have dramatically reshaped the African indigenous world. In opposition to Horton's resurgent 'Phoenix Knight' of indigenous culture and traditional cosmology, which arises anew from the ashes of colonialism and conversion, Fisher stresses the 'Juggernaut' of Islam and Christianity that incorporates the idea of 'devotees sacrificing even their lives in the religious cause' (Fisher 1973:28; 1985:156).

Later on, these approaches were developed by Joel Robbins and John Barker and brilliantly summarized by Michael Scott (2005). Robbins (2003; 2007; 2010) advocates the anthropology of discontinuity, arguing that the impulse of radical change, cultural and social rupture underlies Christianity in totality as a system of meanings. And Christian conversion with its emphasis on the 'second birth' always entails the idea of discontinuity in cultural histories and personal lives (see also Meyer 1998; Engelke

2004; van Dijk 1998; Dombrowski 2001). Robbins argues, '[O]nce people begin to work with the logic of Christianity that logic can resist their efforts to modify it and can lead them to think in ways that they never would have thought indigenously' (cited in Scott 2005:104). John Barker (1990; 1993), on the contrary, rejects the essentialist approach – Christianity is not a 'logically coherent system', but loose accumulation of ideas and practices (in Scott 2005:103). He stresses native agency, 'where social agents operate simultaneously in multiple contexts and levels, tolerating contradictions without seeking to reconcile one context or level with the others' (Scott 2005:103).

John Barker refers to Horton's and Fisher's theories as 'internal' and 'external' conversion, related to two different levels of social structure (Barker 1993:206-207; cf. Hefner 1993:22-25). Yet, both modalities of conversion are crucial for our understanding of Nenets religious movements.

Through the 'external' conversion, while engaged in a cross-cultural encounter with incoming missionaries, Nenets tend to identify with the structure, moral values, policy and habitus of a larger society. In this framework, the emphasis on discontinuity and dissociation from previous social and cultural affiliations are features characteristic of the religious landscape in the Polar Urals. Here the notion of 'being born-again' is obviously the most significant in believers' lives, and should be visibly expressed in everyday life. The conversion experience becomes a radical rupture in a person's life that breaks the continuity between the past and the present. Many Nenets converts become deeply committed to and assert the Christian system of meanings, values and morality. This, correspondingly, triggers anxiety and agitation within Nenets society, and sometimes leads to the expulsion of a convert from his/her local community. As an outcome they lose their previous social status and in some cases, being marginalized within their native tundra community and excluded from the traditional system of exchange, they are compelled to move to settlements.

Through the 'internal' conversion, I will observe how Nenets attempt 'to harmonize the present conditions of their lives with their understanding of received morality' (Barker 1993:223). In this context, conversion is understood as a dynamic heterogeneous process that endures for a long time and takes changeable shapes, as well as entailing various social phenomena. It is the process where people pick up 'piecemeal bits as "flexible tools" for problem solving' (Scott 2005:103). And I will demonstrate how Nenets appropriate various Christian ideas and practices, while operating in multiple levels of what Barker calls the 'practico-moral environments' (1993), in order

to find social and cultural continuity in change and to elaborate new cultural patterns that could make sense of their dramatically changing world.

In addition, in this research I observe the social life of the newly established Christian community, which is influenced by social organization and by the system of meanings of the global religious network (to which it now belongs), and simultaneously is interwoven with the structure and the fabric of everyday life of the native society. Robert W. Hefner (1987:74-75) calls this phenomenon *secondary community* – a new structure within the native society that produces a system of 'secondary moral and ideological identity', and exists beyond the given local cultural meanings and system of identities. Secondary community, Hefner posits, can exist within a local one for a long period, but sooner or later they will begin to conflict, and the experience of secondary community 'shakes the foundations' of a local society and transfers the relation between them into conscious discussion.

A shaky foundation exists in Yamal tundra, too. A newly established Protestant community in the Polar Urals has been incorporated both into the wider (translocal) community of converted and simultaneously seeks to indigenize and internalize new religious practices within the native community. However, the opposition between these two levels of the community is increasing, and the process of identity development alongside the issue of legitimization of a new community of believers reveals its complexity. 'A tension remains none the less', argues Hefner, 'because the knowledge of the new faith is always transmitted in particular communities, each with its own history, identity and political circumstances' (1987:75).

1.6   ETHNOGRAPHER'S PATH

As Michael Agar posits, 'Ethnographers set out to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another' (1985:12). In such interpretive mediation of two worlds through a third, he continues, ethnographic practice is being neither subjective nor objective, but rather the interplay between personal experience and scientific enterprise. In much discussed methodologies of ethnographic work (Abu-Lughod 1991; Clifford 1997; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Stocking 1983), the role of anthropologist as an actor involved in the production of 'objective reality' is often raised. An anthropologist as an individual, his/her personal inclinations, life background and the individual relationships s/he develops with people during her fieldwork are

inseparable parts of the ethnographic reality itself, the frame through which the ethnographic reality is being shaped, produced or created (or even invented).

Below I trace my path as an ethnographer and my experience of research and participant observation of people's religious lives and the often-wrenching process of making sense of the changing world they live in. My ethnographic practice was challenged by the fact that the religious community I observed was highly exclusive and sought to close its boundaries to the outside world (to which actually I belonged). They were living in an atmosphere of religious harassment, be it real or imagined, and their religious experience and life stories were full of tragic plots. In this frame I was supposed be either an alienated outsider, or a fully involved member of the community.

In his article 'The Atheist Anthropologist: Believers and Non-believers in Anthropological Fieldwork', Ruy Llera Blanes (2006) raises the question (much discussed since Evans-Pritchard, though never ultimately solved) of how the anthropologist's personal belief (or the absence of it) is negotiated in ethnographic fieldwork, and how anthropological production depends on the tensions surrounding this question. For him, and this is similar to my ethnographic experience, the incorporation of personal belief into the anthropological project becomes a foundation of methodology: when 'personal belief', as he argues, can be restaged from a peripheral to a central position within ethnographic projects concerning religious phenomena (2006:224-225). Being in the field and studying Nenets religious conversion experiences, the negotiation of my personal belief was not merely a starting point for any communication, but a basic frame for my ethnographic project in general. In some respects, discussions of my status in the community and my personal belief impelled the process of making sense of people's own religious experiences and negotiating the place of their religious community in the wider society.

My personal circumstances and my own experience of conversion and re-conversion allowed me to somehow relate to the Beloyarsk Nenets and their religious life. I was baptized by my father into Russian Orthodoxy at age eleven. Several years later, when I was sixteen, during the post-Soviet missionary boom, I was re-baptized in one of the denominations of Protestantism, when an American missionary undertook a missionary crusade in my hometown in Southern Ukraine. However, at some point the similar experience put me in a more awkward position oscillating between being insider and outsider. It initially helped me to cross boundaries of an enclosed religious community, but at the same time it challenged my research, because people expected from me my full self-immersion into their religious life without preserving the self/other distinction

necessary for the research. Thus, the self/other distinction was always challenged and tended to blur its boundaries while I involved myself in people's daily activities.

When discussing an anthropologist's personal (dis)belief in the field, Ruy Llera Blanes discovers his own methodological answer: 'So, rather than a progressive incorporation of myself as a member of a community, what developed throughout the construction of my "field" were certain relationships of a more intense character that built on a sense of familiarity but not belonging' (Blanes 2006: 227). In my ethnographic case, however, there was no room for the practice of being 'familiar but not belonging'. In the negotiation of my status, Beloyarsk believers rigorously rejected the position of observer – either detached (i.e. non-believing) or participant (i.e. believing). 'You have to be either a member of our church or to leave this place', was their only solution to the issue.

So, here is my personal path of how I tried to make my ethnography possible.

My research is based on three periods of fieldwork undertaken in Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Komi Republic during the period 2006-2011. My acquaintance with the Arctic began in dark and cold November 2006, when I first arrived for my preliminary research in Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug together with my colleague Yelena Liarskaya (European University at St. Petersburg/ Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology), who first introduced me to the reality of ethnographic work. We spent two months working in Salekhard (the capital of the YNAO), Beloyarsk and Yar-Sale villages. By that time I was an MA student at the European University at St. Petersburg, and my initial research goal was to study Nenets (neo)shamanic practices, which I expected to be part of the contemporary indigenous movement. However, instead of the promotion of shamanism (as happened, for instance, in post-Soviet South Siberia), I found numerous Protestant missionaries working in towns and the remotest villages, as well as in the tundra. What struck me even more was the extent of agitation – in public discourse and everyday communications – surrounding the issue of Protestant missionary initiatives and religious conversion among the natives. The missionary activities were imagined as threatening Nenets 'indigenousness', undermining the very foundation of Nenets 'traditional culture'. Since I expected to study religious stimuli for local indigenous movements, I decided to choose these tensions concerning Protestant religious conversion and 'indigenousness' as my research project, and the Beloyarsk Nenets religious community as my research site.

My next trip to the YNAO was in April and May of 2008. This time I spent mostly in Beloyarsk village and the Baidarata tundra, observing Baptist and Charismatic religious communities amongst the natives. I also made a short visit to Vorkuta (the capital of Komi Republic) where the Baptist missionary centre is located, and from where all missionary expeditions into the European and Siberian tundra were organized.

This fieldwork was a short one but very intense, marked by the most vigorous religious rearrangements and heated debates in Beloyarsk. The Beloyarsk Nenets religious community was in its transition period, changing its affiliation from Evangelical into Baptist. This re-conversion triggered extremely heated conflicts between missionaries of different denominations, within the Nenets community of converts, as well as between converted and non-converted Nenets. The village was in upheaval. Some told rumours about a missionary conflict that ended up with a fight and police interference; others were agitated by a case of a tundra woman who had been recently converted into Baptism and soon left her 'heathen' husband, escaping in the village to the house of believers.

The spirit of transition was in the air, and for every believer in Beloyarsk the question of personal religious and ethnic identity and church affiliation was at stake. The situation was more complicated because the community by that time had no leader and all religious, institutional and life issues were to be collectively discussed and solved independently by the community as a whole. Believers met every day, reading and interpreting the Bible, praying and singing – according to their personal, unskilled, understanding of religious service, Christian prayer and Bible exegesis.

Besides a general anxious atmosphere in the village, this field trip for the first time revealed the difficult methodological problem that I had to deal with throughout my time in Beloyarsk. Unlike my first arrival in Beloyarsk, when I was sincerely welcomed, this time I was greeted with a note of caution, and people seemed to be alerted to my presence. They repeatedly asked the same questions: who was I, why was I interested in their religious community, and what was the nature and the goal of my research? 'Won't you betray us?' repeatedly asked Marina, 'You know, there are [religious] persecutions going on, and people keep telling us that you collect information against believers'. I continuously allayed people's fear and suspicion concerning my presence, but it did not help for long and a few days later the same people began asking the same question.

Soon I learned why people were so worried: right after my departure from Beloyarsk in 2006 'someone from Priural'skii administration' arrived from Aksarka

village (the centre of Priural'skii district of the YNAO), carrying out an inquiry about 'sectarians' in Beloyarsk. The Beloyarsk community – which was slowly converting into the Brotherhood with its ideology of religious persecutions and the politics of social closure – interpreted it as the first sign of the beginning of persecutions by the state. And what endangered my ethnographic project was that my presence in Beloyarsk was associated with the subsequent appearance of the authorities. So people got suspicious that I might be a spy or an intelligence agent (a situation similar to what Jeffrey Sluka [1990] described in his experience of fieldwork).

My third and main fieldwork was undertaken during the period of February–July, 2011. I worked in Beloyarsk village, travelling within the network of the communities of converted geographically scattered in the immense Polar Ural tundra (both Siberian and European sides), working also for shorter periods in Salekhard and Vorkuta, where the main local missionary centres were based.

This time, after long discussions with my PhD advisor, Dr Patty A. Gray, and equipping myself with 'Children in the Field' by Joan Cassel (1987), I decided to arrive with my 18-month-old-son Feodor, who 'worked' with me for half of the fieldtrip. I would like to acknowledge my son's support in this research: his presence profoundly changed my relations with the people I worked with. In severe life conditions and being under never-ending suspicion, I nevertheless had to entrust my child to these people, asking for their help. My openness together with Feodor's sincerity at some point broke the ice of distrust. And eventually people acknowledged my deep sincerity and trust and paid me back the same in response.

By that time the Nenets community was finally integrated into the Baptist Brotherhood, converted Khanty joined the Charismatic movement, and the religious landscape of the village and surrounding tundra seemed to be established and stable. The Nenets community was increasingly influenced by the Brotherhood's social orientations: the principle attitudes of separation of the 'church' from the 'world' and the state, and the motive of on-going religious persecution were now fundamental patterns of Beloyarsk religious practices. All these made the previously friendly and open community very closed and cautious to outsiders. In addition, the community had found a leader, though distanced, in Sergei – a Russian missionary from St. Petersburg, who frequently visited Beloyarsk and the Baidarata tundra, and who had gained indisputable authority among the converted Nenets in the Polar Ural.

I was not a complete outsider or newcomer anymore, and over the course of several years had developed friendly relations with many Nenets from Beloyarsk. However, I

could observe that some of my research participants were obviously pressured by the leader and were slowly changing their initial welcome into distrust. Influenced by Sergei, the community eventually openly blamed me as being a spy, who willingly or unwillingly would betray 'God's people'.

A few days after my arrival in Beloyarsk, I finally met Sergei personally. He was a 48-year-old smiling and good-tempered man. However, this apparent openness and kindness concealed vigilance and suspiciousness. He came up and said that he did not want to see me in the religious community, because even though he did trust me as a person, he could not trust ethnography as a science. 'Some ethnographers came the other day to Bol'shezemel'skaia tundra. They asked questions and took pictures, and afterwards the wave of persecutions [from local state authorities] began. You must understand me, these are God's people here and I must protect them from outside harm'. He eventually warned me that he was going to tell the Nenets believers to avoid any interaction with me. And knowing Sergei's ultimate authority in the Beloyarsk community, this meant that my ethnographic project was about to fail.

This was the turning point of both my research and my life experience – the field, like in Boasian times, had become a personal 'rite of passage'. At that particular moment, I realized that the only way for me to stay and to continue my research was to personalize my research as much as possible. Hence, a four-hour conversation with Sergei followed our first meeting, a very honest and sincere conversation. During these hours I was literally confessing him my entire personal life in every detail and every aspect, for I knew that only my complete honesty would break the wall of distrust. I had to trust him in opening my entire life, expecting that in response he would trust me back.

At the same time, I did my best to assure him of my good intentions and tried to establish a reciprocal relationship (as anthropology has to be). Acknowledging the hardships of religious life in modern Russia, I promised to support the community and converted Nenets in person in the face of tensions with local authorities: for example, I could communicate with village and Okrug administrations in regard to social welfare in the community.

Sergei finally accepted my presence in Beloyarsk, though he would never fully trust me. Throughout my fieldwork, I was always being watched by him and his fellows. My every step in the village and in the tundra was observed. My every communication with people in Beloyarsk was checked. There was no end of crosschecking my personality

and purposes of my stay in Beloyarsk. I was both an observer and an object of intensive observation.

Nevertheless, Sergei told the community that I was a friend and that he would be happy to see me one day as a member of the church. He let the Nenets communicate with me, yet warned them not to tell me anything about the tithe practice and any other economic relations in the church. The next day Marina came to me and cheerfully said that she would be happy to host me, 'You are now ours! You are now our sister!'

Once accepted, I built my ethnographic project in such a way that the Nenets were conductors and designers in the production of ethnographic knowledge. 'While learning an informant's culture, the informant also learns something – to become a teacher', rightly points out Spradley (1979:59). I built my relationship with the Nenets from the Polar Urals in the same way. After Sergei said that he would be happy to see me as a member of their community, converted Nenets from Beloyarsk became my teachers in both tundra and religious life. I let them direct my ethnographic research and open those patterns of their everyday practice that they considered to be ready to share with me at that particular moment.

At this first stage, the Beloyarsk Nenets were literally my Christian teachers: they taught me to pray and fast, to read and interpret the Bible, to sing Christian songs. I heard nothing but Christian sermons and established and depersonalized church narratives. However, over the course of time, Nenets began to open some other doors in their lives to me. They began sharing with me their informal daily practices, usually hidden from the eyes of missionaries. I was eventually taught by Nenets how to deceive missionaries, how to secretly watch television (prohibited in the Brotherhood) during nights under the blanket, how to change long skirts to tight jeans once missionaries had left the village and change them back with their arrival. I was eventually shown many complexities and tensions surrounding Christian life in the Nenets tundra, Nenets doubts and expectations.

1.7   DISSERTATION OUTLINE

In the following chapter, I explore the anti-conversion activism and anti-sectarian discourses that determine the religious landscape in the Polar Urals as well as being characteristic features in contemporary Russia. I outline Soviet and post-Soviet realities that have defined the precariousness of religious life for Arctic Evangelical communities. There are two sources that appear to be determining for anti-conversion

and anti-sectarian policy. The first is rooted in the religion-state relations in Russia and the state policy based on the division of 'traditional' vs. 'non-traditional religions'. The second source that comes into conflict with Evangelical movements is the politics of indigenism and indigenous movements in Siberia, based on the construction of native traditional religion and (neo)shamanism. I also describe the competitive religious landscape of Yamal and the Polar Urals and the history of Evangelical movements in the Russian North.

With Chapter 3 begins the analysis of 'modernity'. Here I set out to examine how 'modernity' or 'modern life' as a conception has emerged in Nenets discourse and has become a grid of knowledge. I dwell on spatial, temporal and moral dimensions of Nenets modernity-thinking. Nenets imaginary of modernity promotes the hierarchical view of *self* and *others*, modern and backward, dividing the Nenets cognitive map into the modern centre as the source of modern forces, goods and values, and the backward periphery as a spatial, temporal and moral margin. I also emphasise that Nenets imagine 'modernity' as ethnically coloured (modernity is embodied in Russian people and Russian/Soviet statehood), while developing a sense of inequality in relation to the 'Russian modern life'. The chapter, thus, aims at undertaking archaeology (in Foucault's meaning) of Nenets notions of 'modernity', examining those historical traces that have determined Nenets understanding and experience of 'modernity' nowadays. The Nenets people have gone through a complicated history of various missionary projects that were imposed upon them. The chapter highlights the Soviet period, for I argue that it was the Soviet state in the North that consistently translated its policy into a modernity-conceptualization. The Soviet 'missionary' reform projects most intensively sought to plug backward natives into Soviet modernity, while rooting northern nomads within the 'modern/backward' conceptual grid.

I proceed with the analysis of Nenets agency and their response to the process called by Ssorin-Chaikov 'two-way traffic of symbols and representations' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:4). Hence, the final part of the chapter discusses Nenets production of local modernity, their success and failure at 'being alternatively modern'. I highlight examples of successful production of alternative modernity, when Nenets have appropriated and encompassed 'Russian' goods and ideas, symbols, values, and practices for the reproduction of traditional social order, and have interpreted the former according to their own logic and their own terminology. However, the jeopardy of indigenization of modernity, as I demonstrate, is the risk of *discontinual* change that may result in displacement and disempowerment. In some regards, the Nenets of

Beloyarsk village represent a case of failed attempts to be modern, where the image of 'being alternatively modern' is always at issue as an unfinished project.

Nenets resistance – though discursive – to 'Russian modernity' frames and is framed within their Evangelical conversion experience. Influenced by a larger interplay of identity, politics and morality, religious conversion is understood as a part of the power relations between Nenets and Russian social spaces. In Chapter 4, I observe how conversion into the most radical form of Baptism becomes a novel platform upon which to build their initially failed project of being alternatively modern. Nenets conversion, hence, develops into what Jean Comaroff refers to as 'ritual resistance' (Comaroff 1985). I base my study on the comparative analysis of social and political attitudes, spatial and temporal orientations of different Evangelical movements that work among the Nenets, and examine their points of mismatch or juxtaposition with the Nenets shape of the world.

While observing what elements of Evangelical sociocultural order Nenets recycle in their *bricolage,* I conclude by introducing the concepts '*old-fashioned*' versus '*haute-couture*' modernity. By this opposition I aim to unpack Nenets 'modernity-tension' and their response to it.

In Chapter 5, I undertake an analysis of how technically the Nenets *bricolage* works. Basing my study on Nenets kinship and its revision within Christian understanding of spiritual kinship, I observe how religious experience is used by Nenets as a means to strengthen their tundra subsistence and kin-network interactions. In the Nenets tundra, where there is a lack of institutions for coordinating membership and authority over large social expanses, new religiosity becomes a kin-based activity. So, it is the Nenets kinship web that becomes a platform upon which the conversion mechanism is furthered and determined in the Polar Ural tundra. I argue, it is not only the social organization of the Evangelical movement that influences the structure of Nenets religious communities. Inversely, the structure of Nenets tundra (kinship-based) society defines and modifies the shape of Nenets Evangelical communities. Furthermore, Evangelical missionaries become involved into the reproduction of Nenets tundra social practices, to some extent functioning as *mediators* in the tundra. As a result, a consolidated community of Nenets believers creates a new kin-network throughout the Nenets tundra. It simultaneously overlaps with and alters the traditional tundra kinship network, but ultimately builds a new foundation for the traditional nomadic system.

Chapter 6 elaborates the issue of 'culture' and 'tradition', exploring the anti-native-culture stances implied in Evangelical understanding of spiritual re-birth and those

social outcomes these attitudes have led to. Christian conversion is understood to be a radical change in Nenets' personal life, and, hence, provokes the question of what to do with the native culture, whether to reject it as a heathen legacy or at some point to contextualise the Christian message within the native culture. While engaging in *culturing* their radically changing world, converted Nenets (and missionaries as well) work out both strategies: to reject and to embrace (i.e., somehow to indigenize) the native culture. Passing this 'cultural desert', some Nenets have made radical change, while burning bridges with what they understand as 'traditional culture'. Meanwhile others give the 'culture' a new hope. The latter scenario, as in other cases of Christian conversion among natives, leads to what scholars call 'indigenous awakening': when Nenets new religiosity shapes ethnicity and indigenousness, and hence carries expressed ethnic awareness and defensiveness, alongside anti-Russian attitudes. Besides, the project of *Nenets Christianity* – developed by some Evangelical communities – promotes an idea of the soteriological place of the Nenets people in the world history of Christianity.

I proceed with the analysis of other mechanisms of keeping 'indigenousness' and justifying 'Nenets tradition' in converted life, such as disenchanting traditional culture, or, on the contrary, sacralising it, when Nenets culture and history are reinterpreted as being true 'Old Testament'. By this, Nenets tend to redraw boundaries between secular and religion, while reconciling the European concept of religion and a Western-based form of religiosity with indigenous meanings and practices.

Chapter 7 continues the investigation of 'native culture' tensions. Here, I dwell upon another method used by Nenets in order to bridge Christianity and the native culture, namely the creation of more distinct boundaries between the two domains. This has furthered the development of a *double culture* situation. I base my analysis on Joel Robbins' (2004a) and John Barker's (1990) research, who argue that conversion does not necessarily require rejection or assimilation, but grasping a new culture wholly without sacrificing the old one, and living with two – though distinct and often contradictory – cultural logics.

Similar to Barker's observation, the Nenets dual cultural situation is ensured by the *spatial* division of two culture domains, when 'Russian' cultural practices (including Evangelical experience) are perceived as belonging to sedentary space, whereas 'traditional Nenets' practices are believed to be properly performed in tundra space.

However, Evangelical conversion constantly blurs these spatial boundaries; hence, maintaining biculturalism is a far more complex process than that described by Barker. I

examine cases when spatial boundaries are no longer distinct in Nenets 'ruptured' religious landscape. Developing the double-culture approach, I examine alternative ways by which the double-culture situation can be established. Besides space, it is *time*, *language* and *body techniques* that become those tokens which demarcate Nenets two-sided culture.

CHAPTER TWO

'I CAME NOT TO BRING PEACE, BUT A SWORD':

THE COMPETITIVE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN THE ARCTIC

Alioshka, I hold your father in high regard, he is a clever and good man. And I respect your grandfather. But when I think that you all are Baptists, I would have ripped them both to pieces!

Baptist Bishop Alexei Teleus' childhood memories.

There is a believing woman, Liuda, so the entire village calls her 'Baptist! Baptist!' This 'Baptist' came to be her surname. All I know is that Baptists are crazy [nenormal'nye], they are sectarians.

A Nenets man.

Religious Persecutions that Never Ended?

The Precariousness of Religious Life in Russia

It is early spring 2011 in Salekhard city. I am sitting in a tiny but cozy house used as a Protestant church. The prayer meeting has just finished and the pastor with a few other believers have stayed in the church, having tea and planning their week-end missionary trip to the surrounding villages and the tundra. The pastor invites me to join the mission trip, so I can meet new believing communities in the tundra. The invitation is unexpected, for I know that missionaries here in Yamal and in the Polar Urals are often unfriendly to outsiders, living in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Mirroring my thoughts, the pastor warns me right away to be cautious:

> We had so many incidents, so much trouble. Both the prosecutor's office [*prokuratura*] and television were here [in our church]. How many bulldogs were set on us, it is terrible to think! Here everything is different [from the rest of Russia]. Everything is like in Soviet times. In big cities, in Moscow for instance, they cannot even imagine that anything like that is still possible. They came to us, they filmed us, telling all sorts of foul things about us. Then they showed that on TV, saying, 'Look at this! Here is a woman in the tundra who is giving up her last money to these sectarians!'

They tried to shut us down. Every year we have to write various humiliating reports, answering so many questions. It seems that the only thing they are interested in is how much money we get, where we get our financing from, and how many foreign missionaries visit us. In other words, we've got major hardships and scandals. After such incidents, several of our church members were booted out of their jobs. One of our women used to work in the [municipal] Duma. And Volodia was also booted out of his good job. A boss called him and said: I don't need sectarians here, I don't need problems here, at work. And that was that, he booted him out. The same with me: when I used to work in Labytnangi – they took me to jail [*katalazhka*] in the middle of the night and then let me go back home in slippers when it was freezing outside! So we've gone through a lot…

The pastor continues later on:

Once I participated in a [Christian] conference in the Moscow area. So, there was [a pastor] from Pakistan there. When he started his presentation he asked not to be recorded for safety reasons… And when I began my presentation [about our community in Salekhard] after him I also asked not to be recorded either. So, things like that are going on here, [Christian] believers in Salekhard experience the same troubles as those in Pakistan. And nobody knows how bad it is here.

This story echoes the general atmosphere of missionary activities by newly organized Protestant communities in Yamal and the Polar Urals. And the phenomenon of religious harassment against the background of mushrooming post-Socialist religious diversity and the increasing number of conversions among the native people is what determines local religious life and people's conversion careers.

In the post-Soviet period, new opportunities have been created for cross-cultural interaction revealing a global religious marketplace. The Russian Arctic seems to have become an attractive land for international Protestant missionary activities. Since the mid-1990s, scholars have begun to register the growing influence of evangelical movements among the indigenous population of Siberia and the Far North (Wiget & Balalaeva 2007, Rybakova 2009, Pelkmans 2009a). Here, *at the end of the earth*, there exist people whose 'paganism' still lives on in the form of numerous sacred places as well as in everyday life. A great number of missionaries from within the post-Soviet space as well as from different foreign countries (from Western and Northern Europe, United States, Canada and even from Cameroon, Australia and Korea) began their activities in the Polar Urals and Yamal, making it a 'battlefield' of different missionary principles and strategies.

As a result of current missionary activities, a highly competitive multi-religious landscape has developed in the Russian Arctic, with diverse religious domains: a

number of Protestant movements (mostly Baptism and Pentecostalism), the Russian Orthodox Church, native religious practices and shamanism.

However, the picture was amplified with the persistence of Soviet atheistic discourse on 'destructive foreign religious sects' and local authorities' policy of putting pressure upon and intimidating Protestant religious associations. The endurance of Soviet anti-religious ideology and the issue of 'destructive sects' dominated local public discourse and influenced the ways in which the local authorities reacted to recent religious rearrangements.

From the very beginning of the Evangelical movements in the post-Soviet Arctic up to the present, the public discourse has nearly exploded with the discussion of 'sectarian missionaries', who were believed to manipulate ordinary people, making them into converted zombies who brought their last property to the church, who burned sacred sites in the tundra and destroyed the traditional culture of indigenous peoples. In Yamal Okrug, no matter whether on regional TV programs, seminars, or publications in local media, everyone debated the appearance of new 'sects' in the tundra. As recently as in November 2012 a seminar was held in the Komi Republic titled 'Indigenous peoples as an object of influence from an alien culture in the Russian North' (*Korennye narody kak ob'ekt vozdeistviia chuzherodnoi kultury na Russkom Severe*), during which the participants (among whom were social and political activists, businessmen, and Russian Orthodox priests) discussed the influence of such 'alien cultural components' as Baptist missionaries among Nenets reindeer herders, arguing that 'sectarian' missionary initiatives threaten the traditional cultures of the peoples of the North.

In my conversations with Yamal officials, they too expressed their concern regarding the arrival of 'sectarians'. The Head of the Yamal State Duma and the President of RAIPON[17], Sergei Khariuchi (a Nenets by origin) told me, 'With great regret, in my opinion, Protestant culture is a culture that pursues other objects, as I suspected. I always get signals from different parts of the tundra about the appearance of missionaries. In my opinion they are interested in putting people in economic bondage, dependence'. In the same way, the Head of the Department on Affairs of Indigenous peoples of the North in Salekhard, Lidia Vello expressed her concern, 'Unfortunately, there are some suspicions that they [Protestant missionaries] exert massive pressure. They purposefully travel all over Russia! And purposefully cover precisely indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. This speaks to the unhealthy tendency of their activity. And why isn't our state concerned with that? He [a

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[17] RAIPON – Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North.

missionary] has intruded, impertinently and shamelessly, and preached. And we can only guess and suspect what kind of methods they use. We never publicize it anywhere.'

Another official, who asked not to be named, reported that almost every missionary coming to Yamal was being watched by the Federal Security Service. The person was convinced that some 'sectarian missionaries' used hypnotic or other illegal physiological techniques in order to convert people. Arguing that 'every new religious movement has at its foundation first of all a physiological approach', some Yamal officials even asked the Moscow State Research Centre of Social and Forensic Psychiatry to research the psychological methods of pressure used by 'sectarian' missionaries. It seemed to be the last hope for local officials to prove the illegality of missionary initiatives.

Although in conversations with me the officials expressed only their personal opinions, and the official regional politics was regulated by the federal law granting religious freedom and freedom of consciousness, at the lower level of everyday life newly converted people experienced a range of social inequalities and discriminations, being stigmatized as 'sectarians'. If urban believers lived under the risk of being fired from their jobs, their tundra brothers in faith faced sometimes no less serious hardship in their relations with state authorities. For example, there was an incident when some Baptist nomadic Nenets were denied provisions in a tundra trading outpost. A woman who refused to sell them foodstuffs explained that a state deputy recently visited that trading outpost, ordering her to treat tundra believers as toughly as possible, and not to serve them at all.

Likewise, Nadia told me:

> We are being teased as Baptists, as if Baptist is an abusive word. So when we went [to prayer meetings] we were ashamed when were asked where we go. We lied, saying that were going on a visit to a friend. Once a believer was carrying the Bible in his bag, and someone asked him, 'Aren't you carrying God in your bag?'... People stopped dealing with us. When we arrive [to someone's campsite], they close their *chums* and don't let us come in and have some tea – they are afraid of Baptists.

Her sister Marina continues later on:

> At the beginning we were cussed out, 'Oh, Baptists, Baptists!' saying that we are sectarians. But we tried not to notice that. We are not sectarians – we don't scarify anybody, don't tear up cats or anybody else, don't sacrifice our sisters or brothers. We just believe, read and glorify.

If actual local politics was not always as consistently oppressive towards new religious movements as it was sometimes represented by believers themselves, nevertheless, the idea of religious persecution, martyrdom, and spiritual resistance were those stumbling blocks upon which the life of the Beloyarsk religious community (as well as many others in the Polar Urals) was built. The motive of ongoing religious oppressions remained the dominant frame throughout discourses and the constituent pattern for believers' system of identities, as well as their social expectations and political attitudes.

This constituted one of the most wrenching moments of my field work: living in Beloyarsk and interacting with believers, I was always under suspicion that I was seeking to betray 'their people'. 'You will write your book about us,' said a young Nenets woman, 'and when everybody reads it they will come and kill all Baptists here, or send us to prison!' This leitmotif in conversion stories determined people's social expectations, framed their interaction with authority and influenced the way they perceived themselves and their surroundings.

In this chapter I explore the background of the emerging diverse and competitive religiosity in the Arctic and across post-Soviet Russia, and describe the main tensions that determine religious activity in Yamal.

I see two sources for the precariousness of religious life of Arctic Protestant communities: 1) Religion-state relations and the state policy based on the 'sectarian' discourse and the binary opposition 'traditional/non-traditional religions'. In this frame the Russian Orthodox Church is represented as traditional against the background of non-traditional, hence foreign and alien, evangelical missionary movements; 2) The politics of indigenism and the indigenous movement, which is based on the construction of native traditional religions and (neo)shamanism. In such a context Protestant missionary initiatives come into conflict with regional policy towards the promotion of 'Nenets native religion'. In the Yamal Okrug, where extractive industry impacts not only the local economy, but also nomadic livelihood, indigenous activism is significantly directed towards lands protection and claims for financial support for those people who lose their lands as a result of industrial development. Thus, the articulation and promotion of indigenism is intertwined with abundant gas and oil industry financing. The Protestant missionary initiatives and the increasing number of conversions among the native population, thereby, are regarded as diluting indigeneity, and hence as also threatening indigenous financial support.

2.1   FOREIGN MISSION CRUSADES AND INTERNAL PRECONDITIONS

Post-Soviet religious changes are often called 'religious revival' or 'religious boom'. Some scholars are convinced that post-Soviet Russia has been experiencing the greatest religious revival in human history (Greeley 1994; Krindatch 2004).

Seemingly few were left to be revived after 70 years of enforced secularization and religious oppressions. However, as recently after the collapse of Soviet Union as 1993, the Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research reported an increase of believers between 1989 and 1993 from 30% to 50% (Borzenko 1993). Later surveys showed a continuing rise in personal religiosity in Russia: by 2002 already 57% of Russians identified themselves as believers (Krindatch 2004:126). One of the first national studies of religion in post-Socialist Russia conducted by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) showed in 1991 that by the time of the USSR collapse, approximately half the population in Russia were theists, and about 30% of them reported that they had recently switched from atheism to theism, and the religious experience of 'turning point' in their lives emerged as recently as the late 1980s (Greeley 1994). According to Andrew Greeley, in Russia the proportion of newly-converted was higher than in any other formerly communist Eastern European country (Greeley, 1994:257). Alexey Krindatch also posits that in post-Soviet Russia the level of people's trust in religious organizations was probably one of the highest in the world (Krindatch 2004:130).

The change appeared to be rapid and swift. From an officially atheist country with religious life banned, Russia, in a few years, had turned into a land where multiple religious practices and beliefs were flourishing both in public and personal spheres.

Diverse well-financed missionary crusades from USA, Canada, Korea, Germany, Sweden, Finland and other countries have targeted their work in post-Soviet lands, which they considered a godless 'Evil Empire'. As surveys conducted by the East-West Church and Ministry Report show, in less than 10 years the number of evangelical missionary groups entering the country rose from 311 in 1989 to more than 5,600 in 1997 (Elliott &Corrado 1997; Elliott 1997). Yet the number is approximate, because a lot of solo missionaries arrived in Russia on tourist visas, and therefore were 'invisible' for statistics. The change appeared to be dramatic: those foreign religious activists who previously could not receive a visa to enter the Soviet Union now were kindly invited to meet with authorities. In November 1991, nineteen American Evangelical leaders met with Mikhail Gorbachev and a KGB vice chairman Mikhail Stoliarov, who told them, 'Political questions cannot be decided until there is sincere repentance, a return to faith

by the people... I have been a member of the Party for twenty years. In our study of scientific atheism, we were taught that religion divides people. Now we see the opposite: love for God can only unite' (cited in Elliott & Deyneka 1999:198). As John Anderson sarcastically notes, 'Increasingly the authorities were discovering that in a time of political reform even opium had its uses' (Anderson 1994:141).

The flow of evangelical missionaries from abroad evoked the growth of evangelicalism in Russia. Foreign missionaries with financial, material and logistical support gathered thousands people while preaching at stadiums, houses of culture, on the streets, organizing concerts, using mass-media, providing humanitarian aid, distributing free literature and of course Bibles right on the streets (Wanner 2007:131-146). Numerous institutions involved in Bible publishing and translations established their branches in Russia and began their activities. The American Bible Society, the United Bible Society and the Russian Bible Society published 6,459,835 Bibles and New Testaments in the Soviet Union and its successor states from 1987 to 1996 (Elliott & Corrado 1997:345). Wycliffe Bible Translations, American Bible Society, Russian Bible Society, Pioneer Bible Translators, and Institute for Bible Translation have begun translation of the Bible and the New Testament in 75 languages in Russia (Elliott & Deyneka 1999:202).

Religion became a fashion, and often religiosity remained nominal, rather than sincere commitment. In the peak of the 'religious boom' in the mid-1990s the percentage of those who declared themselves to be Orthodox was 2.3 times higher than the percentage of those who defined themselves as 'believers in God' (Krindatch 2004; Knox 2008:288). There is a popular term in Russia, 'candleholders' (*podsvechniki*), for those whose religiosity is reduced to occasional visits to the church, burning candles without considerable knowledge of or belief in Christian doctrines. In spite of the fact that the majority of Russian people consider themselves to be Orthodox, according to numerous surveys on the most common indicators of religiosity (regular attendance of religious sermons, participation in prayers, the Eucharist, the knowledge of and belief in the main Christian dogmas), Russia remains one of the most secular countries (Borzenko 1993; Filatov 2005). Only 10% of those who consider themselves Orthodox actually regularly attend church and participate in Orthodox rituals (Borzenko 1993:232). Among those newly converted in Protestant churches, many were more interested in humanitarian aid and other financial support provided by foreign missionaries rather than their religious messages. Mark Elliott, a missionary himself, for

instance, with regret reports how elderly women were provided tickets for a free meal in exchange for their presence in worship (Elliott 2000).

Post-Soviet restructuring evoked the revival of diverse indigenous religious movements in Russia. The Russian indigenous religious landscape reveals many religious variations: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, various Evangelical movements, Roman and Greek Catholicism, Lutheranism, Methodism, Judaism, Buddhism, Shamanism and countless local religious and para-religious practices. And after the Soviet Union fell apart, religious revival, invention, reconstruction and all other forms of religious creativity have defined a new circle of Russian history. As far as the late Soviet period when dissident movements were gradually coming out to the public sphere, it was clear that numerous alternative 'underground' social and cultural movements sparked the diversity of religious, quasi-religious, 'pop-religious' beliefs, healing magic, witchcraft, astrology, occultism, esotericism, UFOlogy, extrasensory practices, etc. (Lindquist 2006; Panchenko 2011). Under the veil of official atheistic Soviet ideology, the multiformity of religious practices and beliefs were flourishing.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the growth of the Russian Orthodox Church and its appearance in public space was the most remarkable. Orthodoxy is the religion of 33–40% of the total population in Russia, and approximately 66-75% of all believers in post-Soviet Russia (Krindatch 2004:118). Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church has an impact on a larger proportion of Russian citizens: many people who do not consider themselves to be Orthodox adherents or believers at all, nevertheless express their confidence in the Church (Krindatch 2004:117).

Alongside the dominance of Orthodox Christianity and Islam (11%of Russia's total population) – with a variety of movements within them – the increase of various indigenous Protestant movements in later years has been no less noticeable. During the Soviet period, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) was among the few Protestant organizations legalized in the Soviet Union; it was the umbrella church body uniting Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites and others who wished to be legalized. Those Protestants who were not registered within this official union and a few others continued to operate illegally. However, by 1997 the former Soviet Union counted already 35 Protestant church structures, the diversity of which continued to propagate by separation from each other, or by cooperating with foreign religious movements (Elliot & Corrado 1997).

In general, Post-Soviet religious activities were not entirely implanted by foreign influences, as popularly regarded. Moreover, as scholars argue, post-Soviet religious changes were more the consequence of internal reforms and changes within indigenous religious landscapes, rather than foreign influence, and although post-Soviet religious changes appeared to be radical, there was a certain continuity in religious life during the Soviet period and after (Anderson 1994:182-186; Zigon 2011; Panchenko 2011; see also Steinberg & Wanner 2008; Steinberg & Coleman 2007). As Alexander Panchenko posits (2011:141):

> [T]he division between 'Soviet' and 'post-Soviet' in the history of religion and morality might not be as solid as it seems to be. It is quite common for both scholars and the general public to think about contemporary Russia's new religious movements as 'eclectic' or even 'entropic' [Filatov 2002:447] religious culture grounded partly or totally in ideas and teachings borrowed from abroad. I would argue, on the contrary, that these movements should be considered some of the last remnants or survivals of late Soviet culture, and that their seemingly foreign appearance does not contradict their domestic heritage.

This argument is particularly relevant for our discussion of religious activities in the Arctic. As I posit, religious changes among the native population and predicaments of contemporary religious life to a large extent areinherited in the Soviet history of official culture and institutional ideology under which the variety of 'invisible', 'underground' cultural movements thrived with their own religious beliefs, moral discourses and ethical practices.

'Despite 70 years of socialism, God seems to be alive and well and living in all Russia', Greeley notes and then adds, 'because She never left' (Greeley 1994:255, 269). Missionaries did not arrive on scorched earth as they believed, and what appeared to be the loss of morality was actually rather the multiplicity of morality. As Jarrett Zigon argues after Catherine Wanner, Post-Soviet Russia is 'a place with multiple moralities where various sacred and secular moral discourses and ethical practices have become… legitimate options' (Zigon 2011:4; cf. Wanner 2007:10-11).

Religion-State Relations

Despite the argument on continuity between Soviet and post-Soviet religiosity, in Russia, however, during the 1990s and 2000s, public discourses were triggered by negative images of a 'flood' of foreign religions, and destructive cults and totalitarian sects. A quarter of the Russian population was in favour of direct restrictions on the activity of 'non-traditional' religious organizations in Russia (Krindatch 2004:135).

The stereotype of evangelical 'sects' as the product of foreign missionary initiatives was evoked by the general public attitude toward non-Orthodox denominations as *non-traditional*, and the dichotomy 'traditional/nontraditional religions' (then officially legalized by the Law of 1997) further extended to 'Russian/foreign'. Thus, even those Evangelical movements that have been in Russia for centuries were considered in public opinion as foreign (Knox 2008). Such categories as alien (*chuzherodnye*), dangerous, totalitarian cults, and destructive sects became frequent terms to refer to various non-Orthodox religious movements.

It was particularly Russian Orthodox leaders who talked about 'hordes of missionaries' who arrived to disturb Russian traditional spirituality. Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who later became Patriarch, said, 'For many Russians today, 'non-Orthodox' means those who have come to destroy the spiritual unity of the people and the Orthodox faith – spiritual colonizers who by fair means and foul try to tear the people away from their church' (cited in Witte & Bourdeaux 1999:73).

Hence, as recent as the foundation of the new Russian state, the government began to change its politics towards regulating religious life in a quite traditional Russian frame of state-church relations: following a centuries-old tradition of state control over religious activities, and associating political stability with controlled religious uniformity (Steinberg & Wanner 2008; Steinberg & Coleman 2007).

In 1993 the new Constitution was adopted by the Russian Federation guaranteeing full freedom of conscience and freedom of religion regardless of denomination. However, despite the declaration of religious freedom and religious tolerance, it is unlikely that it was fully observed in everyday life. Similar to the Soviet legislation that on paper guaranteed freedom of conscience, but violated it in practice, post-Soviet freedom of religion was relative and never fully in practice. As I personally observed, in the Polar Urals, like in many other Russian provinces, religious freedom, although affirmed on paper, was consistently violated on the level of everyday life; and regional/local authorities often based their policy on the Soviet and pre-Soviet 'sectarian discourse', sometimes publicly complaining against the so called 'totalitarian sects' and 'destructive cults'. The Soviet model of 'strategies beyond the law' remained a dominant frame of post-Soviet Russian social life and the religious sphere was no exception (cf. Humphrey 2002).

Furthermore, some regions adopted local legislation significantly contradicting the actual federal laws, and discriminatory towards religious missionary activity and religious minorities (Homer & Uzzell 1999; Knox 2008; Wanner 2007:134). As Homer

and Uzzell report, from 1993 to 1997, more than one-third of Russia's 89provincial governments enacted laws shrinking the rights of foreign religious organizations and religious minorities; some of them were really repressive and denied basic rights of believers to profess their faith and to perform religious rituals, 'except in tightly restricted, and presumably invisible, places' (Homer & Uzzell 1999:297). Those religious groups defined as 'sects' obtained a 'second-class' status in comparison with the so called 'traditional religions', and were required to undergo an annual registration procedure, providing information on sources of funding, number of members, forms and methods of attracting new members, as well as how their doctrines differed from traditional religions, etc. (Homer & Uzzell 1999:296-297).

Zoe Knox refers to the annual reports of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in 2000, 2003 and 2006, in which Russia was mentioned as one of the countries where human rights and religious freedom were discriminated against (Knox 2008:282-283). The 2006 report stated, 'The deterioration in conditions for religious freedom and other human rights appears to be a direct consequence of the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Russian government and the growing influence of chauvinistic groups in Russian society, which seem to be tolerated by the government' (cited in Knox 2008:303). Thus, simultaneously with 'westernization' as anti-Soviet pathos, the general anti-Western, nationalistic and even xenophobic sentiments were growing in post-Soviet Russian society. The religious sphere with new legislation, general attitudes and public discourses revolving around 'foreign religions' revealed itself as one of the most typical conflicting zones of post-Socialism. Indeed, the Russian Orthodox Church played a considerable role in the designing of the new political trend on the regulation of Orthodox and non-Orthodox rights. In the words of the Metropolitan of Kursk Yuvenalii, 'Europe-imitation (*yevropeinichanie*) became an illness of Russian life and created a danger of the dissolution of Holy Orthodoxy in a strange (*nevidannyi*) combination of all heresies, under the masks of which is hiding an image of the Beast' (cit.by Krasikov 2005:46).

Finally, provincial legislation practices have been federalized, and in 1997 a new Federal Law 'On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations was adopted'[18] (Krasikov 1998; Elliot 2000; Knox 2008; Daniel & Marsh 2007). The Law was the state

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[18] The original text of the Law: Federal'nyi Zakon ot 26 Sentiabria 1997 No. 125-FZ "O Svobode sovesti i o religioznykh ob"edineniiakh". In: *Sobranie Zakonodatel'stva RF*. 29 Sept. 1997. No.3, Article 4465. Or: *Rossiisakaia Gazeta*, No. 190, October 1, 1997.

reaction on foreign missionary organizations, and a response to already existing regional practices in Russia, as well as the outcome of the intense pressure of the Orthodox Church (Krasikov 2005:47-50; Daniel & Marsh 2007; Anderson 1994:1994).

The Law eventually assigned and legalized already existing categories and the language of religious discourse in Russia, framing the religious landscape within traditional/non-traditional categories. Maintaining hierarchy and inequality among religious institutions, the Law began with the recognition of the Russian Orthodox Church and its special role in the history of Russia, in the formation and development of Russian 'spirituality' and culture. The main point was the division between registered 'religious organizations' and non-registered 'religious groups'. Religious institutions could be called 'religious organizations' only if they had existed in Russia for not less than fifteen years prior to the passage of the Law – only in this case were they given special privileges. Those who could not document their existence on the territory of USSR for a given period – among them were the most persecuted communities that stayed illegal throughout the Soviet period – were unable to register as 'religious organizations' and had to be labelled as 'religious groups'. 'Religious groups' found themselves without the right to own property, to receive tax privileges, to own or operate educational and other institutions, to conduct charitable activities, to conduct religious rites in public space (hospitals, children's homes, prisons, etc.), to invite foreign citizens for professional religious activity, or to produce, import, export and distribute religious literature, printed, audio and video materials. Moreover, only those centralized religious associations that 'acted on a legal basis' for no fewer than fifty years (i.e., during Stalin's years and after!) had the right to use words 'Russia' or 'Russian' in their titles. In other words, the Law established fifteen years for religious 'traditionality' and fifty years for this traditionality to become ethnically Russian. Correspondingly, the remaining religious diversity fell under the category of non-traditional and presumably foreign, despite the fact that many of them had existed in Russia for centuries.

Similar to the Soviet policy, the registration procedure became a key feature of the 1997 Law: those non-traditional religions that are not able to prove their existence in Russia since 1982 must seek annual approval from local authorities. The difficult and discriminating annual registration process of religious organizations, according to Catherine Wanner, becomes a means to 'systematically disempower' those

denominations that are now classified as non-traditional religious groups (Wanner 2007:133-134).[19]

Traditionally having had a close relationship between religion and the state (and more often state control over religious organizations), by the mid-1990s Russia turned back to this familiar framework. The Russian Orthodox Church acquired a privileged position, and similar to the Late Imperial practice, Western evangelism in post-Soviet Russia was regarded as proselytism on the territory canonically belonging to the Orthodox Church (Elliott 2000; cf. Coleman 2005).

Since the beginning of Putin's era, the Orthodox Church has appeared as one of the most influential and powerful institutions in Russia. Its increasing political power and the intimate relationship between the Kremlin and the Patriarchate in some respects was furthered by the idea of conflation of national and religious identities. The historically rooted articulation between being Orthodox and being Russian has revealed itself with no less intensity in post-Soviet Russia (Knox 2008:287-8; cf. Coleman 2005; 2007:206 on the Orthodoxy that was an integral ingredient of national, ethnic, family and community identities in pre-Revolutionary Russia).

Thus, 'Russian' and 'Orthodox' are traditionally regarded as synonyms in nationalistic discourse. Conversely, non-traditional religions and foreign missionaries more frequently came to be interpreted as endangering the Russian nation and Russian culture, as being 'detrimental to Russia's moral fabric' (Daniel & Marsh 2007:10; Coleman 2007; Knox 2008; Anderson 1994:214). As Zoe Knox points out, 'the dichotomy of the traditional/nontraditional divide can also be extended to Russian/foreign, legitimate/illegitimate, and safe/unsafe' (Knox 2008:304).

Unlike Orthodox attitudes, Evangelical religiosity has never conflated religious/congregational identities with national or ethnic ones. The Evangelical notion of 'born-again' and the pathos of rupture it entails (rupture from the social and personal past and surrounding present) notably differ from the Orthodox concept of inherited ethno-religiosity (Wanner 2007:136). This is what allows Evangelical Christianity to avoid cultural barriers more easily, but simultaneously it is particularly what makes its missionary initiatives in Russia so challenging.

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[19]The most challenging component of the 1997 Law was the requirement of re-registration of all religious organizations younger than fifteen years by March 1999 in order to regain their legal status; if not, they had to be juridically 'liquidated'. Wallace Daniel and Christopher Marsh report about 2095 religious groups that were found to be subject to dissolution by the Ministry of Justice after completion of the re-registration process (Daniel & Marsh 2007:12). By May 2002, 980 religious organizations in Russia had been dissolved (ibid.). However, the number of newly registered religious organizations continued to grow in the following years, even though foreign missionary activity was significantly limited (Krasikov 1998; Daniel & Marsh 2007:13).

2.2 ARCTIC RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: DIALOGUE, COMPETITION, CONFLICT

Beloyarsk is my pain till the end of my days. It is my pain, my life, a piece of myself was left there…

Yevgenii, a former missionary in Beloyarsk.

In Search of the Last Pagans: Church Planting at the End of the Earth

Something was burning inside my heart. I thought, I have already told [the Word] to Russians, but Nenets and Khanty still don't know. What if I'd tell them? So, I took skis and went to the Khanty. First, they set dogs on me, but I escaped on a pile of logs, praying to the Lord. Then a woman rescued me, driving the dogs away and saying, 'Come on, I'll give you some tea!' I was happy enough. Eventually I pestered them all by telling about God. They were giving me tea and I was telling them about Jesus Christ. So, this is how our [first] communication happened… They all were living in such poverty, miserable hovels, half underground. I visited them every second day, skiing many kilometres. Then Canadian missionaries arrived. Although they were Pentecostals, it didn't make any difference to me, as long as I didn't preach alone. They began to bring clothes a lot; they brought [humanitarian] aid, money. As a result they provided clothes for the entire settlement, although Khanty began to sell those clothes or to exchange them for bread – ten loaves of bread for one jacket – and to wear their old clothes back again.

Then I came to ask a mayor for a little house for our prayer meetings. He didn't give me a house, but instead he gave me a part of a hut [*barak*], where nobody wanted to live, for it was believed to be a cursed place. We'd taken it, brought chairs and a pulpit and began to preach. Eventually an entire settlement was converted [*uverovat'*] – everybody except the mayor and his family.

Then I joined efforts with Tolik [another Russian missionary] and his Americans [missionaries]. There were also Germans who often visited us; together with them we dug up [*izlopatit'*] the whole tundra. They were really hard workers. And they supported our church a lot, setting it on its feet…

But at the end of the day, I once arrived to the settlement and found that the prayer house was closed. When I asked the mayor, what had happened, he answered that an Orthodox priest had come here arguing, 'Have you propagated sectarians here?' And that's it, they closed us. We couldn't do anything. That priest made a big reversal [*perevorot*]. And the mayor asked us not to come here anymore; otherwise he'd call the police. He also said that the Orthodox Church was going to build its house here to gather people. But they haven't done it yet. Instead they are going to build a new church near the government [in Salekhard].

When this village was closed to me, I simply went on and started my missionary work in the next village and so on, until the story wouldn't repeat itself.

This story, narrated by a Russian Evangelical missionary living in Salekhard, is a typical image of the first missionary activities in the post-Soviet North. The story embraces all parties engaged in a cross-cultural encounter: Russian missionaries (the so-called 'group BUR': Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians) who live mostly in Salekhard and have established the first communities in the surrounding area; short-term foreign missionaries, who financially support religious communities and their believers; a special missionary target – the tundra and rural settlements inhabited mostly by indigenous people (Nenets or Khanty), but majorly governed by Russian authorities; local authorities who are in power either to tolerate or to resist the religious activities of their citizens; and the Russian Orthodox Church, which stays under government protection and seeks power through local authorities, basing its policy according to an assumption of historical priority.

Siberia has become one of the most striking spots of recent changes on the Russian religious map, and is associated with an increasing presence of various Protestant denominations and churches in its vast territories (Krindatch 2004:131; Dudarenok 2005). By the early 1990s the growing, global phenomenon of short-term missions reached even the most remote places of Russia, transforming and rearranging the Siberian religious landscapes. With the fall of the Soviet Union and opened frontiers, numerous Protestant missionary movements have targeted Siberia and the Russian Arctic – those 'godless' lands and pagan strongholds, which are considered as a spiritual blind spot on the map of world evangelization (see Krindatch 2004). Multiple American, Western European and Russian Evangelical ministries have been working in Siberia, evangelizing, organizing conferences, establishing religious infrastructure, translating and publishing literature in local languages (see statistics report on Siberia in Brumbelow 1995).

However, unexpectedly for some visiting foreign missionaries, the Far North turned out not to be an empty 'godless' space. Despite this popular view, the Siberian conversion saga has been sparked not only by the foreign missionary crusade, but is also contributed to by *internal 're-colonization'* from within the post-Soviet space.

Historically Siberia used to be a place for exile, and during the Soviet period a number of prison camps were built on the territory of the Polar Urals and Yamal. Numerous Protestant believers were prisoners here or were deported here during the Soviet anti-religious politics; many of those 'persecuted for the faith' settled in the Far North after their discharge, continuing to plant religious communities here. Besides, before and during WWII, millions of people were deported to Siberia, including Yamal

and the Polar Urals. Among them were Germans, Kalmyks, Finns, Lithuanians, and Moldavians. Many of them carried to the North their religious traditions.

This laid the groundwork for further post-Soviet religious activities in the Far North. Thus, for example, the arctic city of Vorkuta (Komi Republic) – 'the symbol of suffering of God's people for the truth', the area of the biggest Soviet prisons, forced labour camps and places for deportation – eventually became a home for numerous Pentecostal communities and one of the most significant mission sources for the Arctic tundra in 1990s-2000s.

In some respects, it was also the general post-Soviet economic crisis that contributed to the Siberian missionary movement, particularly in the Russian Far North. The majority among the first missionaries and founders of Arctic churches were incomers from Ukraine and Southern Russia, who came to the Far North during the 1980s-1990s (the time of intense economic crisis) in pursuit of employment in the sphere of Northern extractive industries and in search of the so called 'northern bonuses' (augmented salaries, longer holidays, etc.). Many of the incomers were believers and active members of Christian evangelical churches at home, since historically Ukraine was the home of the largest Protestant communities in the Soviet Union and even in Europe (Wanner 2007). Many migrants arrived here for temporary work, but stayed for their entire lives, organizing religious communities in the same way, as was common in their homes left behind in what they call 'the mainland'. Among such migrant workers were the then-Baptist bishops of Tiumen' Oblast', Pavel Rodak and Sergei Kubata, who began to plant churches and organize religious infrastructure in 1990.

These planted seeds of the first evangelical groups were now growing into communities and registered churches, attracting new adherents, as well as calling for new religious workers from the 'Big land' after the fall of Soviet Union. Thus it was Russia itself and Ukraine that supplied the first missionaries and pastors for Arctic churches (as Wanner [2007] reports, in 2001 over a third of Ukrainian missionaries worked in Russia).

Alexei Teleus, contemporary Bishop of Baptist churches in the YNAO, who also left Ukraine 20 years ago, aiming to work as a geologist in the Far North, told me a story of church-planting in post-Soviet Tiumen' Oblast'. By the time of the beginning of missionary activities in the 1990s, there were only two officially registered Baptist churches in the entire Tiumen' Oblast' (with a territory more than twice the size of France, although with a population almost 20 times less). In Salekhard, the capital of the

YNAO, the first Baptist church was registered in 1991, thus opening ways for further dissemination of Christian Evangelical diversity in the Yamal and the Polar Ural landscape. A few years later in every town, village and the most distant tundra settlements of Yamal and the Polar Ural region, churches and communities of Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics had been planted.

At the beginning of the missionary movement, when Federal politics had not yet moved toward the restriction of foreign missionary activity, the cooperation between local missionary communities and international Christian organizations was well arranged, providing good financial support for the Arctic missionary, for building prayer houses all over Yamal, buying transportation and organizing charity work among Northerners.

During the 1990s several missionary 'expeditions' called 'Jesus to the peoples of Siberia' were taken on boats to the North, organized by a well-known Baptist minister Iosif Bondarenko, an active figure of the 'sectarian underground' and a political prisoner 'for the faith' during Soviet times. The Russian Union of ECB organized its missionary project '*Mnogotsvetie Rossii*' (Multicolor Russia), with the priority of bringing the Gospel to native people and migrant workers in the Far North. A significant impulse for missionary movements in Yamal and the Polar Urals was sparked by the Association '*Dukhovnoe Vozrozhdenie*' (Spiritual revival) organized by Peter Deyneka's Russian Ministries. No less important was the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement in the Far North. Alongside the international impact (for example, the Canadian Pentecostal mission of the Bill Prankard Evangelistic Association), there were Pentecostal and Charismatic mission centres in Vorkuta, and the Charismatic movement in the Yamal town Novyi Urengoi, which was influential in the mid-1990s.

Plate 2.1 Prayer house of Evangelical Christians
Blagaia Vest' in Salekhard.

Plate 2.2 Prayer house of Baptist Union
(RUECB) in Salekhard.
Photo by Dmitry Arzyutov.

Plate 2.3 Prayer house of the Baptist Brotherhood
(ICCECB) in Vorkuta.

Plate 2.4 Prayer house of the Charismatic
community in Salekhard.

At the beginning of the missionary movement the newly organized Protestant movements worked generally in urban spaces, populated mostly by incoming Russians and Ukrainians. However, as some missionaries reported, it was sometimes unexpectedly revealed that beyond the borders of the renovated and well-organized infrastructure of Arctic towns, there was another world of tundra people, who spoke unknown languages, wore strange clothes and worshiped their own gods.

An Evangelical minister in Salekhard explained:

We made an original discovery: strange people arrived from the tundra and came to our church. And the church's face began to change, because increasingly more Nenets began to come to the church and to appeal to God. Then we realized that local Russian people who have been living here all their lives know nothing about the Nenets. If you ask them right now, who are the Nenets, they wouldn't answer you. People don't know. So, we realized that they [Nenets] are pagan people. And the question arose, how to work with them, how to bring the Gospel to them? They suffered social needs and spiritual needs, but we didn't know what to do with them and

couldn't understand any words [in Nenets]. How can we give them spiritual food if we don't know their language and culture? This is how we began our research, our social work and preaching among indigenous people.

Thus, in the late-1990s numerous missionary programs were launched, targeting particularly the indigenous population in the tundra and remote ethnic settlements. Groups of Bible translators arrived to Yamal and the Polar Urals with the purpose of translating the Gospel into the Nenets and Khanty languages. Mission centres bought or rented snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and boats in order to reach the most distant tundra sites.

Many young and full-of-energy 'brothers' and 'sisters' arrived in the tundra for the so called 'youth work' (*molodëzhnoe sluzhenie*). They were not considered missionaries in a proper sense, but rather beginners or probationers who prepared people for upcoming missionary work. Most of them usually arrived during summer time with the aim to organize tundra Christian camps, but there were some young Christian workers who visited Nenets chums (both European and Siberian) more regularly, staying in the tundra and villages for several months. They were usually engaged in Christian education, preaching and reading the Bible, but also helped in household and child minding, taught reading and writing to the illiterate Nenets, as well as provided instructions in hygiene and sanitation. Once, a family of converted tundra Nenets told me a story about a believing sister, who spent several months at their chum teaching them music and singing.

Plate 2.5 Missionary trip to the tundra Nenets. Photos from the archive of the Church *Blagaia Vest'*, Salekhard.

Plate 2.6 Missionary trip to the tundra Nenets. Photos from the archive of the Church *Blagaia Vest'*, Salekhard.

Plate 2.7 Nenets children holding the Gospel translated
into Nenets. Photo from the archive of the Church
Blagaia Vest', Salekhard.

On the emerging religious spectrum there was one missionary church that particularly distinguished itself in the Arctic mission. The Baptist Brotherhood of the International Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christians Baptists (ICCECB) became the most successful in its missionary activity among the indigenous people, particularly amongst the tundra Nenets. With its mission centre in Vorkuta (Komi Republic), equipped with modern vehicles, satellite communication, and most importantly, with a well organized religious network throughout post-Soviet space, the Brotherhood spread its influence all over Yamal, the Polar Ural and European tundra regions.

The Brotherhood is one the most conservative Evangelical movements in Russia. Its leaders do to not hesitate to call themselves fundamentalists, declaring that the Brotherhood follows the 'narrow path' of believing ascetics, who, in the name of Christ and his Kingdom, renounce the world with its prosperity, wealth, commodity and attractions. As I will show in Chapter 4, the Brotherhood's contemporary policy, social attitudes and the system of identities are deeply rooted in the Soviet-era religious persecutions in Russia. The motive of on-going religious persecutions and the position of flat refusal of any kind of relations with the state and local authorities are still the most important constituent motives in their identity-building. Its adherents describe themselves as living as in the olden times (*po-starinke*): they follow the most severe discipline rules affecting every aspects of everyday life, have an ascetic morality, and a strictly prescribed dress-code.

To sum up, following God's call to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth, as well as the romantic atmosphere of adventure, numerous missionaries headed to the snowbound tundra – a seemingly empty, dangerous and alien place – to meet and convert indigenous nomadic people popularly imagined as backward and cultureless. Missionaries aimed to bring to the natives the Gospel and 'culture', spiritual food and material assistance, alongside their vision of social order and cultural logic.

For many missionaries, even after many years of their life in the Arctic, tundra space and its unchanged lifestyle still seemed strange and alien. However, some other missionaries got the feel of tundra life and its inhabitants; some of them could even be impressive with their excellent knowledge of nomadic routes and maps of nomadic campsites; they were accustomed to and easy with tundra movement, life in a chum, and tundra food. Bringing the new style of life, they themselves were eventually converted to an indigenous conceptualization of tundra space and time, deeply immersing themselves into the native world and its values.

Religious 'Warfare'

The Nenets of Beloyarsk village and surrounding tundra were found at the epicentre of missionary activity. A gateway to the tundra, located at a close distance from Salekhard and Vorkuta, Beloyarsk became a platform upon which different missionary movements realized their various missionary strategies, struggled for the sphere of influence over people and territories, and established their network.

This has become a starting point for all further tensions, power redistributions, religious conflicts and rearrangements on the diverse and competitive religious landscape. Beloyarsk religious life most eloquently reflected the Arctic religious landscape with quite confused boundaries between religious domains, and more often with obvious tensions between them. Yamal became a 'battlefield' of all against all among every missionary and every religious community.

When I first arrived to Salekhard and then to Beloyarsk for my field work, I was surprised by the degree of tension between different religious communities. And when I was mistakenly taken for a visiting missionary, I faced a really hostile treatment: nobody wished to talk to me, repeating as a mantra that they will manage their business by themselves. Then one local missionary explained the situation in the following way:

> Nowadays there are many missions that want to come here, but we don't let them [come here]. Because they do only harm. I am sure there exist destructive sects. Never mind that they want to evangelize and so on, we don't let them come here, don't cooperate with them, and sometimes even

prevent them from their activity. I would rather complain against them to the local administration than let them go to the tundra.

These words, told by a Protestant, himself a missionary, reflect the general atmosphere of religious interrelations in Yamal, as well as the general situation in Russia, in which the increasing diversity in the Russian 'religious landscape' has resulted in competition between numerous religious movements; the battle for Russian souls has caused commotion and inter-religious conflicts (Pelkmans 2009b; Anderson 1994:186-192).

Thus, the Beloyarsk story of re-conversions was not unique and reflected the common practices of the Yamal and Polar Ural religious landscape, where multiple-conversion experiences became a nexus for the interaction between different belief systems, and people's religious life was determined by the continual experiencing of symbolic borders: constructing, maintaining, and crossing borders of religious domains.

This conflict environment was intended to maintain quite distinct symbolic boundaries between each religious domain; however, in believers' personal lives, these boundaries remained transparent and flexible: people travelled within this religious landscape, crossed the symbolic borders, changed religious affiliation or were part of two religious domains at the same time. However, while crossing religious borders, believers grasped the general conflicting attitudes. As a result, religious 'warfare' was transferred and expanded into other dimensions of everyday life, particularly determining social relations in the tundra. I heard many stories telling, for example, that Baptist Nenets refused to communicate and cooperate in daily tundra activities with their Pentecostal fellows, or when both parties refused to arrange marriages between them, sometimes even dividing their pastures according religious principles.

Most missionaries acknowledged the problem that their own religious tensions had been transmitted into tundra social relations. 'Unfortunately, this is transmitted into the tundra', argued one of them. 'And people there begin to get separated [*delit' mezhdu soboi*], arguing with each other and saying: "you are a Baptist, and you are a Pentecostal!" A split occurred for that reason. There are the Council of Church and registered Baptists, and there are Charismatics and Pentecostals. And different groups of the Nenets and Khanty have been converted from different missions. And often one missionary says [about the other]: "these are not true believers, they are from devil". And as a result we've got a conflict [in the tundra].'

Evangelical interreligious tensions were complicated with general anti-sectarian discourse and local authorities' policy of hostility towards newly established Protestant communities. In addition, the emerging political influence of the Russian Orthodox Church significantly affetcs the dynamics of religious life in the Arctic.

The Orthodox Church is almost invisible on the missionary landscape of the Arctic; it does not have intensive missionary work among the natives in the tundra either, and Orthodox adherents in Yamal are mainly Russian incomers. In most cases Orthodox activities in the North are confined to building churches and chapels in towns and villages as markers of territory control. However, being associated with state policy and staying under government protection, the Church claims to hold power over the territory, and cooperates with local authorities in order to resist Protestant 'expansion'. According to the assumption of *historical priority* and strengthened by state support, Orthodoxy cultivates the idea of being traditional and pristine in the Arctic (cf. Wiget & Balalaeva 2007:4). Hence, local indigenous activists and native intellectuals in Yamal and the Polar Urals often present the Russian Orthodox Church as a truly 'traditional' Nenets religion that never comes into conflict with 'indigenous' Nenets religious practices.

2.3   THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'NENETS INDIGENOUS RELIGION'

> *Nowadays the administration attempts to preserve shamanism among us. I don't know why they do that. Perhaps for the tourism…*
>
> A Nenets man

Besides the 'sectarian' discourse and attempts to restrict missionary activity in Russia with the existence of discriminatory regional religious legislation, there was another source of tension, which made Protestant religious conversion among indigenous peoples of Siberia even more challenging. It was the politics of indigenism and the so called indigenous movement crafted during the late Soviet and post-Soviet period that came into conflict with missionary movements.

Post-Soviet social, political, and religious changes, the 'parade of sovereignty declarations', and the growth of nationalism in Russia extended to indigenous peoples of Siberia and stimulated the emergence of *indigeneity* as a political and cultural trend

in Siberian ethnically-based regions (Gray 2005). Throughout Russia, people became aware and defensive of their ethnic identities, turning their ethnic self-consciousness into various forms of politicised nationalism and regionalism, based on ethnic distinctions. Ronald Niezen defines indigenism as 'a social movement with a strategic focus outside of states that seeks to activate rights to autonomy *within* states' (Niezen 2003:136). Siberia became one of the post-Soviet laboratories in creating political, social, cultural, and spiritual projects of indigeneity. Balzer and Vinokurova, focusing their research on the Sakha republic write, 'The explosion of ethnicity and nationalism came not simply out of a newly created post-Soviet societal void, nor a re-emergence of pre-Soviet identities, but rather as the result of a cumulative series of dynamic interethnic encounters that evolved throughout the twentieth century' (Balzer & Vinokurova 1996:114).

The new wave of neotraditionalism and more politicized indigenous activism re-emerged in the public arena and turned into the revitalization of ethnic-based autonomous districts and republics with their own legislative bodies and the foundation of indigenous organizations addressing indigenous issues and defending indigenous rights (Averin 1990; Gray 2005; 2007; Schindler 1992; Pika 1996; 1999). During the 1990s a number of federal laws, legislative decrees, and presidential edicts, as well as the new Constitution of 1993 attempted to insure indigenous rights to land and to self-government, although there were many obstacles with the implementation of indigenous legislation in practice (Fondahl & Poelzer1997; Murashko 1995; Sokolova et al. 1995). The 'Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North', founded in 1990, entered a new orbit in their activity, accumulated international financial support, and even attempted to become a part of the Federal government.

In the early 1990s there was a legally authorized *obshchina* movement. The creation of these territorialized, clan-based communities was regarded as a true authentic form of native social organization, aimed to become a means to revive native cultures and to pursue 'traditional' economies (Fondahl 1998; Gray 2001; Stammler 2005b). Simultaneously *obshchiny* demarcate indigenous social and political boundaries, create new 'ethnically pure geographic and political spaces' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:167), and increase control over land and natural resources, leading to what Gail Fondahl refers as to re-territorialization of native peoples, 're-asserting its control over a delimited geographic area and resources' (Fondahl 2005:103; 1998).

Various local indigenous societies, organizations, associations, museums and folk ensembles mushroomed throughout Siberia and the Far North. They promoted the idea

of revival of indigenous cultures and languages, and the protection of native lands and environment, though, as Debra Schindler rightly points out, such organization of native peoples into associations has increased ethnic tensions among native groups and between native and non-native populations in the Russian Far North (Schindler 1997:201). Many of the newly founded indigenous associations received international grants and financial support (Gray 2007). A range of scholars stress the crucial role of (Russianized) indigenous elite intellectuals (*natsional'naia intelligentsiia*) – a Soviet product – in indigenous movements (Gray 2007; Slezkine 1994:384).

Among other factors, the indigenous movement based its policy on the construction of 'indigenous religion', which was represented as the foundation of indigenous survival, as sensitive to environmental issues, and as guaranteeing moral order and social regulation.

Nenets Shamanism

In summer 2004, while attending the International Congress on Siberian Shamanism organized by the Moscow Centre for the Study of Shamanism, I witnessed the ritual of shamanic initiation of a Yamal Nenets man named Ivan Yadne. The so-called 'ritual of opening a way' was conducted by a new-ager and neo-shaman under the pseudonym Olard Elvil Dikson – a Russian man who got some knowledge about shamanic practices from Koriak, Kazakh and Khakass elders, and who was 'initiated' as a shaman by the Tyvinian throat singer-turned-shaman Nikolai Oorzhak and became a member of the Society of Tyvinian shamans 'Dundgur'. The ritual I attended took place in a health resort (sanatorium) near Moscow and was a part of the Congress program. Numerous anthropologists, shamans, spiritual entrepreneurs from various countries, as well as sanatorium guests attended the ritual. After the solemn ceremony a new-born shaman was awarded a diploma indicating that he had passed the initiation into a shaman and was responsible now to follow a special code of ethics in his shamanic activity.

The Yamal Okrug produces its own images of 'Nenets religion' and 'Nenets shamanism', which are constructed as ethnic symbols. In Salekhard city, the capital of Yamal region, culture and politics continue to be intertwined, and the image of 'Nenets religion' has become a trend driven by intellectuals[20]. Nenets intellectuals, writers, social activists, cultural workers and educators attempt to reify Nenets traditional

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[20] Although the Nenets are not the only indigenous population in Yamal – the Khanty and Selkups living here are also labelled as indigenous peoples – the Nenets are a titular group in the region, and some Nenets by origin hold high posts in local government: therefore, they have carte blanche in claiming privileged rights and in developing their indigeneity as a political tool.

culture and Nenets indigenous religion as something given, completed and objective, which all Nenets share, and which is essential for 'ethnic survival'. In this context the growing Protestant movements come into obvious contradiction with the regional indigenism policy.

Here, as elsewhere in post-Soviet Siberia, religion has become a tool for the mobilization of cultural and ethnic identities, and plays a crucial component part in Siberian indigenous activism (Balzer 2002; 2008; Humphrey 1998; 1999;Ventsel 2011). As Znamenski argues, spiritual revival becomes 'a planned ethnocultural enterprise' (Znamenski 2007:346).

In other words, the construction of indigeneity is interwoven with the construction or revitalization of indigenous religiosity and institutionalization of native 'national religions' on a par with Christianity or Islam. Throughout the expanses of Siberia the multiplicity of local religious beliefs and practices that were repressed and driven underground since the 1930s began to come out onto the public sphere as important ethnic symbols, and sometimes as political means in nationalist claims. Thus, during the 1990s, in the context of the ethnocultural revival of indigenous Siberia, 'shamanism' appeared highly visible in public life, resonating with the wider political-economic context of post-Soviet Siberia (particularly in Sakha (Yakutia), Tyva, Buriatia, Khakassia, Altay), as one of the ways to 're-indigenize' people and place (Znamenski 2007:345; see also Balzer 2005; 2012).

In those places where shamanic practices and rituals, though fragmentary, were secretly continuing during the Soviet period, people began to come out from the shadows and pretend to be official (legalized) spiritual leaders. In other places where shamanic tradition was totally interrupted during the Soviet anti-religious propaganda and had not been practiced for several decades, the 'reconstruction' or 'revival' of shamanism was derived from ethnographic literature and archival data, stimulated and supported by local authorities, urban intelligentsia, foreign indigenous NGOs and individual Western spiritual seekers (Balzer 1995; Hoppál 1996; Johansen 2001; Hamayon 2001; Zhukovskaia 2001; Fridman 2004;Znamenski 2007:344-361). Classical ethnographic books were being reprinted; trips abroad for international spiritual exchanges were undertaken; seminars and workshops were organized; numerous expeditions were conducted by academics, cultural workers or spiritual entrepreneurs into remote Siberian places in order to find a few elders who might provide bits and pieces of their ancient wisdom (for example, the project on the revitalization of shamanism headed by a Moscow anthropologist-turned-shamanic promoter Valentina

Kharitonova [2003; 2004]; or the 1993 expedition to Tyva in search of shamanism by the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, USA[21]).

The eclectic phenomenon of neoshamanism or 'urban shamanism' or 'post-modern shamanism' as part of a wider process of indigenous movements was much stimulated, inspired and constructed by the indigenous elite. In some regions, as in Tyva or Sakha (Yakutia) – where indigenous intellectuals are politically stronger than in other regions – indigenous activism was politically approved and supported, and became an important means in the construction of ethnic and national identities, in the promotion of cultural difference and authenticity, as well as in the political claims to sovereignty and land-rights (Hoppál 1996; Humphrey 1999; 2002; Balzer 2002; Anderson 2011; Ventsel 2012). According to Eva Fridman, shamanism became 'sacred geography' – it territorialized ethnicity, produced, legalized and sanctified locality and its borders, and rooted people within it, thus making them 'indigenous' (2004).

The 'construction' or 'revival' of shamanic practices turned into attempts to institutionalize it as a national religion more like a 'world religion' – 'the first religion of mankind' (e.g. Nenets religion, Khanty religion, Altaian religion, Tyvinian religion, etc.), with its organization, hierarchy, theology, missionary activity, and leaders (see for example some of the developers of native national religion: Anzhiganova 2001; Kenin-Lopsan 1999; Butanayev 1994; Tuguzhekova 2001). In Tyva Republic, for instance, shamanism was officially declared as one of the Tyvinian national religions along with Buddhism and Russian Orthodoxy (Hoppál 2003). In 1992 the first shaman organization was registered in Siberia – the Society of Tyvinian Shamans 'Dungur', with Mongush Kenin-Lopsan as the president and 'lifelong supreme shaman'. The organization issued certifications (special red cards proving their authenticity) and licenses to the shamans who joined 'Dungur' to engage in healing practices (Hoppál 2003:474; Znamenski 2007:349-351). 'Dungur' enjoyed governmental support and had several 'shaman houses' where shamans – not only Tyvinian, but American, French, German, etc., as well Russian 'extrasenses' – could practice their ritual healing.

Soon after the first shamanic institution emerged in Tyva, similar organizations began to mushroom in other parts of Siberia. In the republic of Sakha (Yakutia), a shamanic temple 'House of Purification' was built in the Republic's capital and sponsored by the city government (Balzer 2005; 2008). The Thundering Drum

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[21] For more information see the FSS report on the expedition: Brunton Bill. Tyva, Land of Eagles – The Foundation's 1993 Expedition to Tyva. In: *Shamanism*, Spring 1994, Vol. 7, No. 1 http://www.shamanicstudies.com/articles/article08.html

Association of Buriat Shamans was founded in 1992, with some forty members (Humphrey 1999; Znamenski 2007). Humphrey writes, 'In Ulan-Ude in the early-1990s, long queues would form at the Association from 5 or 6 in the morning, and a row of cars would be waiting outside in the hope of taking a shaman off to treat a patient at home' (Humphrey 1999:7). Similar trends emerged in Khakasia (Van Deusen 2001), Altai (Tiukhteneva 2001) and other parts of Siberia.

In Yamal and the Polar Ural regions there was no such publicized and politicized neo-shamanism movement as there was in Southern Siberia. However, politically and socially active native intellectuals contributed to the reification and the promotion of Nenets culture and Nenets religion, regarded as the foundation of Nenets indigeneity, as the essential condition for Nenets survival, guaranteeing supreme moral order and social regulation. It became one of the parts in the polyphony of indigenous land- and rights-claims, and a persistent reminder of 'self-regulation as an objective necessity' (Khariuchi et al. 2009:52).

The Head of the YNAO state Duma, Sergei Khariuchi (1999; 2008), his wife ethnographer Galina Khariuchi (2001), Yamal Legislative Assembly deputy and ethnographer Yelena Pushkareva (2007), and the Head of the Department of Indigenous Affairs Lidia Vello are among most notable Nenets activists and Yamal political power figures. They have stimulated Nenets indigenism, bringing it into wider social and political spaces and framing it within modern indigenous rights, land-rights and ecological discourses. Meanwhile, these indigenous activists have become the most rigorous opponents of newly arrived protestant missions in Yamal.

The issue becomes even more urgent in the context of the dramatic decline in the indigenous position in the ethnically-based region: as I have already noted, the proportion of the indigenous population declines every year due to the increasing incoming population, and their voices are less heard in public life.

'Nenets faith' is considered as a lesser religion, closer to nature, to the tundra and all its inhabitants; it is tied up with the Nenets 'traditional way of life', and most importantly with reindeer and everything related to them (Lar 1994; 1998).

'If there is no faith – there are no reindeer – there is no mankind [*roda*]. We will die out [*vymrem*] if we lose our faith', said a Nenets woman in her forties from Yar-Sale village, Southern Yamal. Special attention is paid to ecological issues related to Nenets native religiosity. Nenets religion is pictured as sacralizing lands; hence, it is believed to contribute to the preservation of the delicate balance in the Northern environment. Sacred sites as being Nenets open-air temples (cloaked in special ecological philosophy)

have become visible tokens of Nenets indigenous religiosity, as well as special targets for regional policy.

Sergei Khariuchi, the Head of the Yamal State Duma, when talking about the socio-economical development of indigenous minorities of the North as a target program on the federal and regional level, said that one part of this policy was the preservation and protection of indigenous sacred sites that have 'moral significance' for Northern society (Khariuchi 1999:69-72). In 1999 in Salekhard there was debate on a draft law 'On religious and worship places of indigenous peoples of the North', which was intended to provide government protection for sacred sites in the tundra (Khariuchi 1999:30; Khariuchi 2004). In 2000 a project to map Yamal sacred sites was begun (Khariuchi 2000; 2001; Lar 2000). During 2001-2002 under the aegis of the Arctic Council and with the support of RAIPON, IPS and CAFF,[22] a pilot international project was conducted, called 'The Conservation Value of Sacred Sites of Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic: A Case Study in Northern Russia'. The Tazovskii Region of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug was selected as one of the model territories for the investigation. In Yamal, this project was supported by the regional authorities and aimed to map sacred sites and sanctuaries in the tundra in order to juridically preserve and protect them (Khariuchi 2003; Lar 2003; Znachenie 2004; Yefimenko 2004). The result of the project was mapping 263 Yamal Nenets sacred sites and sanctuaries. Such mapping was intended 'to promote the preservation of indigenous cultures' (Znachenie 2004), particularly in the context of the rapidly growing industrial development of Yamal tundra regions. In some respects this practice sought to mark the borders of indigenous lands, thereby not merely to promote Nenets indigenous culture, but to re-root it within particular territorial boundaries. Whatever violated the symbolic and physical borders of indigenism was jealously accused of being an invasion of indigenous privacy.

The indigeneity idiom was actively discussed and developed also within the regional educational system. The introduction of traditional indigenous knowledge into the school education system, the richly supported project of tundra schools as a new model of education for children of reindeer herders – all these were among the primary goals of Yamal regional policy toward the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage (Barmich 2001; Niarui & Serpivo 2003; Laptander 2013).

In the native artistic sphere, the image of pristine indigenous tradition and mysterious religious beliefs was also one of the sources of inspiration. Leonid Lar is an

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[22]The *Arctic* Council *Indigenous Peoples Secretariat* (*IPS*), and Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF).

artist, ethnographer, and sometimes is called shaman. By his works and paintings he constructs the idea of a unified and structured Nenets religion, with its pantheon, hierarchized system of shamans and spirits, etc. (Lar 1994; 1998; 2004); he contextualizes 'Nenets religion' within modern ecological discourse (Lar & Vanuito 2001). Being close to neo-shamanic international trends, he promotes the idea of Nenets shamanism as the main sphere of religious life of the Nenets.

Plate 2.8 Leonid Lar. 'Num's eyes', 1992.
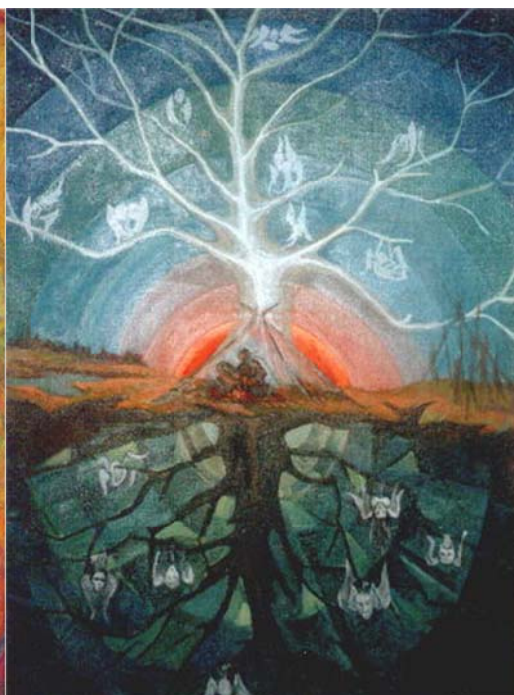
Plate 2.9 Leonid Lar. 'The tree of a shaman', 1999.

A famous Nenets writer and the head of an experimental tundra school in Yamal, Anna Nerkagi, in her work and social activity develops a fanciful mixture of Nenets shamanism and Russian Orthodoxy (Nerkagi 1996).

A galaxy of Soviet-educated indigenous intelligentsia, Nenets writers and poets (Leonid Laptsui, Yelena Susoi, Liubov' Neniang, Nina Yadne, Yuri Vella), new indigenous folklore groups, local festivals and exhibitions, celebrations of indigenous holidays – all these create a foundation for the promotion of pristine Nenets traditional culture, Nenets religion and moral order.

Plate 2.10 The performance with shaman drums. The Nenets folklore group *Vy' sei*'. Salekhard, 2011.

Plate 2.11 A young Nenets man, promoter of shamanism, teaches my 18-month-old son to play a shaman drum. Salekhard, 2011.

Conclusion

To sum up, the post-Soviet process of 'unmaking and making of relations' (Humphrey 2002) implied multidimensional trajectories, and one of them was the thriving of diverse new and old religious movements. The rapid influx of foreign missionaries and evangelicals, and the mushrooming of indigenous religious communities all over the post-Soviet lands, and the flourishing of all sorts of religiosity and para-religiosity dramatically changed the religious landscape and restructured religious life in the post-Soviet space. The construction of shamanic temples, Orthodox churches, Protestant prayer houses, mosques and Buddhist temples in the same environment became a feature characteristic of the highly competitive Siberian religious landscape (cf. Balzer 2005).

By the late 1990s the 'boom' of religiosity, folk medicine, and healing practices eventually began to subside throughout the Russian Federation. Previously rapidly growing churches, temples and prayer houses began to experience decline and welcomed a fixed and moderate number of parishioners. With the new Federal law limiting folk medicine practices, some shamanic houses have closed and shamanic associations have fallen (Humphrey 1999; Balzer 2008). The 1997 Federal Law and the following regional laws harshly restricting foreign missionary activity dramatically influenced the development of Evangelical movements in Russia. Some scholars reported significant declines of Evangelical congregations in various regions of Russia in early the 2000s (Rybakova 2009:12). Although the 'crises of faith and power' (Balzer 2008) remarkably influenced the intensity of religious life, in general, however, the religious landscape of post-Soviet Russia remains dynamic, and is characterized by a diversity of movements and forms of religiosity, competitiveness for followers and

power between various religious organizations, and is intertwined with local political and cultural movements, having close and complex interrelations with diverse kinds of nationalistic, ethnic and cultural 'awakenings'.

CHAPTER THREE

MODERNITY: RUSSIAN, UNEQUAL, CONTAMINATING

Fewer songs are sung in the tundra.
A Nenets woman

The train that always goes forward is stopped here.
A Nenets man

Modernity-thinking

As Mathijs Pelkmans points out, societies with high rates of religious conversion 'tend to be those in which grand projects of modernization have run into disarray or have been overtaken by the destabilizing effects of global capitalism' (Pelkmans 2009b:5). Religion has vernacularly been viewed as an antithesis to modernity; however, as stressed in a number of studies, religion shapes and is intertwined with modernization processes. Although a range of scholars do not consider post-Soviet changes as modernization, but rather dreams of modernity, sometimes with a reduction of possibilities and even a 'transition to feudalism' (Verdery 1996; Pelkmans 2009b:9), it is, however, precisely the discourse on modernity, or imagination of modernity that frames religious conversion in the post-Soviet Arctic tundra.

In my conversations with Nenets, both converted and non-converted, they often articulated conversion experience as part of the *modern* lifeway. Hence, new religious membership was perceived by some Nenets as an adaptation to the 'wider' or 'Russian' world, or as conversion to a new mode of modernity (cf. van der Veer 1996), which entailed both new opportunities and danger: it was supposed to facilitate Nenets integration into the global order, but simultaneously it was believed to be harmful to Nenets authenticity and to break ties with their traditional community. In other words, new missionary initiatives were perceived as an agency of the modern world, and conversion was seen as contributing to the process of widening the Nenets universe, but simultaneously, to quote Jean Comaroff, 'the dynamics of this universe were themselves in question' (Comaroff 1985:3).

I will argue below that Nenets religious change is deeply involved in power relations between the 'centre' (the Russian state personifying modernity) and the native 'periphery'. Conversion experience articulates an awareness of inequality and power relations, exacerbating long-standing internal contradictions within Nenets society. It entails many conflicts and ambiguities that are brought into a convert's life by the fact

that the Christian message has been brought by the Russians – the people identified as entitled to power.

These tensions of religious conversion both challenged Nenets authenticity and even more exacerbated a perception of a turning-point, apocalyptic images of 'times going away' and the inescapable end of the 'true Nenets life'. Living with Nenets in Beloyarsk, I frequently heard discussions of the coming breach and the turning point that occurred in the history of Nenets nomadism and 'Nenets traditional culture'. The Nenets life was frequently conceptualized in terms of rupture and eschatology. A Nenets tundra woman in her fifties expressed her anxiety as follows:

> What is happening now – civilization is coming. *Kaput* [means the end] is going to be with us soon. Surely, the gas pipeline will be laid soon. They will make the railway, and then I don't know what will happen. Surely, civilization will get us in trouble […] Even worse will happen here, everything is bad […]
> So I tell her, send them to school, because Russian life is coming now. We can do nothing without the Russian language. Life is changing now.

In the local vernacular discourse, the perception of the tundra lifestyle as a vestige of the past and the image of loss (be it the loss of lands, ancestral heritage, culture, or authenticity) is always backgrounded by the notion of advancing modern life which proliferates, and then displaces and disempowers tundra people. The conceptualization of 'Nenets culture' in the framework of progress and development evokes a common perception of inequality to 'Russian modernity'.

The following is the conversation between two settled Nenets men in Salekhard:

> – Bro, why should we go back to this monkey world? Let's live in the modern world! We won't need reindeer meat – it'll be meat made from paper soon. And it is cold living there [in the tundra] […] This is a step backwards, to this primitive communal system [*pervobytno-obshchinnyi stroi*]. But this is bad indeed. Anyway, there won't be tundra Nenets anymore at all in some fifty years.
> – But in the tundra it is only reindeer which you depend on. A man is a master of the tundra, of reindeer, he keeps his family. And a woman in the tundra does women's things. And all their life is ordered. There are no power structures [*vlastnye struktury*] weighing upon them. Freedom! And Nenets would never exchange this freedom for anything.
> – I would exchange this freedom for television, telephone, hot water in a bathroom – for progress.
> – You change for the sake of good Russian life. But this 'good life' is in quotes. You would need to travel a thorny path in order to be one of them [*byt' svoim*].

As I will show, Nenets popular discourses on modern life and globalizing modernity, as something to adapt to or confront, become the fundamental conceptual

landscape for their conversion experience. Religious conversion exacerbates the question of modernity and (in)equality to it, and is framed within the cultural discourse of authenticity and *otherness*. Hence,we need to understand how 'modernity' has emerged as a conception in Nenets culture and how Nenets perceive, adapt, respond and resist the increasingly blurred boundaries between spaces, times, cultures and moral systems – how they construct the *other*, as well as justify their authenticity.

Reorienting traditional anthropological perspectives, I reverse the image of 'the modern' and 'modernity' and use it primarily as an *emic* term (*sovremennyi/ sovremennost'*), with the aim of understanding how Nenets themselves perceive cultural and social changes in the context of an increasingly globalizing world, how they imagine modernity and view their own place or displacement in it, and finally, how they construct their own indigenous version of modernity. I seek to view modernity from the perspective of the periphery– modernity as the Nenets feel it. And in some respects, the Nenets internalize the dominant perspective on the periphery, i.e., themselves. '[F]or most Western social thought, modernity remains the terminus toward which non-Western peoples constantly edge – without ever actually arriving', posit Jean and John Comaroff (1993:xii). And this internalized perspective is what exacerbates tensions and an awareness of inequality. However, as I will argue, eventually this (self)ascription, through the conversion into a conservative form of Baptism, is being both reproduced and inverted into a new ideological basis for Nenets' challenge and resistance.

Basing my research on theory surrounding the concept of 'modernity', I particularly draw upon the concept of *multiple modernities* (Giddens 1991; Appadurai 1996; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1997; Englund & Leach 2000; Knauft 2002a; Sahlins 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001; van der Veer 1996; Geschiere & Meyer 1998). In the Nenets case it stresses the *gap* between Nenets' desires and expectations and their actual experience of modernity, within which the native response is elaborated, as the process of becoming *differently* modern. This gap becomes the place of negotiation between global development and progress on one side vs. local tradition and authenticity on the other – that much discussed ambiguity of globalizing modernity which entails simultaneously increasing homogeneity/uniformity and cultural difference/ self-conscious culturalism (Appadurai 1996:Ch.9; Sahlins 1999b; 2001; Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Geschiere & Meyer 1998;). The concept of multiple, alternative or vernacular modernities provides insight into this two-way process, this asymmetry of modernity and tradition – the dialectical interplay between the global order and the

Nenets universe. It also carries dualism of inequality and disempowerment vs. Nenets response and agency, their resistance as involved actors in the process of cross-cultural encounters.

Below I dwell upon these Nenets tensions of 'becoming modern', trying to unpack their historical roots and contemporary social outcomes.

In this chapter I examine Nenets ideologies of the modern, and seek to reconstruct heterogeneous ideological segments, various notions, values and concepts that underlie Nenets imagination and expectation of modernity – those pieces that are used for the Nenets *bricolage* of modernity. To use Marshall Sahlins' expression (2001b:7), I aim to trace what elements of their traditional existence and appropriated meanings and practices Nenets recycle in the construction of their own indigenous versions of modernity.

I pursue how 'modernity' or 'modern life' as a conception has emerged in Nenets discourse, and analyse different patterns of Nenets modernity-thinking. First I dwell on the Nenets imaginary of modernity, of the global world and their hierarchical view of *self* and *others*. I continue with the analysis of the ethnic distinctiveness of Nenets imagination of modernity: the image of 'modern life' is always *ethnically faced*, and the coming modern life is perceived as actual 'Russian' modernity. The analysis of spatial and temporal dimensions of Nenets inflections of modernity follows after: the native world as a periphery, as the existence in the realm of *beyond*, on the edge of commonsensual time and space; the antinomy between the past and the present within the existing dichotomy of 'modernity' vs. 'tradition'. It is also a moral dimension (stigmatizing nomadic culture as 'backward') that defines the Nenets vision of modernity and exacerbates a sense of their inequality to it.

The chapter proceeds with undertaking the archaeology (in Foucault's meaning) of the Nenets notion of 'modernity', examining those historical milestones that have determined the Nenets vision of modernity. I argue that it was the Soviet 'missionary' reform projects in the North, through which the Nenets adopted a notion of modernity, that most intensively sought to plug backward natives into Soviet modernity, meanwhile rooting northern nomads within the 'modern/backward' conceptual framework.

In the final part I will discuss the Nenets production of local modernity, their success and failure in 'being alternatively modern'.

3.1   LIVING ON THE PERIPHERY OF SPACE AND TIME

Dreams of Modernity

Nadia once said: 'Before I didn't know at all where Ukraine is situated or Moldavia, and did not know at all that there exists such a city as Mineral'nye Vody. And now I know, [believing] brothers and sisters come here from everywhere. And if I wanted to go there, for example, if I wish to visit Ukraine, Belarus, then I wish to go everywhere, for brothers live all over the world'. Sometime later, during a serene tundra night, we were watching a sappy Bollywood movie in a *chum*, using a generator. Some Nenets women began a lively discussion about exotic Indian landscapes and clothes when Natasha, a tundra woman in her early thirties, who never travelled outside of Yamal Okrug in her entire life, said: 'Imagine, there are believing brothers and sisters in India too. What if we could go there! Imagine if we could travel there!'

The work of the imagination, as argued by Arjun Appadurai, has become an organized field of collective, social practices, a social fact itself that plays a newly significant role in the modern world, refiguring social landscapes and people's everyday lives (1996:5, 31ff). And the force of the imagination has a far more globalizing and profound effect, in the era of electronic mass media, than working merely on the level of the nation-state, as initially discussed by Benedict Anderson (1983). It induces nowadays translocal social flows, transnational communities, or what Appadurai calls 'postnational sodalities' (Appadurai 1996:8).

In the Arctic, electronic mass media (satellite television, internet, computers, and telephones), new transportation (snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, helicopters) have become integrated parts of Nenets indigenous tundra livelihood, expanding and quickening the mobility of people, as well as images, ideas, sensations, and values (cf. Habeck & Ventsel 2009). And technological innovations bring significant socio-cultural change into the tundra (Pelto 1987; Stammler 2009).

Transnational flows of commodities and values create a powerful discourse on modernity spreading out from the West (Rofel 1992). School education along with the increasing settlement of tundra people, their far more frequent trips outside their native space, an influx of migrants from different parts of the world, market economy relations – all these inspire new kinds of imagination work, and dramatically influence the way nomads imagine the world, globality and its interconnectedness with the tundra edge (cf. Clifford 1997:28).

Plate 3.1 A mobile phone call
in the Baidarata tundra. 2011.

Plate 3.2 Satellite dish in the Salemal tundra
(Southern Yamal). 2011.

The Nenets reveal a new imaginary geography and increasingly widen their cognitive map; in the terms of Frederic Jameson, they enter 'postmodern hyperspace' (Jameson 1991:43). Newly arrived Evangelical missionaries also are involved in such processes of widening Nenets geographical imagination, contributing to the development of 'imagined nomadism'.

Plate 3.3 Missionaries show the latest world news in the tundra.
The Polar Ural tundra, 2011.

Aspiring imaginations of the global world and its goods have become in the tundra what Meyer calls, a 'culturally, socially, and politically grounded project' (Meyer 2010:117), which evokes new modes of belonging, as well as sharpening a sense of displacement, of being left behind and out of the way (cf. Knauft 2002b:132). Hence, Nenets expectations of becoming modern (what Knauft [2002b] calls 'oxymodern sensibility') imply a sense of inadequacy and backwardness associated with the tundra lifestyle, which represents the place of 'absence' or 'lack' of modernity: the more intensive the imagination of the modern, the more distinctly notions of inequality, disempowerment and peripheral marginality emerge within their cultural discourse of modernity.

Thus, Nenets imaginary of modernity promotes the hierarchy of self and others, modern and backward, dividing their cognitive map of the world into the modern centre – the source of modern forces, goods and values – and the backward periphery – the spatial, temporal and moral outer edge, perceived as '*the last place*' to receive development and change (cf. Englund & Leach 2000:230).As Bruce Knauft writes, 'In many marginalized and disempowered areas, the local making of modern subjects entails the incitement, categorization, and denigration of what it means to be "backward", "uncivilized", and "unenlightened". These stigma provide the local background against which "progress" and "development" are configured' (2002b:133).

Likewise, the perception of marginality and images of living on a geographical, historical, and cultural periphery are deeply internalized in Polar Ural Nenets society. They too are aware of and sensitive to their modern awkwardness – they don't live in the centre of their own cultural universe. They envisage modernity within which they are disempowered. And these (self)perceptions predominate in Nenets discourse of the modern, and, as I will show below, play a crucial role in the dynamics of contemporary religious changes in the Polar Ural tundra.

'*You Lutsa are Higher than We are*'

> You know, if *natsionaly* [ethnic minorities, indigenous people] would speak here among their own [people], our people would never even notice them. We need someone from the Russians to come here and to preach. If a Russian [missionary] arrives here, so local people will come for his gathering. But they won't come if a native would preach, they are ashamed of each other...
> Today a woman came running to the shop and yelled, 'The bosses have arrived [*nachal'stvo priekhalo*]! They said there will be a meeting tonight at six.' I asked her, 'What bosses?' 'I don't know, some Russians from

Vorkuta!' We all went to the meeting, and there was a priest [*pop*] talking about his Russian god.

These words spoken by a Khanty woman from Zelionyi Yar village (the Polar Urals) have something in common with the *yarabts*, a Nenets personal song, written many decades ago by Tyko Vylka (~1883-1960), the first Soviet-raised Nenets painter and writer:

> On the shore of Kara sea, at the high hill of earth there is an old hut. It used be a new one long time before, but now it has tumbled, overgrown with grass. Reindeer bones show up white in the grass, they too are overgrown with grass. Here Tyko Vylka used to live, hiding from tsarist gendarmes. He has seen much sorrow, suffered a lot. I could not expect then that I would live a happy and radiant life. Now I live in town, in my own house. I am better off, I wish not to die at all.
> Who gave to Vylka such a happy life? The Soviet pure [*chistye*] people, the Soviet power. They adopted [*priniali*] my people as their own children. Thanks to the great Russian people, thanks to Lenin-hero [*Lenin-bogatyr'*]![23]

'The Russians' in Nenets is *Lutsa* – a term which in Yamal loses its distinct ethnical boundaries, but rather refers to the incoming population associated with patterns of power and privilege. It refers to both old residents and migrants from Russia and from the entire post-Soviet space, indicating non-indigenous ethnicity. *Lutsa* is the cultural *other* for the Nenets people. It is a social category, which is similar to the conception of '*the whiteman*', often perceived by the people of the Third World as an archetype of Western modernity, wealth, cultural and political prerogative, and the force of globalization (Bashkow 2006:2). Likewise, the term 'Russian' is opposed to the term '*natsionaly*', which means those who have distinct ethnic features, i.e., ethnically coloured, whereas 'the Russians' remain ethnically neutral, or white. Alexandr Pika (1999:15) similarly pointed out the opposition between concepts of 'ethnic' and 'modern', when 'ethnic' – as an attribute of the so-called 'less-numerous peoples of the North' – signifies the past and designates 'dying out', thus opposed to 'modern', 'progressive development'. Hence, modernity is an essential property of the Russians.

The conception of 'the Russians' involves particular ideas about personality characteristics, as well as commodities and technology, social institutions and lifestyle. *Lutsa* personifies and brings modernity, whatever is understood by this notion in a given historical situation.

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[23] *Tyko Vylka*. Sverdlovsk: Sredne-Ural'skoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo. 1965. P.58.

Just as the long-term history of relations between the Russian state and the Northern natives has been complex and ambiguous, the image of *Lutsa* in Nenets culture too is ambivalent and polysemous. The construction of *otherness* does not necessarily imply a negative and critical evaluation of *Lutsa*. Nenets *Ŋarka Lutsa* (Big Russian) means 'master', 'the boss' (*nachal'stvo*). And he brings into the tundra world his Russian gods: be it the sacred image of Lenin-hero, or the Christian message about Jesus the Saviour. In the 19th century a *Lutsa* god – St. Nicolas the Miracle-Worker – found his place in the Nenets pantheon under the name of Mikola Mutratna (Lar & Vanuito 2011:90,102ff). As far back as the 19th century, Nenets worshiped the Russian Orthodox icons (N. *Lutsa khe-khe'* – 'Russian gods' or *Lutsa ŋeva* – 'Russian head'), keeping them in their sacred sledges (N. *khe-khe' khan*) alongside other 'idols', bringing them both candles and deerskin, sacrificing reindeer in their name (Shemanovskii 2005[1904]:18-21; Shrenk 1855:365-366; Zhitkov 1913:229).

Similarly, during the Soviet period nomadic Nenets sometimes used to carry the bust of Lenin in their sacred sledges as the image of the Russian god to sacrifice to and to propitiate to. Likewise, nowadays an Evangelical brochure telling about the *Lutsa* god Jesus can be found in the heart of Nenets *miad' pukhutsia*[24], which the Nenets ritually feed with sacrificed reindeer blood, vodka and tobacco (Yelena Liarskaya, personal communication).

Lutsa means chief, superior, but at the same time, devil and the source of moral and ritual contamination. It used to be a popular Nenets belief: if you saw *Lutsa* in your night dreams – you saw the devil. In Nenets folklore Russians are the children of the devil (Golovnev & Osherenko 1999:2).

Lutsa is an embodiment of state power, similar to Ssorin-Chaikov's example from Katonga (Central Siberia) when 'collective farm' was a nickname of its director, and its institutional form was embodied in his figure (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:11). Likewise, when I stayed in Beloyarsk, I was frequently asked by my Nenets friends to go to local authorities – be it a governor's reception, a local notary, or a head of the village – to represent their affairs. 'You are Russian, so you belong there [*ty tam svoia*]', they insisted.

Lutsa is personified with the statehood that builds residential schools in remote settlements, and provides full support for native children during their education, which provides free medical care, special social payments for tundra people, living supplies for

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[24]*Miad' pukhutsia* (translated from Nenets as 'an old woman of the *chum*') - a female ritual figure, usually a wooden doll dressed in numerous female coats, who is believed to protect the *chum* and its residents.

free, such as medicine and veterinary drugs, petrol, iron stoves, canvas clothes for tents, guns, etc. The term '*darmovoi*' (something gotten for free) develops into a specific Nenets idiom frequently associated with the Russian state.

Lutsa is also attributed with the ideal of *beauty*. The Asian phenotype, which is more typical for Siberian Nenets, tends to be excluded from the cultural construction of Nenets beauty. Meanwhile, the more a Nenets person looks Russian (i.e., has light hair, and blue wide, non-Asian eyes) the more s/he is considered to be beautiful or handsome. And vice versa: Asian-looking young men and women, with dark hair and skin and almond-shaped eyes, would not be the first choice in marital arrangements in the Nenets tundra. I asked a young woman from the Baidarata tundra why she refused to marry a Nenets man seeking marriage with her. She answered, 'But look at him! He looks Asian [*asiat*], he is dark and has narrow eyes [*uzkoglazyi*]'. Similarly, a young Nenets mother of three confessed to me that she does not like her elder daughter, she finds her unattractive because of her pronounced Asian features. Hence, there is a vernacular stereotype that Nenets women seek to give birth from Russian men in order to get beautiful children, thus seeking to appropriate not only artefacts of modernity, but its racial face as well. 'The 'darkness' of underdevelopment' (Englund & Leach 2000:230) here is not mere symbolic but is rather a tangible category.

To sum up, *Lutsa*-newcomers is an important category in Nenets culture, which, to use the words of David Anderson, 'marks people who have been sent with a particular project or mission and is often bound up with an accusation of intrusiveness, acquisitiveness and an insensitivity to local ways' (Anderson 1996:102). *Lutsa* as the construction of *otherness* has become, to borrow from Ira Bashkow (2006:14), 'an ambiguous, morally complex, and culturally creative "intimate alter"' for the Nenets.

With *Lutsa* come money, transport, electricity, new technology and tools, but simultaneously, vodka, violence, dependence, unemployment, displacement and disempowerment. Although being protected and promoted on the higher administrative level, getting governmental financial support and material assistance in their everyday lives, the rural and nomadic natives nevertheless frequently face discrimination and disrespect from the 'Russian' population. To take the case of Aksarka village as an example: it is the administrative centre of Priural'ski region of the YNAO, where tundra people usually come to get their social payment from a local bank. During the period of my fieldwork, it was the only branch bank in the surrounding territory, and there was usually a long queue of tundra people, waiting for hours and sometimes for days for

their money. A cashier yelled, 'Get out of here, stay outside, you come and stink here, and your wool is everywhere!' Meanwhile she served 'Russians' out of turn.

Or to take another incident, which happened to me when I travelled from the Polar Ural tundra to Salekhard, the capital of Yamal: in an intermediate station I was supposed to take a bus, but it was full at the time I arrived. However, when the driver saw me, a 'Russian'-looking woman, he immediately demanded that a Nenets woman with a newborn baby and a young boy get off the bus, thus vacating a seat for me. The Nenets family was obviously from the tundra, they wore deerskin coats, had numerous bags, and the newborn baby was literary wrapped up in a carpet. Submissive and speechless, they got off the bus, and sat embarrassed right on the ground. When I began protesting and arguing with the driver, he and some other passengers said, 'But they stink here! We cannot travel with them! Don't worry, they won't be frozen outside, they are accustomed to living in the tundra'. When the bus was leaving, I looked in the boy's eyes, staring at the departing bus – I still see his sullen look full of hatred.

My field notes are full of similar stories: about Russians who travelled in the tundra on their trucks and did not stop when they met people in deerskin overcoats, even though the latter needed help; about Beloyarsk officials yelling at visiting nomads to get out of their office, because they were dirty and stinky. Such discriminative attitudes resulted in everyday negative ethnic stereotypes, and exacerbated ethnic tensions and a range of social inequalities (cf. Gray 2007; Kvashnin 2010; Slezkine 1994:373-374; Schindler 1997).

The Islands of 'Civilization' in the Sea of 'Backwardness'

'The tundra is no longer as it used to be. Modern life has come into the tundra. And the tundra Nenets live today a civilized life, everything is modern in their chums: they watch television, use gas, sleep under blankets, and use different shampoos. They no longer live at the end of the earth'. In these words spoken by a Nenets woman, the issue of the coming modern life is articulated with the issue of space. Modernity, embodied in specific meanings and goods, is also perceived as challenging boundaries between margins and centre.

The spatial dynamics of modernity and the relationships between space and culture have been much problematized in discussions of modernity and globalization (Foucault 1998; Soja 1989; Harvey 1989; Lefebvre 1991; Rofel 1992; Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Watts 1992; Featherstone et al. 1995; Hetherington 1997). As stressed by Watts, space shapes modernity's constitutions (Watts 1992:120).

Space has been a neutral grid of knowledge, and an axiomatic (thus dead, according to Foucault) conception in anthropology. However, the emergence of 'the epoch of space' (Foucault 1986:22) as socially constructed, multilayered, hierarchically interconnected and impregnated by cultural meanings, symbols, and values reveals itself in all intensity in the age of globalization.

In the era of globalizing mobility and migration, ruptured landscape, and disjuncture of place and culture (Gupta & Ferguson 1992), the social production of space is challenged by blurred borders and increasingly more intense frontier experience. Scholars argue that the disjunctions and displacement, difference and dislocation become central characteristics of modernity at large, modernity as disconnecting space from place (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1996). Simultaneously, the forces of globalization intensify attempts to defend fragmented space and to strengthen borders between different fragments of social space. Thus, space becomes more intense, saturated and multilayered, and spatial identity is increasingly problematic (Clifford 1988:13).

In the frontier experience, representations of centres and borderlands become simultaneously more intense, yet intricate and awkward, 'when familiar lines between 'here' and 'there', centre and periphery, colony and metropole become blurred', and cultural certainties and fixities of imagined social space are challenged (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:10). Frontier experience becomes crucial for the construction of the modern; as Watts argues, frontiers 'represent the first wave of modernity to break on the shores of an uncharted heartland. As the cutting edge of state-sponsored forms of accumulation, frontiers are characteristically savage, primitive and unregulated' (Watts 1992:116-117). It is 'the time of gathering' at the frontiers (Bhabha 1994:139).

Northern Siberia historically was seen as a frontier – that particular symbolic, ideological and material space Watts writes about (Watts 1992). The frontier ethos is particularly revealed in the history of arctic nomadic societies (Bassin 1991; Grant 1997; Diment & Slezkine 1993). In the Nenets tundra, what mediates the two cultural worlds – Russian and Nenets – is space and different strategies of 'the production of locality' (Appadurai 1996:178), a series of spatial reorganizations and displacements. Space here is a form of interaction.

In the Arctic, there are continuous encounters and negotiations between natives' and newcomers' social constructions (or ideologies) of space and various strategies of land use. Foucault (1980; 1984), discussing the relation between space, power and knowledge, emphasized that the way of social organization of space reflects the way of

social control and the form of power: 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (Foucault 1984:140). Power and space cannot be separated; at some points this is all the same. Hence, space is a reservoir or container of power, the means by which subjects came to be incarcerated, disciplined, and imprisoned within spaces of social control (Watts 1992). In this dimension, the tundra exposes Foucauldian conceptions of heterogeneous space-power: the social space of the tundra is a place of negotiation and conflict between different modes of power and knowledge, as well as different coordinate systems and systems of social relations which are embedded within different ideologies of space. It reveals the power emanating from the state managers, industrial companies, entrepreneurs, etc., as well as the power emanating from the indigenous social production of space (Stammler 2005a:Ch.6; Anderson 1998; cf. Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). Thus, tundra space is never simply horizontal, but embraces a series of encounters and conflicts of heterogeneous sociospatial orders.

Native Ideologies of Space

For nomadic Nenets, tundra space is appropriated, marked, organized, controlled, and highly meaningful; as Piers Vitebsky puts it, the 'entire landscape is like a huge open-air temple' (Vitebsky 2012:436). A range of scholars discussing land-use systems and the relations of indigenous people to the land stress the significance of spatial conceptions in nomadic cultures (Anderson 1998; 2000; Ingold 1987; 2000; Fondahl 1998; 2003; Stammler 2005a; Ventsel 2004; 2012; Jordan 2003; Ziker 2003; Vitebsky 2012). While stressing the elasticity of the land (Ventsel 2012), co-existence of multiple ways of land-use patterns (Anderson 1998; Stammler 2005a:208ff), or 'modes of appropriation' (Ingold 1987:130ff; Jordan 2003:321ff), the relationship to land in general remains a central concern in the identity of indigenous people. *Tundroviki* (tundra people) is an identity defined through the land, encompassing ethnic, kin-based, or linguistic categories; it 'implies an even stronger set of solidarities and obligations between people and certain places and animals', argues David Anderson (2000:116).

Every traveller and anthropologist living with nomads in the tundra has been impressed by how they *know* the land with all its rivers, lakes, hills, campsites, routes and trucks, and how they can orientate in a seemingly empty and unmarked mess of land (Zhitkov 1913:224; Shrenk 1855: 542-543; Khomich 1974). Such *knowing* the land, as David Anderson posits for the Evenkis, becomes a form of property (Anderson 1998). And the mode of appropriation, as observed by Florian Stammler, is based on the idea that 'people act as part of the land, not as the holders of it', i.e., when people 'are

held' by the land, instead of 'holding' it (Stammler 2005a:214). Aimar Ventsel, discussing the tundra land possession through the notion of 'master' (*khoziain*), argues that this mode of land entitlement reveals a 'moral possession' of the land (Ventsel 2012). In Yamal and the Polar Urals the nomadic lifestyle and nomadic spatial orientation is regulated with structured movements related to the cycle of the seasons, kin-based territorial organization, reindeer migrations, and economic strategies (Brodnev 1950; 1959; Dolgikh 1970; Krupnik 1993; Stammler 2005a; Kvashnin 2009). To sum up, tundra space is impregnated with memories, ancestors' heritage and stories; it is demarcated by nomadic campsites, migration routes, fishing places and hunting trucks, as well as graves and sacred sites, revealing the kinship system, economic strategies, social organization, and spiritual and cosmological knowledge of the nomads (Ventsel 2012; Stammler 2005a:207ff).

Multilayeredness of Tundra Space

However, as David Anderson rightly points out, the native modes of land possession and spatial conceptualization cannot be viewed as untouched and uncontaminated by decades of state interference (Anderson 1998:68; see also Stammler 2005a:Ch.6). The Nenets tundra cannot be seen as an independent space of native life, but rather a multi-layered space (Stammler 2005a:223ff), where indigenous engagement with the land is overlapped with 'Russian', where reindeer herding and hunting ways of engaging with the tundra co-exist simultaneously with Russian state enterprises and their own strategy of land use. Thus, tundra space is an intersection of different strategies and policies.

As Stammler points out, different actors in the Yamal tundra (administrators, gas company employees, entrepreneurs, and herdsmen) draw different cognitive maps of tundra space (Stammler 2005a:208). For local administrators, Stammler continues, the tundra is a characterless land mass with the administrative centre as an island in it. For oil and gas companies, the tundra is an empty space with mapped oil and gas deposits beneath its surface. For the director of an agricultural enterprise the tundra is a system of distinct migration routes of reindeer brigades (ibid.). Every actor of tundra space produces his own mode of social control and power. The tundra thus becomes a space of negotiation of different modes of power.

With the expansion of the extractive industries to the North since the 1950s, new waves of incoming population (*priezzhie*) arrive in the Northern regions, outnumbering the native population and making them into ethnic minorities in their homelands (Khomich 1970; 1972; Volzhanina 2010:76ff; see also Fondahl 1993). For the majority

of newcomers, the Far North is simply a working place, with their true homes left on the 'mainland' (*materik*). As David Anderson points out, the newcomers 'allegorically place their adopted homes on islands – as if their life histories were those of colonists who had traversed wide and dangerous seas to reach a new land' (Anderson 1996:99). These islands of civilization are scattered in the imagined sea of the 'wilderness'. And many among *Lutsa* newcomers, even those who have been living in the North for decades, have no knowledge and often a lack of respect for local people and their 'strange', yet *backward* lifeway. For many, the only thing they know about indigenous people living in the tundra is that they are 'children of nature', 'savage Asians', whose way of life belongs to 'the Stone Age', lagging people with the absence of culture. As Aimar Ventsel observes, the incoming population living on such Siberian 'civic islands' do not merely tend to shun any communication between the tundra and villages, but hence, ignore the space outside of the village, consciously avoiding the 'wilderness' (Ventsel 2011:121).

Such common perspective embodies the entire history of Siberian native nomads, who have been vernacularly perceived as 'outsiders' living on a *periphery*, those who are severed from the sedentary *centre*. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987:386) argue, nomadic modes of existence are antithetical to the organizational 'State', and resist the organizational structure of the state and its attempts to striate the space in order to take control. Pictured as borderlands of the state, Northern Siberia was the perfect image of wildness, 'primordial emptiness' and periphery as opposed to the meaningful space of the sedentary centre and statehood (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Slezkine 1994).[25]

Unlike native spatial conceptualizations, the 'sedentary centre/state' historically imagined the tundra as an empty, *liminal* and unstructured space, as the spatial locus of wildness or lawlessness. Throughout the history of the Russian colonization of Siberia, indigenous people of Northern Siberia were portrayed as the iconic image of '*other*', wild and stateless societies, living on a frontier of the civilized world (Diment & Slezkine 1993; Slezkine 1994; Bassin 1991; Brower & Lazzarini 1997; Sokolovskii 2001; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).The spatial periphery thereby was perceived in moral categories, as the lack or absence of social order and moral laws.

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[25]As Yuri Slezkine writes: 'From the birth of the irrational savage in the early eighteenth century to the repeated resurrection of the natural man at the end of the twentieth they [the inhabitants of Russia's northern borderlands] have been the most consistent antipodes of whatever it meant to be Russian. Seen as an extreme case of backwardness-as-beastliness and backwardness-as-innocence, they have provided a remote but crucial point of reference for speculations on human and Russian identity...' (1994:ix). And the more Siberian indigenous livelihood was integrated in the Russian/Soviet state machine, the more Siberian natives 'were inscribed by the state as existing as if outside the boundaries of Russian/Soviet society', argues Ssorin-Chaikov (2003:22).

Hence, the history of the state presence in the arctic tundra has been realized in forms of various 'civilizing' projects and missions, reorganization of territories, and 'striation of the space', the ultimate goal of which was to structure the unstructured, to implant hierarchy, law and order, and to enhance the control over people and land.

The state built fortresses and trading posts, then villages, state farms and towns as governed space or 'culturally significant places' fixing the border between the 'civilised' and 'wild' territory (Ventsel 2011:119), as plateaus of temporary and semantically meaningful zones of sedentary stabilization within a continually pulsating nomadic space. The state sought to 'enliven' the empty territories by marking them with settlements and roads (Ventsel 2012; cf. Gow 1996). Correspondingly, the Nenets expectation of modernity is perceived as a social and spatial re-ordering (cf. Hetherington 1997), as an approach of the centre toward the periphery, or as centre interfering with the periphery.

It was the Soviet 'century of *perestroikas*' (Grant 1995) that particularly strove for reorganization of arctic indigenous space. And the notion of backwardness and wilderness (developed throughout the period of Siberian colonization), and indigenous statelessness constituted Siberian natives as subjects of state modernization reforms.

In the Soviet period, however, nomadic space is no longer an empty unstructured space, but rather a *deviation heterotopia*(Foucault 1998:178) (or *'badlands'*, as Hetherington [1997], following Foucauldian insight of heterotopia, defines places of *Otherness*) – a marginal space in relation to modern societies, a place of deviant social ordering.[26]Hence, the ultimate aim of Soviet policy was the implanting of modernity in this 'in-between space', to turn *heterotopia* into *utopia* (cf. Hetherington 1997).

Soviet Chronotope

'Stop sending me back to the Stone Age!' argues a settled Nenets man in his late thirties who lives in Salekhard. Tundra life for him, like for many others, is associated with the past, 'out of step with the rest of the world's time' (Ferguson 2012). Similar to a South African apartheid joke from the late 1970s, when a pilot said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to South Africa... To adjust to local time, please set your watches back 30 years' (Ferguson 2012), Ssorin-Chaikov (2003:80) refers to an example of a pilot in the 1930s who perceived his flight from Krasnoiarsk city to the Taimyr peninsula as a flight not just in space but also in time – from one epoch to another; he felt he actually landed in the seventeenth century. From the perspective of a person

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[26]This '*deviation heterotopia*' might be viewed as a primitive tribal society, primitive communism or peripheral capitalism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

living in the sedentary 'axis mundi' Northern Siberia reveals not only deviant spatial (dis)order, but also breaches commonsensual temporal dimension.

Hence, the culture difference is not only spatialized, but temporalized as well – a society located at a distance reveals not only an issue of space, but time as well. The first ethnographers and travellers undertaking journeys to other countries felt they actually travelled into the past. Such *allochronic* perception, justified by Enlightenment and 19th-century evolutionism, and carried on by much anthropological theorizing and writing, is described by Johannes Fabian as 'denial of coevalness' – 'a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse' (Fabian 1983:31). Likewise, Ssorin-Chaikov (2010), quoting Leslie Poles Hartley's 'the past is a foreign country: they do things differently', points out that the stable idiom – the foreign country as located in a different time-scale – becomes a foundation for anthropology.

The Soviet ideology and Soviet-era ethnography legalized such allochronism, within which tundra space and native peoples revealed their archaic timelessness.

Developing his concept *heterotopia*, Foucault posited that *heterotopias* are connected with temporal discontinuities, which he called symmetrically *heterochronias* (1998:82). Likewise, the tundra is the *heterotopia* which reveals its own *heterochrony* or anomalous temporality – temporal disjunctures with slices of different time. It is emplaced not only on the periphery of space, but on a periphery of time as well: here people are found in discontinuity with commonsensual time, they belong to or are stuck in the past, as 'living antiquity' (*zhivaia starina*) (Ssorin-Chaikov 2010). Hence, in order to find the past, one can go not only to the library or museum (those typical *heterotopias* according toFoucault), but travel to other countries.

The *heterochronic* angle and the articulation of the peoples of Siberia with the past has been consistently unfolding in Soviet ideology, based on 19th century evolutionary theory and natural-historical process. The motif of difference in space as a difference in time was a very common Soviet perspective on Northern Siberia, as well as a commonsense viewpoint today (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:80). And within the correlation of time and space, modernity, progress, development, tradition, and backwardness become both spatial and temporal categories, correlated with the past and the future. Time becomes a measure of difference and a means of its classification, as well as a means of power implementation (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006).

In general, Soviet ideology was based on special temporality. With its construction of a new social order personified in the image of Soviet modernity, rushing into 'the

radiant future' by acceleration of *Piatiletkas* (the five year plan as the pace of modernity), the Soviet project was *utopian*, with the ultimate goal to construct a perfect society in a perfect future (therefore the post-Soviet transition is perceived as *dystopia*– 'a utopia gone wrong' [Hetherington 1997:viii]).

Thus, the Soviet ideology of modernity was temporalized, similar to Knauft's arguments: 'a belief in progress disconnects the present from the past' (Knauft 2002b:123). Likewise the spirit of Bolshevik Revolution was expressed through the notion of a radical break between 'before' and 'now'. Within such temporality the future becomes not merely an analytical metaphor, but the Soviet cultural project (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006; 2010). Similarly, the past is the cultural project too, as long as the notion 'traditional culture', as argued by Ssorin-Chaikov, was reified and invented by Soviet ethnographers as an untouched monolithic image of the pre-Soviet past. 'The difference between Soviet "modernity" and indigenous "tradition" were naturalized as a reality in the Soviet evolutionary "natural-historical" (*yestestvenno-istoricheskie*) narratives' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:81). And state-native relations were rooted within such spatial-temporal dialectic of modern versus traditional/backward. The natives of Siberia were found within this antinomy between the past and the present, between desired future and inadequate past. Thus, Soviet temporality was aimed to condense the boundaries between the backward past, the better present and the bright future.[27]

Missionaries of socialism sought to help or literally to pull up (*podtiagivat'*) backward peoples to contemporaneity – as the present oriented toward the modern future. They sought to help them to make a leap forward into the new stage and new time, implanting different rhythms, technologies and representations of time, as well as various patterns of land use and spatial conceptualization. As a vice-chairman of the Committee of the North, Anatolii Skachko stated in the journal 'The Soviet North' in 1931 (in the standard rhetoric of that time):

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[27]In the history of Soviet intellectual tradition, the emplacement of the people of Siberia (particularly nomadic societies) into the past was twofold. At some stage (during the 1920s activity of the Committee of the North) their backwardness and *pastness* was viewed as a special alternative path of historical development, a stage of primitive communism, societies socialist per se and not spoiled by capitalist relations. As believed, this gave them a unique preferential opportunity to skip over the state of capitalism, transforming their 'primitive' communism into 'scientific' communism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). In this frame, Siberian natives were situated in *retrotopia* (Rév, 1998), when social utopia as an imagined future is situated in the past (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:44ff). In the later period, the Soviet ideology made them ahistorical, the dead-end of evolution, expelling them beyond the borders of 'historical perspective' as a 'civilizational mistake' (Bromlei et al. 1986:244; Oushakine 2012). The notion of time acquired also its moral dimension, based within the opposition between backward and primitive past versus radiant future (cf. Fabian 1983:40 time as a problem of deviance). In both paradigms, nomadic *otherness* and *allochronism* (either in a positive or negative sense) made them subject to Soviet modernization reforms.

This means that if the whole of the USSR, in the words of comrade Stalin, needs ten years to run the course of development that took Western Europe 50 to 100 years, then the small peoples of the north, in order to catch up with the advanced nations of the USSR, must, during the same ten years, cover the road of development that took the Russian people one thousand years to cover, for even one thousand years ago the cultural level of Kievan Rus' was higher than that of the present-day small peoples of the north' (cit. by Slezkine 1992:58).

3.2   CONVERSION TO SOVIET MODERNITY

The Missionary Project of Soviet Modernity

'Lenin's nationalities policy and cultural revolution substantially shook up the previously sleepy and immovable North' (Sovetskii Sever 1932: 8).

'50 Nenets [from Novaia Zemlia] study at secondary school... Women deliver not in *chums*, but in district hospitals. Nenets listen to radio. Those who did not have their written language nowadays read books in their native language. There are more Nenets teachers, poets, students... and social activists each year. Novaia Zemlia is not a distant outskirt anymore' (cited in Zelenin 1938:34).

Plate 3.4 Soviet poster. 'Keep cleanliness in a *chum*, sweep floors daily, sprinkling them with water. Frequently clean battens with a knife. Don'tspit on floor.'

These were typical reports from the North, which became a laboratory of Soviet modernity. Zealous 'cultural trips' (*kul'tpokhody*) were made to the North with the aim of mastering the Arctic and plugging backward northern peoples into Soviet modernity. Scholars and graduating students, social activists and troops, doctors and teachers, state employees and collectivizers, volunteers in search of adventure and social benefits – the Soviet 'missionaries' and 'soldiers of the cultural battlefront'headed to the North and stayed there for years, mastering the North and bringing 'civilization' to aborigines, struggling against backwardness (Antropova 1972; Slezkine 1994:225-6).

Speaking at the meeting of the Committee of the North in 1925, the distinguished Soviet ethnographer Vladimir Bogoraz stated, 'We have to send to the North not scholars but missionaries, missionaries of new culture and Soviet statehood...' (Bogoraz 1925:48). The Soviet period revealed the enormous degree to which the state – as sets of institutions, as culture and discourse –became 'implicated in the minute texture of everyday life' (Gupta 1995:375) of the Northerners. And it was the Soviet state that consistently translated its policy into terms of modernity and modernization, and the rendered Soviet reforms as 'missionary' projects of implanting Soviet order (cf. Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:88,132). Conversely, Soviet modernity was perceived by northern natives through their relations with the (Soviet) state, either resisting or identifying with the latter. As Ssorin-Chaikov argues, the state was 'an imagined framework for *identifying* practices and people' (2003:115).[28]

The aim of the Soviet 'missionary project' was 'to give people lagging behind in their development not in centuries, but millennia, access to the Soviet power, to the socialist culture', as posited Mikhail Smidovich, the Head of the Committee of the North (1930:5). Integration of Siberian aborigines into the Soviet society occurred through various reforming 'missionary' projects generally known as Soviet construction (*Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo*). Hence, the Northern peoples were the subject for 'radical socialist reformation'. The ultimate goal was to help extremely backward 'non-Great Russian (*nevelikorusskii*) peoples catch up with central Russia, which has surpassed ahead' (Gurvich 1970:17). Thereby, the '*otherness*' of the Northern natives was translated into an ideological conception.

'Communist missionaries' started to convert native peoples from their backwardness to the light of Soviet culture (which eventually signified 'Russian' culture). They brought 'civilization' by building new villages and creating state authority, as well as by providing public education and medical services. Literacy campaigns, creation of written languages, establishment of school networks and training courses, training new teachers and cultural workers specialized in work in the North, building houses of socialist culture, Red *Chums* and *Yurts*, cultural bases in the North – these were all part of the Soviet campaign to convert the Northern natives into Soviet modernity, and to create a utopian society.

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[28]There is a substantial corpus of literature dedicated to the history of the Soviet modernization reforms in Northern Siberia (Balzer 1983; 1999; Forsyth 1992; Selzkine 1992; 1994; Grant 1995; Fondahl 1998; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Kuoljok 1985; Vakhtin 1994; Naumov 2006); below I briefly highlight the main dimensions of 'Soviet modernity' as it was constructed and implemented in the North.

Accelerated Pace of Modernity

The first steps towards the implementation of Soviet modernity in Northern Siberia was championed by the Committee for Assisting the Peoples of the Northern Periphery, known as the Committee of the North (*Komitet Severa*) (Demidov 1981; Gurvich 1971; Zibarev 1968). Initially classifying and legislatively fixing the list of the so-called 'lesser (*malye*) peoples of the North', the Committee sought to help Northern indigenous peoples get involved in the Soviet construction and to assist them in their economic, cultural, and political development. The Committee advanced Lenin's famous conception of the 'non-capitalistic path of development of backward peoples', based on which 'the small peoples of the North' were examined as being at a unique stage of primitive communism, with the absence of developed class stratification and class struggle (Sergeev 1956; Osushchestvlenie 1971; Antropova 1971).

During the 1920 and 1930s, reforms were undertaken in Northern territorial administration – those attempts of the state to fix territories or 'to striate the space' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:386) in order to enhance control over territories and indigenous population (Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo 1927 [1926];1929; Popov 1927; Mestnye organy 1934).

By the 1930s, with Stalin's 'Great Transformation' and acceleration of the pace of Soviet modernization (what Golovnev and Osherenko call 'galloping Sovietization' 1999:69ff), new 'progressive' approaches toward radical sovietization and industrialization were implemented in the North. As the final war against the backward past, ethnic and clan principles of administration were replaced by territorial and economic ones (Dolgikh & Levin 1951); traditional indigenous leadership was pushed aside (Golovnev 1997); the 'class war' was turned into repression against shamans and rich herders (*kulaks*); nomadic livelihood as the form of cultural backwardness was subject to total eradication, and northern industrial development was prioritized over traditional indigenous economy. With the abolishment of the Committee of the North in 1935, the arctic regions were placed under the authority of the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route (*Glavsevmorput'*) – the 'shock-brigade' in mastering the North, which interfered with all spheres of economic and social activity in the North (Trautman 2004).

The accelerated pace of modernity led to forced collectivization of the property (including land and animals) and the following sedentarization of nomadic populations. As a range of scholars point out, the Soviet policy attempted to change the mode of

reindeer husbandry from a communal-based way of life to a form of productive industry 'which attempted to reduce the landscape to a vast open-air factory floor and the herders to factory workers' (Vitebsky 2002:188). Life-style nomadism (*bytovoe kochevanie*) was declared a form of cultural backwardness, which prevailed on people to enter the socialist future, thus it was destined to be replaced by 'industrial nomadism' (cf. Bol'shakov 1936; Kantor 1934; Gurvich 1961; Vdovin 1967).

In general, the Soviet policy toward northern indigenous people was targeted at total sedentarization of nomadic populations: the nomadic livelihood was regarded as slowing the pace of modernity, whereas the sedentary economy was considered as contributing to the successful socialist construction, thus *modern*.

One of the first projects targeted to change tundra space was the program of establishment of 'cultural bases' (*kul'turnaia baza* or *kul'tbaza*) in the North (Suslov 1934; Terletski 1935; Zelenin 1938). Cultural bases were built in the remote places on the migration routes, far from regional centres and main lines. Later on, some of them developed into big villages and district centres, and became incorporated into the nomadic livelihood. The cultural bases were designed as consisting of House of the Native (*Dom tuzemtsa*) or later House of Culture (*Dom kul'tury*), hospital, kindergarten, boarding school, shops, veterinary units, zootechnical and agronomic units, a local research centre with laboratories for agrochemical and medical-bacteriological research, various training workshops, a power station, residential houses, a bathhouse, and a meteorological station (on the creation of Yamal *kul'tbaza* in Yar-Sale see Shmyrëv 1933; Lipatova 2008:70ff).

During the 1930s and particularly after WWII numerous trading posts (*faktorii*), settlements, villages and cultural bases began to mushroom in the most remote arctic tundra regions. And Beloyarsk village was among such newly built settlements with its own school, hospital, clubhouse, and shops. New settlements began to influence the trajectory of nomadic migration, changing migration routes and becoming 'centres of gravity' in which the exchange of goods, information and cultural practice took place.

Among other primary targets of the Soviet project in the North were public education, literacy campaigns and the establishment of a school network in tundra, initially in the form of mobile training courses, and then as a boarding-school system (Lunacharski 1927; Prokof'ev 1931; Stebnitski 1932; Bazanov & Kazanskii 1939; see also Liarskaya 2003).

As part of the first attempts to familiarize the Northern native periphery with Soviet modernity, a number of teachers surfed tundra space, migrating with a campsite,

following people on their migration routes. The so called Red *Chum* (R.: *Krasnyi Chum, Krasnaia Yaranga, or Krasnaia Yurta,* in some places 'Red Boat' – *Krasnaia Lodka*), were portable tents (or boats) that worked for the nomads who were difficult to reach, and also accompanied nomad groups on their migration (Khomich 1966:307-310; Kuoljok 1985:66-69). Modelled as early portable Christian missionary stations, the purpose of the Red *Chum*project was to raise the 'cultural level' of the peoples, educate them and to provide medical assistance, as well as to promote the work of socialist construction, informing and explaining people about the Soviet Revolution and the Party policy, and to disseminate antireligious propaganda. Later on such institutions as Houses of Culture, Houses of Folk Art (*Dom narodnogo tvorchestva*), theatres, clubs, propaganda teams (*agitbrigada*), libraries and cinemas became inevitable parts of Northern towns and villages.

Since the 1920s, there was a policy toward training of 'national cadres' – professionals and intellectuals from among the people of the North themselves. The giant project of socialist construction in the North required more teachers, doctors, veterinarians, Party and culture workers, as well as administrative personnel. A network of various schools and training courses in district and regional centres was established, where Northern natives were sent to for education (Voskoboinikov 1958a; 1958b; Kuoljok 1985:63ff).This was seen not merely as formal education, but as incorporation of the peoples of the North into the 'socialist culture' (Prosveshchenie 1958; Gurvich 1971).

With the change of Stalin's political course from the late 1930s onwards, the new state nationalities policy for the Northern minorities turned into a politics of russification (Vakhtin 1994; 2004). The school language was gradually changed to Russian, and native languages were banned in residential schools. Later on, the politics of russification was promoted by Khrushchev's ideology of the '*Soviet people*' (*Sovetskii narod*) – 'new historic unity the Soviet people'. This single all-Soviet entity was supposed to be ethnicity-neutral; however, as Nikolai Vakhtin notes, this monolithic unity 'form(ed) very quickly around the central core of the Russians' (Vakhtin 1994:53).

Plate 3.5 Nenets children at *Tel'visochnaia* school (Nenets
National Okrug). Photo from G.F. Verbov's collection.
The archive of MAE RAS (№ И-935-69).

Apart from that, from the 1950s industrial development of the northern territories became a priority economy, changing the environment, the social landscape and people's lives in the Russian Arctic. As Nikolai Vakhtin points out, often industrial enterprises 'behaved like a victorious army in an occupied town', whereas some Northern minorities 'were turned into mere food and transport suppliers' for giant industrial companies (Vakhtin 1994: 49). Besides its economic (oil-gas industry as the mainstay for the Russian economy) and ideological dimensions (bringing 'civilisation' to the 'uncivilised' territory [Ventsel 2011:119], industrialization meant a huge influx of incoming population to the Arctic, which dramatically inverted its demographic landscape. To use the words of Art Leete and Aimar Ventsel (2011:9), Soviet industrialization, with the construction of new settlements, a network of infrastructure, and influx of incoming population 'has changed not only the lifestyle of the indigenous people but created a unique polar society where different social and ethnic groups live together, tied to each other through mutual interests. The interdependence of these groups is very intensive and has caused an exchange of ideas, concepts and know-how'.

Religious Persecutions and Soviet Counter-faith

When he [a Nenets man] goes to a village he hears from the Soviet power that God doesn't exist. But when he returns to the tundra – he sees his sacred sledge behind his *chum*. So he has a dilemma, "Damn, I have a sacred sledge and yet the Russians tell me that there is no God. What shall I do?' Then he decides: well, let there not be a God in the village and here [in the tundra] I have my own life and I will keep my sacred sledge and will sacrifice. Just in case. (An elderly Nenets).

The battle against religiosity was one of the priorities of Soviet modernity. During more than seventy years of antireligious campaigns, religious persecutions, closing and destruction of worshipping places, activity of the Union of Militant Godless, lectures on scientific atheism and anti-religious propaganda in every corner of the country – all these were directed to displace religiosity from Soviet people's minds (Peris 1998). It was not a mere antireligious war, but a missionary campaign for a new mode of religiosity, often described by scholars as Soviet 'counter-faith' or godless religion (Tumarkin 1983; Stites 1989:109-123). The Soviet missionaryvision was the consolidation of people into a single moral community, and their conversion into the new secular religion with its dogma, sacred symbols, temples, elaborated rituals, and moral code.

Plate 3.6. A Soviet poster. 'Elect workers in the Tribal Soviet.
Don't let shamans and kulaks go in'.

In Siberia and the North, the struggle against shamanism became an integral part of the anti-religious campaign and 'socialist construction' in the North (Forsyth 1994:287ff; Suslov 1931; Skachkov 1934). The first administrative sanctions against shamans (deprivation of their votes, exclusion from the participation in Tribal Soviets and other controls, as well as destruction of shaman drums and ritual items, imprisonment and killing shamans) were developed into systematic anti-religious battles. Cultural bases, Red *Chums*, schools, hospitals, and village reading rooms, *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* were targeted to become guide-centres for the dissemination of antireligious ideology. Antireligious meetings, lectures, and study groups, Godless

Corners, and antireligious wall newspapers became indispensable parts of every public office. The Soviet public education system was prioritized towards godless and anti-religious education. 'Not a single student should graduate from these educational institutions without proper godless training' (Suslov 1931:148).

To sum up, the native universe was being dramatically altered. New transport networks, communications, and education systems, new types of housing and clothes, new food and goods sought to challenge the everyday fabric of the Northern natives.

In 1936 a newspaper reported 'In December 1936 Nenets herdsmen and their families from the Nenets reindeer-herding *sovkhoz* granted 168 rubles to the Spanish workers' relief fund' (cited in Zelenin 1938:32). The cognitive map of the Nenets was dramatically widening, while embracing new borders and territories. Many Nenets, who never left their native tundra before, travelled for education to Leningrad and other big cities; native children went on sightseeing tours, herding families were sent for summer holidays to the South, to health resorts, etc. During WWII a number of Nenets went to the front and participated in battles in Europe; some even reached Berlin.

The ultimate Soviet aim was to pull the (spatial, temporal and moral) periphery to the centre, to make the periphery closer – though never equal – to the centre. However, as Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003:14ff) argues after Caroline Humphrey and Edward Said, by 'nesting hierarchies' the Soviet reformers thereby were 'nesting orientalism' in the native North. While bringing to the North their own understanding of social order, while basing their policy on the conceptual dichotomy modern/progressive vs. traditional/irrational, 'Communist missionaries' eventually assigned otherness and backwardness to the natives, as being an outpost of modernity and civilization, edging but never actually arriving to the symbolic centre of the modern.

3.3   UNMAKING MODERNITY

> *He arrived on white stags right to the village, and picked her up, and took her back to the tundra.*
>
> From a Nenets marriage story.

Domination and Resistance

The process of articulation between the Nenets nomadic world and the Russian state order can be viewed as the history of centralized domination, a series of disruptions, as natives suffered from state dominance, and the profoundly unequal relationship within

which the state consistently endowed the Northern natives with statelessness and backwardness, rooting them in a spatial, temporal and moral periphery.

However, this relationship was never unidirectional. Similar to Jean Comaroff's (1985:155) observation of the Tshidi encounter with the colonial order, the Nenets contemporary universe is the product of interplay between both systems. As Ssorin-Chaikov argues, though the Siberian natives 'did supply data for their ethnographic displacement to the imagined landscape beyond and before the Russian and Soviet state, these transactions are part of a larger economy in which the state symbols and identities were traded back' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:4). He calls it a 'two-way traffic of symbols and representations' (ibid.). In other words, this is not a mere suffering from the state presence in the Arctic, but cultural mediation, negotiation and conflict, resistance and indigenization.

The Soviet reforms were oftentimes accompanied by resistance and rebellions of native populations and their suppression by the state thereafter (Leete 2005). Nenets resistance to the Soviet reforms was expressed in a series of armed uprisings called *măndălă* (Nenets 'gathering, riot'; or *măndălăda* – 'many people assembled'), when Nenets herders rose up against Soviet state-building reforms, against repressions of *kulaks* and shamans, school education, forced collectivization, against building trading posts which attracted an increasing number of Russians, etc. (Golovnev 1995:183ff; Golovnev & Osherenko 1999:69, 81ff; Khariuchi & Petrova 1999:79ff). However, the uprisings were repressed; and later on, Nenets resistance developed in tacit forms.

Among such tacit forms of resistance was the development of hidden practices, particularly concerning the ritual sphere. For instance, oftentimes, when a 'cultural worker' or 'instructor in socialist construction' confiscated shamanic drums and ritual costumes, native people made them again, and shamanic rituals continued to be performed, albeit secretly (Suslov 1931:129). Likewise, as a Nenets woman in her forties described:

> When *Lutsa* in 1917 were destroying and burning their towers or cupolas, their churches, we hid our deities. The Nenets people have small religion, closer to nature, so we could preserved everything [...] During the 1970s, as soon as *Lutsa* drove up to a *chum*, as soon as one could hear bells [of a Red sledge], we hid everything […] Because you know, they [*Lutsa*] were also going to the tundra, checking everything. And we hid everything. We took away sacred sledges [N.: *khe-khe' khan*] and kept them in the forest so that no one could see, or we hid them in the snow.

Another mode of native agency was developing practices of referring to and identifying with Russian and Soviet statehood, indigenizing its institutions, its symbols,

its space and timescale – eventually indigenizing the mode of modernities that were being imposed by the 'Russian' state order. It is a conjuncture in which native cultural structures are deployed with the aim of developing new modes of practice, revealing the resistance and flexibility of nomadic culture. This is what Sahlins defines as '*develop-man*' – active appropriation by the natives of the European power imposed upon them, hence, the process of enrichment, extension and revaluation of indigenous categories in the context of cultural encounter with the 'other' world, the process in which there is only one aim – to preserve continuity-in-change and integrity of the cultural order (Sahlins 2005[1992]; 1999b).

'Rather than despondency, it is a forward action on modernity', argues Sahlins for Papua New Guinea, 'guided by the assurance the Enga will be able to harness the good things of Europeans to the development of their own existence' (Sahlins 1999b:ix). Likewise, as scholars observe for the Nenets (mostly for the Yamal Nenets), their engagements with the Russian/Soviet/post-Soviet forces have allowed them to enrich and to develop their cultural order, rather than losing cultural uniqueness and authenticity. Those appropriated and encompassed 'Russian' goods, ideas, symbols, values, and practices are used for the reproduction of traditional social order, and the Nenets have interpreted them according to their own logic and their own terminology.

Florian Stammler, for instance, shows how Yamal Nenets learned to benefit from the post-Soviet market economy, strengthening their nomadic economy, while integrating the market economy and gas industry into their internal economic exchanges (Stammler 2005a). Demystifying the notion of the 'Nenets phenomenon', Stammler studies those mechanisms of integration of nomadic society into the global economy, and native agency in a changing social, political and geographical environment. Exploring how the 'market' works in Yamal, he posits that it is the complex interactions between nomads and their surroundings (like state government, state-controlled enterprises and gas companies), rather than cultural resistance and the isolation of nomads, that lay a foundation for the success of Nenets traditional livelihood (Stammler 2005a:295).

Likewise, the 'Russian' sedentary space is also indigenized by nomadic Nenets. As Yelena Liarskaya demonstrates, Yamal villages and towns with their resources are being engaged into the Nenets social production, and 'Russian' settled space eventually develops into a variation of Nenets culture (Liarskaya 2001). The tundra order itself extends into the sedentary space. Hence, it is not only the metropole that has power to reorganize the space: it is also a two-way process, in which natives resist, re-make and

indigenize the structure of their space, re-imagining and re-mapping the entire world (the global space) according to their native cultural logic and social needs.

Failed Attempts to Be 'Modern'

The project of indigenization of modernity, or cultural continuity-in-change that Sahlins writes about, is always an endangered thing. As he argues, transforming and stretching categories of one's own culture in order to encompass new commodities and meanings is a gamble, an 'empirical risk' which can entail not only continuous change but *discontinuous* change – the situation when people do not succeed in adapting and indigenizing 'modernity' in their own terms. Sahlins defines it as the situation of cultural collapse, when eventually people abandon their own culture and pass from develop-*man* to development (Sahlins 1985:vii).

The Beloyarsk sedentary space, with its resources, goods and economy, has become an integrated part of Nenets culture. The majority of herdsmen and fishermen living in the tundra have their houses or flats in the village – their stationary bases lying not outside anymore, but within their nomadic cycle. However, the project of indigenization or creation of alternative modernity is not as successful here as in the Yamal peninsula.

The situation in the Polar Ural tundra region differs from that in the Yamal region, where the Nenets are the majority population with less intense communication with the Russian urban world. Territories closer to the Polar Urals, i.e., closer to 'Russian' urban centres, historically have been places of intensive cross-cultural interactions with the incoming population. The high proportion of sedentary native population reveals local problems: hard drinking, poor living conditions, unemployment, and violence define the contemporary social landscape of many regional villages.

The sense of second-classness, displacement and disempowerment in the sedentary space, and the idea of periphery are deeply rooted in people's minds, albeit compensated by a sense of assurance in tundra space, a sense of being master of the tundra and tundra livelihood.

Whereas in Northern Yamal, villages and trading posts do not profoundly change indigenous production of space, here, closer to the Urals, the sedentary space changes native perception and experience of space. For many nomadic Nenets the village becomes a space-organizing element around which their tundra migration is concentrated.

Moving between the tundra and the village, many of them spend equal time in both. For Nadia, for example, as for many others from the Baidarata tundra, the choice to

finally settle down in the village and to abandon her tundra life is discussed every day. For her sister Marina, the choice was finally made several years ago, when she abandoned her forty-some years of tundra life and moved to the village. While staying in Beloyarsk, I could observe some families and individuals who were in the process of such a vital transition. They were transferring their remaining herd to their relatives, pulling down the *chum*, exchanging their tundra clothes for European ones, moving to Beloyarsk and beginning their long and often distressing path of sedentarization. This is what is popularly referred to as *yonei' ter* (*yodei'ter'*) – the Nenets term for those living in the middle, neither as true nomadic reindeer herders, nor as sedentary Russians.

Often the Nenets communication with the Russian world is defined through the Nenets notion of *siadkabtă* (to feel shy, embarrassed), which is usually associated with Nenets hesitancy and lack of confidence in the 'Russian' world, while dealing with Russian lifestyle, Russian talk, Russian clothes, and Russian manners. Arriving to the village, particularly communicating with local authorities or Russian entrepreneurs, tundra Nenets act cautiously, as if trying to avoid exposing the habitus of their backwardness.

A Ukrainian man (a former Evangelical leader) who married a Nenets woman and lives in Beloyarsk expressed it as follows:

> The Nenets here are driven people; they need someone who orders them what to do. If they need to do something with documents, to collect some documents, for example, and bring them to the local authorities – they cannot do that at all, [they are] afraid of that. They consider themselves lower than Russians.

The proximity of discontinuous culture change (as opposed to Sahlins' continuity-in-change) has become a central pattern of Nenets life in Beloyarsk. And as I have already stated earlier, it appeared that even some Polar Ural Nenets themselves internalized the ascription of being inauthentic and culturally corrupted. Here are the words of a Polar Ural Nenets woman in her fifties, who settled in Salekhard many years ago:

> Whereas Yamal Nenets know and respect their culture, the Polar Ural Nenets, on the contrary, have lost everything. Perhaps, this is because they live closer to the centre, under the influence of the Russians. There are lots of mixed marriages here, when Nenets women give birth from newcomers. At the same time they have a strong dislike for those who have come in such large numbers [*ponaekhavshye*] […] There are often fights at school between Russian settlement children and Nenets tundra ones. Yet of course, they're right, because they consider these lands as theirs. And of course they don't like Russians, for how can you love those who've brought vodka!

Especially in the Priural'skii district, which is closer to the centre, closer to civilization.

It is noteworthy that she gives such a description of 'her people' from a third party point of view, as if she is fencing herself off from her culture, which she describes in terms of debasement and shame, while comparing it with the ideal of cultural purity and true authenticity. Simultaneously, her defensive attitudes and cultural awareness are expressed through the underscoring of boundaries between the Nenets and the Russians, blaming the latter for causing Nenets cultural contamination. Through building boundaries between the Nenets and the Russians she actually creates awareness of Nenetsness.

'Obrusevshyi' Nenets

The failure to be modern is examined by Sahlins through two signposts: humiliation and self-consciousness (Sahlins (2005[1992]). *Humiliation*, i.e., cultural construction of self-disenchantment, a sign of cultural debasement, signifies the situation in which people in their process of reproduction and variation of traditional categories and values, comprehending a new world with its commodities and ideas, eventually begin to look at their own indigenous cultural system in terms of shame and debasement (see also scholarly discussion of this concept in Robbins & Wardlow 2005). In order to give up their culture they 'must first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being. Beyond that, they have to despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt – and want, then, to be someone else' (Sahlins 2005[1992]:38).

Simultaneously, the failure to be modern can be developed into a situation of resistance, when the 'culture collapse' brings '*a self-consciousness*' of the indigenous culture. As Sahlins posits, an experience of humiliation and one's own worthlessness can react with the defensive process of conscious representation of the native culture as something distinct and pure, when people suddenly discover that they have their own 'culture'. This results in 'culture movements' or 'indigenous movements' that happen now in different parts of the world, including Yamal. 'All over the world native peoples are becoming aware – and defensive – of what they call their "culture"' (Sahlins 2005[1992]:38-39).

The Polar Ural Nenets can be viewed as developing both these scenarios: a sense of cultural debasement, inauthenticity and, on the contrary, cultural resistance expressed through self-consciousness. Along with the *siadkabtă* pattern, feeling embarrassed and

uncertain in Russian space, awareness of their second-classness and backwardness, the Polar Ural Nenets at the same time express their cultural resistance and self-consciousness through the consistent re-construction of boundaries between the Nenets and the Russian worlds. Yet these boundaries between the Nenets and the Russian spaces are always blurred, and oftentimes exist as a discourse, rather than practiced demarcation of two culture patterns. Furthermore, the awareness and prestige of 'genuine' nomadic Nenets culture and lifestyle are noticeable.

The term *obrusevshyi* – Russified – is a significant idiom in Nenets discourse, within which is framed a form of resistance to the power domination. Often veiled with insulting intonation, it refers to those Nenets who are blamed by their fellows for betraying Nenets culture, giving up Nenets language and Nenets way of life – those who tend to be '*like Russians*'.

Here are Marina's childhood memories: she recalls her father who once hit his younger daughter when he heard her singing Russian songs in a *chum*. 'You are singing Russian songs as if you had a Russian father and mother!' He then said, 'It is the Nenets *chum* and there are Nenets Gods in it, you can't sing Russian songs here!' Likewise, Marina herself now blames those Nenets who live, speak, and dress '*as if* they are Russians', offensively calling them '*obrusevshyi*'; she keeps saying that she hates them. Once she was outraged when her niece named her dog with a Russian name: 'You call this dog as if it is *obrusevshyi*!'

Thereby, in the *'obrusevshyi'* discourse, at issue is a critique of those Nenets who entered Sahlins' humiliation phase. Likewise, Marina expresses her hatred against *obrusevshyi* Nenets, describing them as those 'who don't acknowledge their people [*ne priznaiut svoiu natsiiu*], who disclaim that they are Nenets, and are ashamed of or simply don't want to be Nenets'.

Moral Dimension of Modernity

Another discursive mode of resistance to *Lutsa* modernity is the representation of the *Lutsa* world as causing moral and ritual contamination. Moral norms in the tundra are believed to be more strictly regulated than in sedentary space; moreover, Nenets families and kin ties in the tundra are stronger and more stable than those in sedentary space. Therefore, it is precisely the increasingly more intensive contacts of the tundra dwellers with the urban culture that is perceived by some Nenets as spoiling and destroying the traditional moral order. Similarly, such vital problems of the Northern

natives as alcoholism are generally associated with their encounter with the 'Russian' world.

It is not only the blurred boundary between the sedentary *Lutsa* and tundra Nenets worlds that causes moral contamination, but also *Lutsa* goods and commodities themselves (or at least inappropriate usage of them in the tundra) are seen as violating Nenets genuine moral order. Electricity in tundra, television and computers that provide access to all sorts of films and music, and even personal hygiene goods are often defined as embodying a threat to traditional Nenets morality. The 'modern' goods and values violate traditional age hierarchy, norms of proper behaviour, gender roles, body attitudes, and sexuality. As I will show later in Chapter 7, a similar logic is found in the missionary discourse, when Russian language is perceived as a token of a sinful life.

Moreover, as I observed, *Lutsa* modernity – as an ideology of value, as practices and goods – is perceived as breaching not merely Nenets moral order, but causing ritual contamination. A tundra woman characterized the sedentary life as follows:

> When a tundra dweller lives in a settlement, it seems to me that he cannot live there at all. Well, for example, many of those who previously used to live in the tundra, now live in settlements, they move to settlements, well, sit down in a settlement. They live another way of life now, it seems to me that they are getting totally spoiled – in Nenets it is *sia'mei* [...] That is, everything goes wrong.

The Nenets concept *sia'mei* means ritual impurity, menstruation and ritually impure objects (see more on this concept in Liarskaya 2005). Hence, *Lutsa* sedentary space is described in terms of symbolic pollution and ritual impurity. The danger of ritual contamination is in those misfortunes, diseases and disasters that it brings to a violator, to his/her family and household. As Yelena Liarskaya argues, *sia'mei* and ritual impurity related to this conception refer to '*another world*', and the source of impurity can be not only a menstruating woman, but a newborn baby and everything related to childbirth, as well as everything related to a death (2005:320-321).

In this respect the *Lutsa* world with its forces can be interpreted as a figure in the Nenets cosmology, associated with '*another world*', or as an extension of it. It is reminiscent of what Harri Englund and James Leach observe for the Rai Coast villagers (Papua New Guinea), who perceive white people and white people's money as associated with the world of the dead, as having cult knowledge of the world of the dead (Englund & Leach 2005:231)

If the *Lutsa* represent unregulated and violated boundaries between '*this*' and '*another*' worlds, and *Lutsa* objects cause ritual contamination, it makes the observance

of ritual order in the Nenets space difficult – the tundra and *chum* are now full of *Lutsa* presence. A young Nenets tundra man described it as follows:

> We don't keep the majority of sacred objects in *chums* anymore. A *chum* is now believed to be not entirely pure anymore. There is a lot of civilization [*tsivilizatsii*] in it. So we do not know all the traditions and could violate something. Therefore everything is kept now in sacred sledges [outside of a *chum*], in order not to make a lot of trouble by mistake. Because we still don't trust Russians. And this remains from Soviet times.

In the Nenets cultural universe and cognitive map these two worlds – Nenets and Russian – are demarcated by symbolic boundaries and perceived as alien from each other, yet inseparable, interconnected, mutually and reciprocally articulated. They live on a border: between Russian and Nenets spaces, between the tundra and village/town, experiencing frontiers in their everyday life. The border experience shapes people's agency, narratives and the fabric of everyday life, and determines their identities and social expectations, while strengthening their anti-Russian feelings and questioning their Nenets authenticity.

Here, symbolic boundaries between 'Nenets' and 'Russian' are clearly demarcated and form the basis for lively discussions, even though, these boundaries are never firm and rigid, but flexible and often blurred. Nenets frequently marry Russians, they can be educated, work and settle in 'Russian' urban space, and eventually they can be converted into 'the Russian faith'. Hence, Beloyarsk is a social place where the image of 'being alternatively modern' is always at issue as an unfinished project, and where the relationship between modernity and tradition is continually configured.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to examine the predicament of Nenets modernity and to unpack how 'modernity' as a conception has emerged in Nenets culture, as well as in Nenets contemporary religious conversion. The Nenets people have undergone a complicated history of missionary projects that were being imposed upon them. They have been adapting and internalizing, identifying themselves with, responding to or resisting the coming modernity. While imagining modernity and viewing their own place or displacement in it, they construct their own indigenous version of modernity.

I have shown that the Polar Ural Nenets, unlike their Yamal neighbours, are not so successful in keeping unblurred boundaries between Russian and Nenets spaces, times, cultures and moral systems. They are oftentimes (self)ascribed as being inauthentic, not

true Nenets, which I consider as a sign of their failure to construct an alternative shape of modernity.

In the following chapter I examine the place of Evangelical Christian missionaries and conversion experience in the Nenets expectations of modernity, in their tensions aroundbecoming locally or alternatively modern. I will argue that conversion into a most radical form of Baptism becomes a form of Nenets resistance and a platform upon which to build their initially failed project of being alternatively modern.

CHAPTER FOUR

NENETS *BRICOLAGE*

Nenets Bricolage and Resistance

In summer 2011, the Beloyarsk community was expecting the arrival of sixteen Baptist missionaries who were heading for the tundra 'crusade'. What surprised me a lot was the level of the Nenets agitation and the intensity of preparation for the arrival. While waiting for the missionaries, Nenets in the village were repairing their houses, hanging wallpaper, painting walls and doors, cleaning windows, putting up curtains, and buying new furniture, bedclothes, cooking outfits, etc. – all things that they would be unlikely to do or use in their everyday life. Sometimes they bought utensils without any idea of how to use them. Meanwhile they were arguing about what would be convenient for missionaries, what is 'normal' for them.

At that time I was living at Marina's house, which was supposed to accommodate Sergei, a missionary-leader with his family; thus the renovation of Marina's place seemed to be the most responsible task. Some of Marina's tundra relatives arrived to help her. One morning Rimma, Marina's niece, burst into Marina's kitchen and exclaimed anxiously that the curtains in the 'missionary room' were not ironed! 'So what?' Marina asked. '*Lutsa*! *Lutsa*! *Lutsa* are coming!' Rimma replied with agitation. 'They will live here! *Lutsa* will arrive here soon, but the curtains are rumpled!' The entire history of inequalities and tensions, power relations and domination underlie her agitation about the coming '*Lutsa*'.

As I argued in the previous chapter, religious conversion is understood as a part of the power relations between Nenets and Russians. The conversion experience became one more platform upon which to challenge and to re-construct the symbolic boundaries between Nenets and *Lutsa* spaces.

Moreover, new religious experience was a far greater challenge to the Nenets familiar cognitive map, drawing new symbolic boundaries, widening it to the global extent, embracing multi-vectored directions. Missionaries, Christian charity workers, and Bible translators from the vast post-Soviet space (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Kazakhstan), from Western and Northern Europe, the United States, Canada, and even from Cameroon, Australia and Korea have worked here, completely mixing the common understanding of vectors of modernity as going from the West to

the East, from the global North to the global South (cf. Gray 2011). The introduction of transnational Evangelical Christianity to Nenets society is inseparable from the wider processes of their incorporation into larger political and economic systems. Missionaries are agents of their own vision of modernity: alongside the Gospel, they bring new goods and meanings, introduce new modes of thoughts and practice, their own understanding of social and cultural logic and historical process. They expose the Nenets to the wider cultural order that underlies the project of conversion.

Besides, the emerging Evangelical missionary movement also blurs the common perspective on sedentary and tundra space. Florian Stammler argues that even after the Soviet series of reorganizations of tundra space, the Yamal tundra remains, however, inhabited exclusively by native peoples and 'thus governed by their own *zakon*' (order) (Stammler 2005a:230). Similar to observations of David Anderson (1996:99) and Aimar Ventsel (2011:121), for the majority of the incoming population, only the sedentary space of villages and towns with their shops, markets, streets, cinemas, schools, and post offices is meaningful space with meaningful context, while the tundra 'sea of wilderness' is ignored and avoided. The emerging Evangelical missionary movement in the Arctic, however, challenges these boundaries, violates the borders marking civilization and wilderness and seeks to convert the *inner* side of indigenous space. Missionaries make their way towards the remotest places of nomadic campsites, target their work at the indigenous population who live both in sedentary spaces and in the tundra. The meaning of 'mission' itself is deeply rooted in the experience of crossing borders: to cross the border of someone's culture, someone's religion in order to expand one's own territory and to 'colonize the consciousness' of others (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). In this frame, the disjuncture of place and culture is particularly at issue. Religious conversion challenges the common-sense praxis of place making, and violates those borders and those naturalized links between places and people that the state has been maintaining for a long time (cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1992:12).

Hence, conversion opens up the global shape of 'modernity' and stimulates native people to reappraise their perspective on their place in the globalizing world. And this section is aimed at an examination of the ideological background of the Nenets response to their challenging situation. I argue that conversion practices develop into a *Nenets bricolage*, which appropriates and recycles practices, values and concepts of both Protestant culture and Nenets 'tradition', while seeking to find a response and to reproduce, at the same time transforming, Nenets subsistence practices (cf. Comaroff 1985). New forms of religiosity and ritual practices approach both transformation and

strengthening of tundra life and economy, when new religiosity is simultaneously perceived as change of and return to the genuine 'Nenetsness', the true Nenets 'traditional lifeway'. In her study of Soviet collective farms in Buriatiya, Caroline Humphrey (1983:402ff) defines Buriat shamans as *bricoleurs* of Soviet life. In the Nenets case, it is new Baptist converts that become *bricoleurs* of *de-sovietization* (and as I will show, of *de-westernalization* as well), of unmaking modernity, and thus *bricoleurs* of a reassembled meaningful Nenets universe. As Sahlins argues, 'The system is a synthesis in time of *reproduction* and *variation*' (Sahlins 1985:ix), hence, in the process of functional revaluation of the categories, Nenets cultural order reproduces itself in change. Thus Nenets *bricolage* alters the relations between categories of Nenets culture and integrates external ones, changing meanings and values, yet *re-assembles* 'Nenetsness', and evolves the Nenets response, a message of resistance to the dominant system and the 'coming modernity'.

In this chapter I examine those elements of native and appropriated Evangelical sociocultural order that Nenets recycle in *bricolage,* in the construction of their response and in developing their own indigenous versions of modernity. I base my study on the comparative analysis of social and political attitudes, and spatial and temporal orientations, of different Evangelical movements that work among the Nenets, and their points of mismatch or juxtaposition with the Nenets shape of the world.

As I will show, Nenets agency in this cross-cultural encounter was based on the proximity of native imaginary of the world to that of the conservative Baptist movement. After some years of religious search and a series of re-conversions, the Beloyarsk native community eventually chose the most fundamentalist Baptist movement. And as I will argue, the latter conversion, although inspired by the Russian church, provided the Polar Ural Nenets with a new foundation for their failed project 'to be modern', developed new tools for resistance to *Lutsa* modernity, to globalizing capitalist culture and, hence, for becoming *alternatively* modern. Nenets appropriated and recycled the Baptist imagination of modernity and developed it into an ideological platform upon which to base their own project of alternative modernity.

I eventually adduce two types of modernities – '*old-fashioned*' versus '*haute-couture*' modernity – as an opposition by which the Nenets concretize their 'modernity-tension' and formulate their response to it.

To sum up, despite a vernacular understanding of the Nenets conversion as conversion into the Russian faith and Russian lifestyle, new religious experience eventually became a mode of resistance to *Lutsa* modernity and to Russian state

dominance. It became 'ritualized resistance', though tacit and never explicitly expressed, – resistance not as political action, but resistance as consciousness (cf. Comaroff 1985:194-196).

4.1   THE GREAT SUCCESS OF THE 'NARROW PATH'

The Local Failure of a Global Movement

The Beloyarsk community passed through a long-term and complicated history of re-conversions. As recently as the mid-1990s, the village became a special missionary target for a number of Protestant movements. Since that period, the continual re-planting of mission-churches in Beloyarsk and surrounding territories turned into a real conversion drama with its detective, crime and love story plots. Each religious conversion was not a pure private experience, but rather a communal religious event, followed by discussions, disputes, and arguments, when believers made a collective decision to change affiliation and to be converted to a new religion.

The Charismatic church '*Novyi Sve*t' ('New Light') based in Salekhard and Novyi Urengoi cities was among the first in 1999 that began its consistent missionary activity in Beloyarsk and surrounding territories. Visiting Charismatic pastors from different parts of the world undertook a series of 'crusades' and christenings that were public, mass and festive. A number of people from Beloyarsk (among them were Nenets, Khanty, Komi, and Russians) were attracted by these initiatives, though often without a serious understanding of the Christian message itself. The missionary work seemed to be successful and popular and the pastor expected to gather some fifty members in a village church. Based on an increasingly growing Pentecostal and Charismatic network in Yamal during the 1990s, as well as throughout the world, its local success in Beloyarsk seemed to be ensured. However, despite apparent success, Charismatic conversion became a catalyst for the ensuing conflicts between the church and local authorities in Beloyarsk, as well as within the community.

Soon after, a new mission arrived to Beloyarsk – the Church of Evangelical Christians that had recently separated from the All-Russian Baptist Union and was supported by the international Association '*Dukhovnoe Vozrozhdenie*' ('Spiritual Revival'). Liberal, young, and enthusiastic, the mission-church targeted its missionary zeal purposefully towards the indigenous population in sedentary and tundra space. They officially registered the first religious community in Beloyarsk, this time

consisting almost entirely of Nenets. The newly established Beloyarsk community got its leader, a Ukrainian man who married a local Nenets tundra woman.

However, this religious change was not the end of the conversion saga, and several years later, in 2006 a new church arrived to Beloyarsk. It was the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, whose members called themselves the Baptist Brotherhood. The church targeted its missionary work precisely among the tundra population. And as I already noted in the first chapter, before its first arrival to Beloyarsk village, the mission-church had already established a religious community in the Polar Ural and Bol'shezemel'skaia tundra regions amongst Nenets reindeer herders. Therefore, from the perspective of the Beloyarsk community, the Baptist church (which had arrived from the tundra, not from sedentary space) was a *tundra church*.

As an outcome, after heated debates in the Beloyarsk community, following conflicts between Charismatic, Evangelical, and Baptist missionaries, the village group was converted again – this time into a most fundamental type of Baptism.

The conversion drama calmed down with the establishment and reliable authority of the conservative Baptist Brotherhood and growing disillusionment of Pentecostals and Evangelicals with their missionary outcomes. While Baptists continued to plant their churches in northernmost villages and tundra regions, heading to Yamal and Gyda peninsulas, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches had located mostly in urban space and did not experience any remarkable influx of new members among the natives.

As scholars often stress, the neo-Protestant movements, particularly those neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic global networks and independent churches (cf. classification of Pentecostalism by Anderson 2010:14), have become the most dynamic religious movements in the world and the fastest growing sections of Christianity (particularly in the so-called Third World), and appeared to be one of the most successful in Russia during the early 1990s. However, they experienced a decline in Beloyarsk village and eventually failed in the Polar Ural tundra. Both Charismatic and Evangelical leaders often expressed their regrets at the failure of an initially successful missionary activity in Beloyarsk. A Charismatic pastor from Salekhard said:

> We've lost the chance and missed the village [Beloyarsk], perhaps because we didn't carry out missionary work extensively. You know, all believers which are in Beloyarsk now, they were initially ours! It all started with us! We awakened them all! Dima [the first Charismatic missionary in Beloyarsk] baptized many people and there was a large church there. We used to gather a whole sports hall, and everything was ready for successful evangelism. We would have had a big church there, if the Baptists had not arrived. And Nadia with her church, both sedentary and tundra Nenets –

they all used to be with us, all of them started with us. And what do we have now? Nobody's there!

On the contrary, one of the most radical and fundamentalist religious organizations in Russia, which represents itself as following *the narrow path*, has had the greatest missionary success among nomadic and rural Nenets in the Polar Urals. The Nenets of Beloyarsk acknowledged the Baptists' fundamental attitudes, their devotedness to missionary work and to the tundra people, as well as, paradoxically, their paternalistic approach towards natives, which turned out to be clear and familiar to Nenets expectations. Nadia expresses it in the following way:

> So we said 'yes' to them [the Brotherhood], because we enjoyed their missionizing [*sluzhenie*], enjoyed that everything was so simple, so good and so clear. Everything was simple, so even a small child would understand. And the voice of Sergei, and the voice of Nikolai Ivanovich – like a father: so quiet, so clear, as a tender father speaks with his child. He [Sergei] was speaking to us in such a way. In general everything was so good. But ours [means previous Evangelical missionaries] – they usually visited us for a half a day, brought foreigners to *chums*, took pictures of everything and went away. Maybe it's romantic to them; they've never seen people living in the tundra. But they've never sacrificed themselves in the name of Lord.

The Resistance Movement

The origins of the Baptist Brotherhood go back to the most awkward period in the history of Russian Protestantism – the 1960s, a time of toughening up of the Soviet state policy towards religious organizations, and total control over religious life by state authorities, particularly dispensing with any kind of 'liberalism' toward 'religious sects'. Antireligious activity became one of the top priority tasks for the Communist Party during the period of 'the Khrushchev thaw' (Sawatsky 1976; Sawatsky 1981:131; Savinski 2001:201ff; Nikol'skaia 2009:172ff; Odintsov 2012:321ff; Mitrokhin 1997). During 1958-1961 a series of state laws was passed aimed to impose even greater restrictions on religious life in the Soviet Union. The turning point was the adoption of two documents: 'The regulations of the Union ECB in the USSR' and the official, but secret 'Instructive letter for senior pastors' (Kuroedov & Pankratov 1971: 150-60; Sawatsky 1981:140ff; Odintsov 1994:121; Odintsov 2012: 333-334; Nikol'skaia 2009:201ff). The documents significantly restricted the religious activity of Protestant churches, required compulsory yet more complex registration of religious communities and their leaders, prohibited missionary activity, child baptism and children's religious education, church charity and loan-societies, toughened tax policy for religious

organizations, approved a list of 'illegal sects', etc. In addition, the new regulations required religious leaders to collaborate with the state authorities.

These two documents became a starting point for the split within the Union of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists and the movement of resistance against the Soviet state policy and religious conformism of Church leaders. A reform Baptist movement headed the so-called 'Initiative group' (*Initsiativnaia gruppa* or *Initsiativniki* movement) – a team of young and passionate believers who devoted their lives to the struggle against the Soviet regime, as well as against the registered Union of ECB. A few years later the 'Initiative group' established the Brotherhood called the Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) (Sawatsky 1981:160ff). This resistance movement had become religious underground, and took the brunt of the Soviet-era religious persecutions, suffering a lot from state harassment. Refusing any kind of relations with the state, rejecting official registration, the Brotherhood was illegal during the Soviet period, and its leaders were regarded as criminals during the 1960s and 1970s. Hundreds of the Brotherhood's members were arrested and imprisoned, and some leaders spent more than twenty years of their lives in prisons and labour camps.

In 1989 a church historian, Walter Sawatsky, wrote that the CCECB has been experiencing a decline since the mid-1960s, gradually but steadily losing support and its members, who were tired of long-term persecutions and harassment. The CCECB remnant has become more purist and exclusivist, noted Sawatsky, and questioned their ability to survive (1981:151-152). However, in spite of their illegal status and state persecutions, the Reform Baptist movement has been gradually developing its organizational network and well established underground activity. The post-Soviet period proved the Brotherhood's viability and nowadays the conservative religious movement thrives, increasing the number of its members. With a new name – International Council of the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists – it maintains its unity in the entire post-Soviet space, and its fifteen associations unite the most conservative and still unregistered Baptist communities in the CIS, the Baltic countries, and those who emigrated to the USA and Canada.

Up to the present, the motifs of religious persecution and spiritual warfare and the ideology of martyrdom remain constituent for the Brotherhood system of identities and determine its defensive withdrawal from the state and from 'the world'. Its adherents define themselves as living as in olden times (*po-starinke*), with the ideal image of a 19th century Russian peasant – an uneducated hard worker, but sincere believer with a patriarchal large family. The Brotherhood's believers follow severe discipline rules

affecting every aspect of everyday life, have an ascetic moral code, regulated gender roles, and a strictly prescribed dress-code. The everyday activities of the Brotherhood's members and their households are carefully policed by pastors and senior believers. Its adherents advocate radical change and a complete break with the pre-converted past, as well as associations with a global 'world of sin'. The prohibition of contraception led to having many children in families of believers (the ideal Baptist family has 10-15 children). The principle of the separation of the Church from the world often results in objecting to serving in the armed forces and sometimes refusal of public education and child daycare.

These Baptists reject official registration of their communities and churches (which is believed to be tantamount to divorce from Christ), renounce the authority of the state in the life of the Church, and oppose any kind of political or social involvement with the 'world', or politicizing the Church, thereby persistently building a wall between 'the Church' and 'the world'. Moreover, their highly tied and regulated network structure with highly elaborated rules and norms is reminiscent of an alternative state within the state, where all church-citizens live according to and are judged by Church laws.

Since the early 1990s, the Brotherhood established a mission to the Russian Far North, and the rural Nenets (dwelling in the immense tundra space in Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Komi Repubic and Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug) became the main target of the Brotherhood missionary initiative in the North. The highly tied religious network of the Brotherhood and well established material support allow for organizing well equipped mission trips to the remotest parts of the arctic tundra. Missionaries, pastors, and ordinary church members from different parts of Brotherhood network are being sent to the missionary centres in Vorkuta (Komi Republic), Nadym and Salekhard (Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug). There, provided with snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, satellite communication devices, etc., they go deep into the European and Siberian tundra regions, living for 3-6 months in northern villages or migrating with herdsmen from campsite to campsite. When missionaries leave a place, other groups of Christian workers are on their way to the North. Thereby, the village of Beloyarsk, for instance, like many other Northern settlements is 'controlled' by missionaries throughout the year. An 'army' of believing youth travel each year to the North, practicing missionary activity in the tundra, organizing Christian camps, teaching illiterate Nenets and simply helping in household and childcare.

They are full of enthusiasm, romantic mood and religious zeal, and some missionaries spend most of a year in the tundra. Marina once said, 'They are the

romantics of the tundra, like those romantics of the 1970s, who first arrived to master the North'. Similar to Soviet 'missionaries', who undertook 'cultural trips' (*kul'tpokhod*) with the aim of mastering the Arctic and plugging backward northern peoples into Soviet modernity, contemporary Baptist missionaries also devote their lives to bringing the Christian message to backward heathens, to convert them from the darkness of backwardness into the light of faith. Simultaneously, they draw the natives into many aspects of their own culture, which they convey both verbally and nonverbally in their everyday routines. Eventually they instil their own vision of modernity.

Prosperity Gospel or: Max Weber is Not Alive and Well in the Nenets Tundra

Whereas the Baptist Brotherhood was an underground form of resistance in Soviet times, the early post-Soviet period, revealed the variety of neo-Protestant movements that became another form of resistance, an anti-Soviet alternative, a way to join the global community. As Catherine Wanner points out, in the 1990s newly arrived foreign missionaries presented their faith not against Orthodoxy but against Soviet socialism (Wanner 2007:136-137). New religious practices, particularly the inflow of prosperity-gospel denominations, gradually contributed to social and cultural changes after socialism, by providing both cures for depression and by bringing a neoliberal capitalist culture. At some stage, 'de-sovietization' turned out to be 'westernization' and scholars acknowledge the role of newly-founded religious organizations in this process. Associated with the West and based on the ideas of neoliberal capitalism, with the Prosperity Gospel ideology, newly arrived Evangelical churches were attractive and fashionable (Wanner 2007:136). Catherine Wanner, following the Comaroffs' insight, posits that American evangelical missionaries in the post-Soviet space share a colonial-like 'vision of reconstruction' for the societies they work in. Similar to the Comaroffs' observation of missionaries among the Tswana, Western missionaries in the post-Soviet space were 'cultural agents' of a new style of life. Bringing the Gospel, they simultaneously promoted capitalist ideology among the people they taught (Wanner 2007: 145-146). Mark Elliott (1996) also notes the phenomenon of 'Western missionaries, who champion in one and the same breath Christ crucified, market economics, and Western democracy'.

The post-Soviet situation was not unique and the affinity between Protestantism and modern economic development has been widely discussed after Max Weber (2001 [1930]). In his essay titled 'Max Weber is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala:

The Protestant Ethic today', Peter Berger (2010) revises Weber's thesis about the relation between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. While questioning simple cause-effect relationships, he nevertheless acknowledges the religious factor in economic development and social change in contemporary Latin America. Joel Robbins (2010:170-171), while discussing the popularity of Prosperity Gospel in the Global South, points outs that this ideology becomes a way of making sense of capitalism in the places where that economic system most spectacularly fails to contribute to a flourishing social life. This observation is similar to the earlier argument of Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose (1996) about Korean Pentecostalism that spread the message of American-style economics and anti-communism in Korea, and precisely such movements, as argued, have been particularly successful.

'The return on capital has suddenly become more spiritually compelling and imminent… than the return of Christ', remarks Eric Kramer with sarcasm (cit. by Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:315). The promise of prosperity, financial assistance and humanitarian services, a new ideology of success, business and leadership development against the background of general economic and social disorder, and of the eradication of the Soviet economic and political system is what makes the juxtaposition of early post-Soviet religious revival associated with cargo cults and chiliastic movements (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:315).

The Charismatic mission church 'Novyi Svet', with which the Beloyarsk conversion drama began, is such a neo-Pentecostal independent church. It appeals to the younger and better-educated urban population, embraces modern culture trends, uses contemporary methods of evangelism (such as Christian business seminars, network marketing, modern media facilities, global infrastructures) and often has a prosperity emphasis, basing its ideology on neo-liberal attitudes. It belongs to such 'passionate religious movements', as pointed out by Pelkmans, which are concerned 'less with tradition and ritual and more with truth, morality and visions of the future' (Pelkmans 2009b: 2). However, as I posit, this globally successful movement has not drawn a wide response among the rural Nenets in the Polar Urals. Although it appeared to be a perfect place for Pentecostal church-planting, the Russian Arctic eventually rejected an ideology that contributes to the process of making sense of neoliberal capitalist culture.

Why have liberal Evangelical and Pentecostal movements – those experiencing nowadays the rapid growth and phenomenal global success – ultimately failed in the Nenets tundra? And why are the Nenets, opting for one religion on the global religious marketplace rather than another, choosing the most fundamentalist Baptist movement?

Below I will try to answer these questions by comparing social attitudes, spatial and temporal conceptualizations of missionary movements in the North, and their points of intersection with the Nenets shape of the world.

4.2 BEING IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD: 'WORLD-BREAKING' AND 'WORLD-MAKING' PRINCIPLES IN PENTECOSTALISM AND BAPTISM

In his celebrated essay, Joel Robbins looks at the Pentecostal-charismatic movement through a simultaneous process of 'world-making' and 'world-breaking' (Robbins 2004b), which is similar to Peter Berger's general understanding of the 'world-maintaining' and 'world-shaking' power of religion (Berger 1969:4-6). Following Birgit Meyer's interpretations (2010), I understand 'world-making' as a *spatial* expansion of Pentecostalism, its community-building success and its role in construction or imaginary of the world 'at large'; and 'world-breaking' as a *temporal* dimension, the stress on rupture, either as a complete break with the *past*, or as being disjointed from the surrounding *present*, the notion of 'being born again'.

Below I undertake a comparative analysis of Pentecostal/Charismatic and Baptist spatial conceptualizations and their temporalities.

Pentecostal Spatial Orientation

The spatial conceptualization of the Pentecostal movement is based on the '*world-making*' principle, argue Robbins and Meyer. This concept of the world as the ultimate space to be filled is deeply rooted in the doctrine of spiritual warfare – understanding the world as a site of a spiritual war between the Devil (or local, demonic '*territorial* spirits') and God (see Meyer 1999; Englund 2004, Robbins 2004b:122). From this perspective, the idea that the whole world should be imbued with the Holy Spirit is teleologically legitimized as a sign of God's victory in the spiritual warfare. The phenomenon of mega-churches, Pentecostal visibility in public space, media empires, business enterprise and even Prosperity Gospel ideology in general have become tools in Pentecostalism's 'reaching out' into the world, in its conversion of the global space (cf. Coleman 2006:2; Meyer 2010). 'It is not people that are the problem, space is the problem', said a Ghanaian Pentecostal leader in Meyer's case (Meyer 2010:119). Goods and commodities are not bad *per se*, but on the contrary, they can be legitimized or even

sanctified (i.e. infused by the Holy Spirit) as long as they are used in the spiritual struggle for the world to be converted (Meyer 2010:118). Meyer also considers this idea as a nexus between the spread of capitalism, consumption, and the appeal of Pentecostalism, i.e., the embedding of neo-liberal economic policies into Pentecostalism.

The Charismatic church '*Novyi Svet*', from which the Nenets began their conversion career, is far from being a mega-church with its media and commercial empires. However, it remains a very typical neo-Pentecostal organization. Lacking the possibility to cover the world, believers nevertheless have dreams and intentions oriented toward world-making: they are encouraged to be active in local public space, to be engaged in their own business, visibly expressing their God-blessings. Despite the fact that the Prosperity Gospel is not officially accepted by the leader as a church ideology, believers often discuss the ideas of prosperity and materiality. They justify wealth and commodities as long as the latter can be part of a born-again life and would contribute to converting the world.

Once a Nenets woman in her thirties and not a member of the church said to me with a note of jealousy: 'Charismatic women are all so modern (*sovremennye*), they all have their own businesses and drive their own cars'. This was true, almost every female community member participated in network marketing and several women were the most successful Amway and Mary Kay business owners in the entire region. A young Charismatic Khanty woman from Aksarka village, for instance, was a Mary Kay representative and she had recently been rewarded with a pink Ford by the company, the ultimate symbol of her success. She was confident, however, that her business was actually a missionary work, and she skilfully combined her Mary Kay networking with evangelism, spreading both cosmetics and the message of Christ. Her own business network was actually her church. And her material symbols of success worked as signs of God blessings. 'You know, this [my business] is similar to faith. Faith without works is dead. So I believe and I do my work', she argued.

At some point this justification of *being in the world* furthers believers' imaginary of the world 'at large' that is de-localized, 'transcends more limited, local worldview and promises to involve believers in a global born-again community' (Meyer 2010:121). The church seeks to connect believers with a broader, global network – an imagined community of believers, which is transnational, de-territorialized and de-centered (Casanova 2001; Marshall-Fratani 2001; Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001). Similar to the global network marketing the Charismatic women participated in,

contemporary globalizing Pentecostalism is often compared with the Internet – a dense, unbounded, many-stranded, polycephalous global network of exchanges (Peel 2009: 192). Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Yamal and the Polar Urals regions obviously carry this multidimensional, translocal impulse, contributing to the imaginary of the world that is de-territorialized and de-centred. They attract missionaries and Christian workers from Canada, USA, Australia, Korea, Africa, and Northern and Western Europe, as well as sending their believers out to different parts of the world to communicate with other believers. Hence, the significance of locality and cultural difference is loosening in the Charismatic spatial conceptualization.

In such a frame, the Charismatic church, with its globalizing and de-territorializing impulse, brought a threat of *displacement* for the Nenets. In the previous chapter I discussed the issue of spatial semantics in nomadic cultures, stressing the significance of spatial orientation, knowledge of land, and the relationship to land that remain a foundation for the Nenets system of identities, when the tundra land possession reveals its moral dimension, as well as embodies the kinship system, economic strategies, social organization, and the spiritual and cosmological knowledge of the nomads. Thus, native space is the last 'thing' that nomads would surrender.

The globalizing Pentecostal network, however, as argued by scholars, is not tied down to any place; 'it becomes local without ever taking the local into itself' (Robbins 2003:223), it disembeds cultural phenomena from their 'natural' territories (Casanova 2001:428). Although carrying the phenomenal capacity to indigenize and translate the Christian message into local forms, Pentecostalism, is deployed in a transnational, global network and seeks to connect every local point with it (Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001; Meyer 2010; Robbins 2004b). As a result the Pentecostal project of 'reaching out into the world'transforms locality: 'the local becomes a site that is enveloped in a broader scheme' (Meyer 2010:119).

While drawing believers out into the wider world and imagined global community, Pentecostalism was perceived by the Nenets as rooting them out from their traditional locus, rather than being grounded within Nenets space.

Likewise, a Charismatic minister in Salekhard, for instance, saw no future for any projects to localize the Nenets in the tundra and to preserve their nomadic culture, be it in the form of *obshchina* movements or other projects to enhance nomadic sustainability. 'What is the sense of keeping them in the tundra? This won't be a solution to their problems in the future', he argued, and later continued:

In general... if we look at the history in general, the history of Christianity – what did Christianity lead to? Because they [*indigenous people*] are not the first, and not the last, and even not the hundredth people that are being absorbed [*pogloshchaiutsia*] by Christianity... What does Christianity lead to? To destroying [*unichtozhenie*] per se. Or, to assimilation. That is, they won't remain [*zaderzhat'sia*] in that form in which they try to stay now. They either will be assimilated, or most likely...

With that, he pointedly ceased talking.

Such de-localizing attitudes, possibly, were the first tokens announcing the failure of the Charismatic movement in the Nenets tundra.

Baptist Spatial Orientation

As per the Baptist imaginary of the world and their ordering of space, the first and fundamental postulate of the Brotherhood is total separation of the Church from the state, and ultimately from 'the world'. It is not simply a point in a church charter; it is an evangelical principle and a constituent pattern for the Brotherhood's system of values and sets of practices. The world is not a space to be filled or even changed – this predominate place of sin is rather to be escaped or avoided. Conversion of space (especially public space) is far from being the missionary goal of the Brotherhood. It is rather protecting the Church-space *against* the influence of 'the world' by building borders between them that can be characterized as the basic perspective of the Brotherhood.

Calling themselves *fundamentalists,* Baptist believers consistently struggle against any kind of 'corrupted modernism', whether it is social evangelism, liberal movements within Protestantism, prosperity gospel values, or ecumenism. A church member should live only church life and should be outside of any kind of social activity, including engaging in politics or business, attending theatres, listening to secular music or watching TV. Such advanced church technologies as Christian business, Bible based business seminars, Christian theatres, Christian political parties, etc., are the biggest threats for the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood ideologists use a distinctly anti-prosperity pathos, a message of antipathy to the values and concepts of capitalist culture, expressing rigorous opposition to the market economy, neoliberal values, spiritual democracy, and individualism. A Beloyarsk Baptist pastor once started his Sunday preaching as follows:

There are many Calvinists nowadays […], and we condemn them roundly, because they are too modern, they keep talking only about prosperity and wealth, instead of going by the narrow and thorny path of

Christ – the path of suffering and hardships. The problem is that modern evangelism has turned into a concert, a pantomime, a total theatricalization of Evangelism. It happens now in registered churches of the official Union of ECB, who used to gather whole stadiums of people. All these are very colourful, attractive and modern. But where are they all now? On the contrary, we have everything as of old [*po-starinke*]: skirts and veils, as if we are survivors of the past. But our Brotherhood is steadily increasing, even though we are on a narrow and thorny path.

Refusal to collaborate with other religious organizations and with the state is a matter of principle, even regarding the issue of joint social activities. Moreover, 'social activity' itself or 'social Gospel' is completely rejected within the Brotherhood. In his reply to the publication of 'Social position of Protestant churches of Russia', one of the Brotherhood's ideologists, Mikhail Khorev, declared that the Church does not intend to be concerned about the improvement of earthly life.[29] Instead, the Brotherhood represents itself as *separated* or *distant* from any earthly concerns, including those common for religious organizations such as alcoholism and drug addiction, orphanhood and charity in general. The true Church of Christ is not established with the primary aim to build social justice and equity, neither to cure social evils, nor to struggle for a just economic system. Thus, the Church should remain against the adaptation of Christian principles either to 'modern culture', to 'modern thinking', or to local social contexts. The only evidence of the truth of the Church is being persecuted by 'the world', but not church prosperity or social activity.

While protesting against collaboration with the state and against politicizing of the church, against prayers for presidents and political establishments, the Brotherhood thereby establishes its sole political principle – to be in opposition to the state authorities and political mainstream.

This understanding of being *separated* (*otdelënnye* is the Brotherhood's popular name) from 'the world' develops a specific spatial conceptualization. While building a blind wall between 'the Church' and 'the world' (which is often associated with Western capitalist culture), the Brotherhood does not develop the world-embracing attitude, nor the idea of world expansion as it is in the Charismatic ideology. Baptists do

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[29]Khorev, M. I. Yevangelie ili sotsial'naia doktrina? In *Istoriko-analiticheskii otdel. Mezhdunarodnyi Soiuz Tserkvei Yevangel'skikh Khristian Baptistov*. October. 2009. According to the Baptist church charter, the church does not have juridical status, and should not be involved in any commercial activity or profitable business.

not intend to convert the world, or to cover the space; their intention is rather to isolate and to protect the Church.

To sum up, it is rather a Baptist spatial '*world-breaking*' that is found in contrast to the Charismatic '*world-making*' doctrine. The Baptist Brotherhood is a centralized and highly hierarchized organizational structure; its organizational centre is endowed with an unquestionable authority and symbolic power. However, the Brotherhood ideology does not entail a 'reaching-out-into-the-world' tendency. Instead, the Baptist axiological tendency is rather unidirectional – the further from the urban centre towards the geographical periphery, the more opportunity to be religiously unspoiled and to have a pure Christian life without the corrupting influence of urban civilization, i.e. the more possibility to create the purist 'church-space'.

The significance of border experience and the imaginary of spatial distance – the idea of 'the Church' that must live somehow beyond the border of 'modernity' – induces the construction of *spatial utopia* – the imaginary of the Church 'at large' that should be distanced from the metropole centre or the 'modern world' as much as possible, and one should not interfere with the other. These ideas underlie Baptist missionary projects as a realization of utopia called 'the Church of God'. The Baptist social expectation is reminiscent of (and often popularly compared with) those of Russian *Narodniki* ('Populists') of the 19th century, with their anti-capitalist stance, nostalgic project of 'going to the people' (*khozhdenie v narod*) in search of truth, cultural purity, and genuine conceptual clarity.

Trying to realize this utopian project, Baptists seek distant, isolated places to plant their churches, hence to construct this ideal 'church-space'. Many Baptist believers prefer to avoid urban space, instead choosing peasant life in remote places.

Baptist axiological *ex-centricity* (to use the Bhabha's term 1994:4) is found in juxtaposition with Nenets expectations, who have for centuries been considered as people on the periphery, as 'outsiders' severed from the sedentary centre. Baptist spatial semantics coincide with the Nenets spatial order and their perception of the tundra. Tundra space, which has been perceived by the Russian 'centre' as an empty and wild space, and by the Charismatic and Evangelical missionaries as a land of Devil spirits, is, for Baptists, that unspoiled space to realize their utopian project. The tundra, commonly perceived as being exempt from state structures, appears to be the perfect space to build the Church. For the Brotherhood, it becomes the Holy Land.

It is no wonder that the tundra became a special missionary target for the Baptists, and the social space of the tundra overlapped with the Baptist project of realizing their

utopia. Baptists domesticated tundra space, making it meaningful, valuable and alive. Missionaries for months and years travelled in the tundra of the European North, the Polar Urals, and the Yamal, Gyda and Taimyr Peninsulas. They had deep knowledge of the tundra, with its landscape, migration routes and campsites. As a result they indigenized the tundra landscape. And they re-localized or re-rooted Nenets in this sacralized space.

Baptists' attitudes are similar to that of early Soviet politics toward Northern natives, who were regarded as living in a stage of primitive communism, unspoiled by class differentiation. Consequently, the Soviet missionary aim was just to transform the primitive communism into a scientific one. Likewise, Baptist missionaries argue that Nenets culture has not been spoiled by urban civilization with its market economy values and thus is much closer to the pure Christian ideal than the sedentary centre. The missionary aim therefore is just to bring the Gospel and to make Nenets pristine life truly Christian.

Pentecostal Temporality

To return to Robbins' second point: '*world-breaking*', the pathos of rupture and discontinuity, underlies Christianity in totality as a system of meanings. Robbins looks at this discontinuity issue through the lens of *temporality*, 'Christianity represents time as a dimension in which radical change is possible. It provides for the possibility, indeed the salvational necessity, of the creation of ruptures between the past, the present, and the future' (Robbins 2007:10-11). Christian conversion or being 'born-again' always entails a rupture in time: be it a complete break with the *past* – memory, local traditions, narratives, gods, 'traditional culture' as a whole – or as being disjointed from the surrounding *present*, which can be social environment, believer's kin or wider society (Meyer 1998; Engelke 2004; van Dijk 1998; Dombrowski 2001; Robbins 2010). Christian ideas concerning discontinuity and change that Robbins made the starting point for his central theoretical assumptions (Robbins 2003, 2007, 2010) are a fortiori developed within Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. As Meyers argues, a temporalizing discourse 'seems to be basic to Pentecostal identity as grounded in the present and geared toward the future' (Meyer 2010:121).

Dissociation from previous social and cultural affiliations was among the features characteristic for the Charismatic churches I observed in Yamal and the Polar Urals. Here too, the notion of 'being born-again' was obviously the most significant in a believer's life and were to be visibly expressed in everyday life. In many cases these

attitudes led to taking a stance against 'traditional culture'. As I will show in the following chapters, the practice of burning 'idols' became an expressed ritualization of discontinuity (as Robbins calls it, 'rituals of rupture' 2003:224). This 'anti-culture' stance was even more intensified by the practice of *diabolization* of traditional spiritual beings, which is the common technique for Pentecostal translations of key Christian terms into local cultures (Meyer 1994). Ritual items, 'idols' and even the tundra as a whole were thought to be filled with demons that have real existence. One Charismatic missionary was convinced that 'the problem is that even if they burn their idols, they yet have idol consciousness, and this is the essence of life for these people'. As a result of diabolization, converted Nenets did not merely reject or deny old meanings and practices, but actively struggled with everything that could be associated with 'demons'.

Baptist Temporality

The Baptist Brotherhood – as the community of 'true Christians' – of course has no lesser degree a significant 'born-again' pathos and a stress on rupture from 'pagan' past, as well as from sinful presence. However, as I argue, Baptists have rather a retrospective teleology that makes their discontinuity impulse less emphasized. Here, the idea of conversion is rather perceived as a return to the past. Representing themselves as 'pristine Christians', Baptist believers idealize both early Christian ascetic principles and the historical beginning of the Brotherhood itself. Born as a protest reform movement, the first Brotherhood figures are regarded as courageous, unyielding, and purist believers, who claimed the purification and rebirth of Evangelicalism, and the return from a corrupted (by an atheistic state) religious institution to a truly Christian Church. Up to the present, the sacralization of the past – be it the Biblical past, 19th century Russian Evangelism, or Soviet-era evangelical 'renaissance' – becomes the constituent domain for believers' religious experience. Thus, conversion is perceived as a return to the 'holy past', back to the source of pure Christianity.

'We live as of old', repeated a Baptist leader in Beloyarsk. He echoed the main Brotherhood principle – do *not* go with the modern times. In his statement discussed above, Mikhail Khorev argued that the Brotherhood is always being told, 'You can't live in the past! Stop going back to fathers and looking at the church of the first century! The church of Christ should look ahead, into the future'.[30] He insists that this attitude

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[30] Khorev, M.I. *Ibid.*

towards the future is an encroachment on the Church's foundation. Instead, the Brotherhood lives looking at the past, for only the past keeps the ideal of Christian purity.

There is another implementation of Baptist retrospective teleology. While analysing Baptist conversion narratives published in Brotherhood didactic literature, I have observed that their structure significantly differs from those typical for contemporary Evangelical tradition. What is striking in these conversion narratives is their main character – the stories are generally told by the children of believing parents. The prevalence of conversion stories of children of believing parents is logical and is a historical outcome of the Brotherhood. Considering that during the Soviet period the Brotherhood existed as an illegal and persecuted organization, the long-term social isolation induced the closedness of the Brotherhood. Thereby, during a long period the Brotherhood has been replenishing itself via its own natural increase, so that now a big portion of incoming members consists of the children of believing parents. And since the Brotherhood members are aimed at having many children (and the prohibition of contraception allows this life strategy to be realized) its natural increase is at a high level.

The specific character of conversion stories, however, significantly alters the typical structure and axiological outcomes of conversion narratives. The typical genre of spiritual autobiography has a three-part diachronic structure. It echoes the structure of the ritual process itself – the rite of passage (which conversion itself represents), elaborated in classic studies of ritual by Arnold van Gennep (2004 [1908]) and then Victor Turner (1991 [1969]). For Van Gennep and Turner, the ritual consists of three phases: separation – liminal phase (transition) – aggregation. Similarly, a typical Evangelical conversion narratives has a three-part structure: a) The description of a sinful life, designation of a sin; b) transition stage, the awakening of the sinner; c) final unification with Christ in His church (see Rambo 193:113ff).

In Baptist standard conversion stories the typical three-part structure of conversion narratives is modified. The first part, the statement of a sinful life, is replaced by the description of a genuinely Christian life in a Christian family – the normal background for a child of believing parents. The second part, where one can usually read the turning point of conversion itself, is on the contrary, replaced by the story of the temporary interruption of Christian purity and the detachment of the individual from the holy Church. Hence, the final pattern of a conversion narrative is the *re*-unification with the family and holy community, the return to a previous religious purity. Therefore, Baptist

conversion narratives do not emphasize and ritualize the rupture from the sinful past in personal life as much as it is maintained in other Evangelical traditions. Instead, conversion narratives are structured in the form of a return to the past, i.e. to the family history, as a reunification with the parents' faith.

What point of intersection can be found here with Nenets temporality?

Immersing themselves into Christian disjunctive temporalities, converted Nenets faced the problem of articulating and conceptualizing their own past within an appropriated sense of time. The converts got involved in ongoing experiments with local time and history, engaging in everyday discourse while expressing and interpreting Christian discontinuity and the notion of being 'born-again'.

At the beginning of the conversion era, there were a number of cases in which the Christian rupture and born-again impulse led to a rigorous denial of 'traditional Nenets culture' (a converted native could interpret these words to mean anything from a single act of burning 'idols' all the way to the point of giving up the entire nomadic way of life and settling down in a village or town).As I will demonstrate in chapter 6, the anti-native-culture position evoked great tensions and conflicts and raised heated debates within the Nenets community, as well as in regional public discourse. Soon after, many converted Nenets began the process of justification of or returning back to 'the culture'; those who previously antagonized 'traditional culture' became deeply committed to asserting, reshaping and expressing it.

What made this possible? I assume that it was precisely the Baptist tacit meaning of conversion as the 'return to the past' that had furthered the Nenets' search for temporal continuity and cultural integrity in their converted world.

Religious conversion inscribed the nomads into the wider Christian history and induced them to (re)construct their own history, while using 'material at hand' – their family stories and legends, native rituals and myths, as well as appropriated tools and techniques of translations provided by their membership in the Christian church.

In the following chapters I will show how people re-narrated their personal stories and local histories, while internalizing Christian values and key concepts such as prophecy, salvation, predestination and damnation. They revised their histories, situating them within Christian soteriology, as well as representing 'traditional Nenets culture' as a manifestation of the '*Old Testament*', and non-converted Nenets – as 'Old Testament' Nenets, who live according to old Jewish law. Such techniques with general Baptist axiological retrospectivity provided believing Nenets with the tools to convert,

to justify and even to sanctify their own past. Hence, this allowed them to re-assemble 'Nenetsness' on a novel conceptual foundation.

4.3   'HAUTE COUTURE' MODERNITY VS. 'OLD-FASHIONED' MODERNITY

Arkadii, a former Evangelical leader of the Beloyarsk community once explained to me his understanding of the Baptists' success amongst the Nenets:

> They [the Brotherhood] cannot be successful in a civilized place, but here in Beloyarsk, there is a direct way out to the tundra. And nobody except Nenets will accept them. So many times people from emancipated [*raskreposhchennyi*] and advanced [*prodvinutyi*] churches came in here – but they didn't succeed at all. But *Sovetovtsy* [i.e. the Brotherhood] get rooted here, because everything is strict in there: veils, skirts, they govern everything – here to stand, there to sit. And the Nenets feel comfortable there. And when they go to other churches, they call it [in Nenets] *siadkobtă,* which means ashamed, uncomfortable. So, Tolik's [Evangelical] church is a liberated and emancipated one. Therefore the Nenets feel uncomfortable in there. They are straight away *siadkobtă* [...]
>
> This is as if you use an automatic washing machine and don't even know that non-automatic ones exist. But when you arrive here, where the civilization is much lower, less developed, you have to become like them, you have to become less developed, so they could understand you and you could understand them. And *Sovetovtsy* fit them, because they live in the old way [*po-starinke*] and keep the Nenets under subordination. And Nenets cannot do anything without them.

I find this explanation the best illumination of the grounds of the Baptist-Nenets encounter.

The Brotherhood is popularly called *Sovetovtsy* – a term derived from the official name of its board, The Council (*Sovet*) of Churches. However, it rather vernacularly articulates with the Soviet legacy, towards which the Baptist system of coordinates has always been orientated. Struggling for decades against the Soviet regime, the conservative Baptists eventually took the shape of a Soviet-like institution. As an Evangelical leader in Salekhard argues, 'They're *Sovetovtsy*, because they look like Soviet people and everything is Soviet-like in their Church. Even their meetings are called and look like Soviet party congresses [*s"ezdy*]. They are dressed as Soviet party officials. They are always against the Soviet, against the communists, though they look Soviet themselves, having faces of prosecutors, as I call them'.

Paradoxically, the Soviet habitus of the Brotherhood became more attractive, because it was more familiar for the Nenets than the modern Western shape of the Charismatic movement. As Piers Vitebsky rightly argues, 'The Soviet past had already

moved up into at least one of the positions of a golden age – it has become "traditional"' (Vitebsky 2002:187).

As I have already stressed, many scholars discuss Weber's famous thesis about the relation between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. In the Nenets tundra, however, instead of promoting capitalist culture, the Protestant movement became a form of resistance to the latter – resistance to the process of disenchantment that, according to Weber, was instigated by Protestantism itself. Baptist conversion became a form of un-making capitalism in the Arctic – a mode to slow down the Western shape of 'modernity'.

Sergei, the leader of the Baptist Beloyarsk community, repeated that they live as of old, looking back at the past, while not letting 'modernity' interfere with the Church's inner life. For him, as for the rest of Baptist ideologies, and now for Nenets adherents as well, the conversion experience exacerbated their relations to the global system, to modernity, but simultaneously it provided a set of conceptual tools through which such tensions could be embodied and acted upon.

These 'modernity tensions' became a fundamental point of juxtaposition between the Nenets and Baptist cultural orders. As I show in this and the following chapters, the conjuncture of Baptist and Nenets social attitudes, spatial orientation and temporal logic, gender and family roles, and generally their imaginary of modernity and their (dis)placement in it – instituted for the Nenets novel grounds for challenge and resistance, for cultural boundary-building and re-maintaining authenticity.

Besides, the Brotherhood became a mediator between the Nenets world and the Russian state. Both for Baptists and Nenets, '*the other*' means the state, to negotiate with or to oppose. The social isolationism of Baptists and their self-representation as being distanced from 'the world' appeared to be consonant with Nenets '*outsiderness*'. Nenets tacit resistance to the power domination and their perception of *Lutsa* modernity as causing moral and ritual contamination were echoed with the general Baptist understanding of modernity and their resistance to the state.

This can be compared with the Charismatic politics of missionary work: there were some cases at the beginning of the missionary movement in the Polar Urals when Charismatic and Pentecostal missionaries, while working in the tundra, preferred to work among *sovkhoz* reindeer brigades rather than among private herdsmen. They would initially negotiate with the head of a brigade, who would then distribute missionaries among *chums*. Moreover, collaboration with local state authorities was believed to facilitate evangelizing work.

The Brotherhood, however, by protesting against collaboration with the state and against politicization of the Church, thereby politicized conversion, i.e., they made converted Nenets more politically concerned, actualized an awareness of their inequality, and thus created a new basis for Nenets resistance. Nenets converts appropriated the discourse on religious persecutions and the Baptist stance against collaboration with the state. Following their leaders, Beloyarsk Nenets blamed those churches that were officially registered and were thereby dependent on the state.

For example, Nadia argued, 'The church of Tolik [Evangelical church in Salekhard] is depraved, because it is registered. That means that they serve the world, but not the Lord. Our church [Baptist], on the contrary, is not registered. That means that it doesn't stick to the state [*ne derzhitsia gosudarstva*], but stands aside of it, on its own'.

These converts became more alerted toward *Lutsa* authorities. Anti-Russian discourse was much more elaborated within the religious community than in a society of non-converted Nenets.

The long-standing marginalization of the nomadic Nenets in the Polar Urals made the tundra a difficult place for political mobilization. Nevertheless, the Beloyarsk community of the converted asserted its self-determination through conversion to the conservative Baptist movement. Thus, religious conversion became a mode of 'ritualized resistance', the tacit resistance of a colonized periphery.

'The Russians have had a diabolical influence on the [Nenets] people', argued the Baptist missionary in Beloyarsk, a Russian himself. He obviously meant by Russian influence the whole complicated history of Russian colonization of the North. The missionary task, thus, was to protect the Nenets against this 'diabolical influence'. Hence, Baptist mediation between the Nenets world and the Russian state took the shape of a wall between the former and the latter. And Brotherhood membership became a form of alternative citizenship.

To sum up, the Baptist Brotherhood (whose identity is based on resistance ideology) provided the Nenets with the categories of resistance and opposition to the Russian state and to the global order. And the background for the Nenets resistance became Baptists' construction of their own type of modernity. I call it '*old-fashioned*' modernity as opposed to that of '*haute couture*' which represents, for instance, the Charismatic movement.

The terms of fashion design are meaningful. Sergei, the Baptist leader in Beloyarsk, originally from St. Petersburg, who had extreme authority among the Nenets, used to be a fashion designer in his pre-converted past. For him and correspondingly for his Nenets

congregation, corporeality and aesthetics of conversion, the appearance of believers, the style and intonation of talk, even the dress-code and body techniques were fundamental patterns of religious experience. Through the framework of aesthetics, an awareness of 'modernity-tensions' was being articulated and elaborated.

Trying to explain to me her religious choice, Marina said: 'There are modern churches, where everything is so emotional, with modern music, they wear jeans and women wear make-up. They are advanced [*prodvinutye*]... they are too modern [*slishkom sovremennye*] for us'.

For the Polar Ural Nenets, '*haute couture*' modernity is one which is 'too modern', which is uncomfortable or embarrassing to put on. The Charismatic church, for instance, with its aesthetics of success and emancipation, made Nenets converts sometimes feel uncomfortable. Alexei was right: talking about their former membership in Charismatic and Evangelical churches, Nenets often described this experience by the use of the Nenets term '*siadkobtă*' – feeling uncomfortable, ashamed, embarrassed. A young Nenets woman from Beloyarsk, in her twenties, described her visits to the Salekhard Evangelical church (the 'advanced and emancipated' one). She said that before coming into the church she purposefully changed her clothes in advance, and put on jeans instead of her traditional dress – in order 'to fit the situation'. But it made no difference: she still felt '*siadkobtă*'. 'There I felt as if I was already an old woman!' she concluded.

Conversely, the Baptists translatedthis *siadkobtă* experience(in Sahlins' terms, a *humiliation* experience), the awareness of inequality to what Nenets call 'the modern', into a new mode of self-consciousness and resistance, hence making it a *strategy of empowerment*. The rejection of 'modern churches' became a religious principle. Moreover, this attitude articulated and concretized the discourse on modernity itself, and its multidimensionality and multivectoredness. It thus provided the ideological platform upon which the project of the Nenets alternative – i.e., old-fashioned – modernity was being elaborated. An enchanted, indigenized modernity, one that reverses commonsensual spatial and temporal perspectives, it faces back to the past (hence, against the contemporary neo-liberal values) and beyond the spatial frontiers, further into the periphery, locating its axiological centre in the marginal tundra.

Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to unpack the dialectical interplay between the Nenets and missionaries. The missionaries arrived to convert and to change the Nenets universe

(believed as backward and pagan), to colonize their consciousness. However, the conversion experience revealed Nenets agency in this cultural encounter. Opting for one of the religions on the global religious marketplace rather than another, they chose the most fundamentalist Baptist movement, while rejecting those neo-Protestant movements that appear to be the fastest-growing sector of Christianity nowadays.

While comparing social attitudes, spatial and temporal conceptualizations of Northern missionary movements and their points of mismatch/juxtaposition with the Nenets worldview, I observe that it is Baptists' space and time and their imaginary of the world that came into consonance with the Nenets shape of the world. As Nenets recycled the Baptist imagination of modernity and their resistant attitudes to the latter, they developed it into an ideological platform upon which to base their own project of alternative modernity.

In the following chapters I examine Nenets' techniques of indigenization of the Christian message while creating the project of being alternatively modern. I argue that, as a native response, the Nenets transformed new religious practices into a new background for their own 'Nenetsness', as a strategy of empowerment. I observe how new religious membership provided a foundation for 'indigenous awakening'. Similar to observations of scholars on other parts of Siberia (Broz 2009:23-24; Vaté 2009:41) and elsewhere, the Evangelical movement became a vanguard of the Nenets ethnic revival.

In the following chapter I will demonstrate how the missionary enterprise has been deeply affected by indigenous cultural processes, to the extent that missionaries got involved in the reproduction of indigenous culture patterns, legitimating indigenous cultural logic and social order, indigenous kinship and gender roles, hence reinforcing traditional sociocultural order.

CHAPTER FIVE

BLOOD KINSHIP AND KINSHIP IN CHRIST'S BLOOD

In Spring 2008 I arrived at Nadia's chum in the Baidarata tundra. We were sitting near the fireplace and having tea and she was telling me the news about their congregational life in the tundra, how they got new 'brothers' and 'sisters' in the community, while some former members had broken away from the church and therefore were not 'sisters' and 'brothers' anymore. Finally she said to me, 'Tanya, if you would repent, you would become our sister, and no one would be closer to us than you'.

Relationships in her religious life were cast in an idiom of kinship, but what meanings and social practices underlay her notion of 'sister' and 'brother', and how did the Christian ideology of kinship correlate with Nadia's understanding of 'natural' kinship and her native tundra kin network? In other words, what did it mean to be a 'sister' or a 'brother' among converted Nenets and how did this new category fit the native ideology of kinship? Ultimately, did the words of Jesus redefine kinship?

There is a popular joke in Yamal: in the tundra all Nenets are relatives. And the issue of kinship was particularly discussed within newly established Protestant communities when it was revealed that native 'sisters' and 'brothers' in Christ, constituting a native church, turned out to be members of the same family or clan.

As a range of scholars stress, kinship ties are essential for the social organization of Siberian native people and kin networks play a crucial role in social regulations, distributing resources as well as land-claims (Dolgikh & Levin 1951; Ventsel 2004; Ziker 1998). In the Nenets case, too, bonds of kinship keep Nenets society integrated, and the kinship system has essential cultural and economic significance in the tundra. Mutual assistance, reciprocity and exchanges within groups of kinsmen are considered the foundation for tundra economy, for the nomads' wellbeing and even their survival. The interconnectedness in Nenets tundra society is popularly described as '*Nenets radio*'. The tundra can be characterized as kin networks where every nomadic campsite is bound with the rest of the kinsmen dispersed across the immense expanse of the tundra. In other words, seemingly separated, isolated and geographically distanced, Nenets nomadic campsites are nevertheless united in a tundra kin network that is highly tied and interconnected by economic, informational and other social exchanges.

In this chapter I argue that although Protestant missionaries were largely accused of destroying 'traditional culture', severing kin ties and causing kinship and family conflicts in the tundra, it was the Nenets kinship system that became a platform upon which the conversion mechanism was furthered and determined in the Polar Ural tundra. As I will show, Nenets kinship practices, as well as Nenets 'kin-thinking' (when kinship becomes Foucault's grid of knowledge) significantly influenced the way the Nenets appropriated Christianity. Nenets kinship also determined missionary work in the tundra. The missionary mechanisms began to function within existing Nenets extended kinship networks and missionary trajectories were often determined by this network, by internal regulations within Nenets kin groups (both sedentary and nomadic), as well as by exogamic politics. I call it the *internal missionization* of Nenets kin networks where the converting mechanism reproduced itself upon traditional Nenets kinship.

In this chapter I explore the symbolic construction of kinshipand those practices and discourses of kinship that had become a core issue within the new religious experience among the Nenets.

Kinship, as well as the idiom of blood kinship, is a crucial theological issue in Christianity; a key concern is to observe how biological, social and religious aspects of kinship negotiate, conflict or merge into each other in the framework of Nenets conversion and creation of new religious communities. Hence, the aim here is to analyze how Nenets kinship – an essential and taken-for-granted category, regarded as inherited in people's blood – was taken out into the field of revision and reconstructions, and was instrumentalized as a means of social regulation and as a matter of power relations.

My main argument is that the Christian category of spiritual kinship was indigenized according to a Nenets internal logic of 'natural' kinship. The indigenization process developed in such a way that newly established communities of brothers and sisters in Christ coincided with the tundra kin network or created an alternative tundra network that still functioned according to traditional nomadic logic. Hence, tundra economic and social networking (usually based on kinship) was revised and reinforced in the framework of conversion.

The chapter does not aim to present a comprehensive survey of the traditional Nenets kinship system (the study of Nenets kinship system can be found in Dolgikh 1970; Kostikov 1930b; Kupriianova 1954; Kvashnin 2001; 2003; Simchenko 1974; Startsev 1930; Vasil'ev 1979; Verbov 1939; Volzhanina 2010). The focus here is to

examine the missionary initiatives and Nenets religiosity as a kin-based activity, the outcome of which was twofold: on one side, it was the revaluation and realignment of Nenets traditional kinship networks; on other side, it was the indigenization of the Christian conception of kinship and in general of the religious network of *spiritual* 'brothers' and 'sisters' according to native internal cultural logic. I analyse how converted Nenets 'played' with kinship as a strategy to adjust social relations, interpreting the conflicting encounter of two ideologies – their traditional understanding of biological kinship perceived as something inherent and unchangeable, and kinship as a religious category – as a gradually gained kinship, as an outcome of the 'second birth', according to which all believers become related to each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

I also undertake a comparative analysis of Nenets and Baptist Brotherhood attitudes towards marriage and family that illuminates the background for the Nenets *bricolage*. The proximity of Nenets and Brotherhood notions of kinship and of ideal marriage, family and gender roles provided the Nenets with novel tools to fashion their culture project as 'truly traditional', yet alternatively modern.

5.1   KINSHIP AS SUBSTANCE AND CODE

Christian Kinship as Substance and Code

In his study of American kinship David Schneider examines the distinction between a relationship as *substance* and a relationship as *code for conduct,* a dual aspect upon which kinship is built. (1977; 1980:28). To use Schneider's idea, the combinatory potential of substance and code is relevant for an analysis of the social life of kinship in Nenets religious experience and community building. The idea of kinship as a matter of blood and sex meets a new understanding of relationship built on the idiom of kinship as a second birth, i.e., kinship as a moralized code for conduct. On the one hand, it is Schneider's *denaturalizing of kinship*, when (as a result of religious conversion) kinship that previously was understood as unchangeable and inherent is now taken out into the field of social construction. On the other hand, the process of creating a religious community implies '*naturalization power*', when new kinds of relationships that seemingly have no basis in substance are interpreted and built according to the 'natural' understanding of kinship, or as Silvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney define it, a process of naturalization at work, when relationships are cast in an idiom of kinship (Yanagisako & Delaney 1995).

Schneider also stresses the prevalence of the use of kinship terms in Christianity, and the notion of kinship as a grounded concept in Christian paradigm (1977:70). 'Kin-thinking' can be viewed as fundamental in the constitution and functioning of Evangelical Christian communities. Schneider posits for Christianity that it made a shift from substance to code, 'so that commitment to the code for conduct becomes paramount as the defining feature and the substantive element is redefined from a material to a spiritual form in Christianity' (1977:69).

However, it would be a simplistic approach to compare religious kinship and Nenets 'natural' kinship as based either on code or substance relatively. Both paradigms are built on both elements; and this potential combination of unchanged and substantive versus constructed and socially regulated becomes an arena where two kinship ideologies meet and negotiate.

Religious kinship is not merely a metaphor or a relationship as code for conduct. Christian kinship is theologically based on the idea of *embodiment* that implies the importance of blood as a substance of kinship (Cannell 2013; Englund 2004:304-305).United by the blood of Jesus or being born again in His blood, Christians organize a spiritual unity that is, therefore, experienced as *corporeal* unity (Englund 2004:305). Religious conversion is an act of faith, whereby a believer joins a corporeal unity and establishes a new kind of relatedness, which is based on the metaphor of blood and permits community members to call one another 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Harri Englund, for instance, provides an example of Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo (Malawi), who believe that the blood that Jesus shed on the Cross runs in the veins of every believer (2004:305).

However, the relatedness established through the blood of Christ and corporeal experience in Christian kinship is not simply a matter of a single event, like Pauline conversion. Religious kinship is a matter of long formation – relatedness that is gradually constituted, i.e., based on code. It is a matter of on-going verification through religious practices, something that is not substantively given, but a matter of perfection, which can be temporarily or forever lost if one morally stumbles. For instance, in the Baptist Brotherhood, there is a practice of temporary or permanent exclusion of a member from the community where a person is not allowed to participate in the religious life of the church, as well as to communicate with the rest of the members in his/her everyday life. This is perceived as detachment from Christ's body, and usually community members are cautious to avoid calling a violator 'brother' or 'sister'.

To summarize, spiritual re-birth establishes relatedness that is built on both elements: substance and code. And in contemporary Protestant Christianity, the notion of religious kinship is not merely a matter of ideology but is rather the tip of the iceberg revealing a complicated system of social and economic relationships, exchanges and interactions within translocal religious networks. And as I will show below, through negotiation of native kin ties and religious conceptions of kinship, converted Nenets developed new imaginaries, new forms of exchanges and even new mobilities; to put it in Janet Carsten's words, 'kinship constitutes one of the most important arenas… for creative energy' (2004:9).

Nenets Kinship as Substance and Code

The distinctive features of Nenets kinship are also built out of these two elements: relationship as natural substance and as code for conduct.

Anthropological discussions of kinship often revolve around bodily substance, particularly the idiom of *blood* that defines a relationship as natural substance when 'blood' is believed to be a state of shared physical substance (Schneider 1977; Carsten 2011; 2013). As a range of scholars observe, Nenets historically have had a distinctive clan (N.: *yerkar*) and phratrial (N.: *tenz*, a group of clans) system, following exogamic rules, restricting marriages within the same clan or the particular group of clans (Dolgikh 1970; Golovnev 2004:37ff; Khomich 1966:141ff; Vasil'ev 1979; Verbov 1939). Two primary groups of Nenets clans are observed – Vanuito and Khariuchi (or Okotetto) – and members of each group call one another *niami* (N.: *nia* means brother), or *ŋamzani pelia* ('a piece of my flesh') (Verbov 1939). So it is believed that clan members are united as brothers with a unity in blood and flesh.

The idiom of blood and body underlies the idea of Nenets kinship, as well as determining the construction of Nenets ethnic identity. To repeat an expression of a Nenets woman, who perceives Nenets ethnicity through the idiom of blood: 'Doctors came here the other day and they did blood tests among the Nenets. And it was revealed that the Nenets don't have pure blood anymore – everything is mixed: Nenets, Khanty, Russians'.[31]

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[31]In the same logic, the idiom of kinship is frequently employed in nationalistic discourse and manifestations of ethnicity (Eriksen 1993:108; Banks 1996:154). As in the ideologies of modern nationalism, blood can unite people as a nation or an ethnic group (Linke 1999, Schneider 1977), or as Michael Herzfeld posits, nationalism expands on a locally conceived 'natural' relationship of kinship (1987, 1997). Thomas Eriksen defines nationalism and other ethnic ideologies as a form of metaphoric kinship: 'As a metaphorical *pater familias* nationalism states that the members of the nation are a large family' (Eriksen 1993:108).

Besides the relationship in blood and flesh, Nenets kinship also implies an aspect of *territoriality*, when every clan or group of families is marked by its own land, pastures, fishing and hunting territories, cemeteries and sacred sites (Brodnev 1959; Dolgikh 1970:93ff; Verbov 1939:65; Yevladov 1992:153-156; Zhitkov 1913:205-208; see also Stammler 2005a:207-238). Despite long-distanced migration (particularly in the Yamal peninsula) kinship-based territorial control remains significant for Nenets economy and social organization. To borrow from Edmund Leach, property relations and land tenure endured through time constituted the concept of descent and of affinity (1961:11).

Beginning in the 1930s, the Soviet policy was directed toward the destruction of the clan system among the Siberian native population and the clan principle of social organization was targeted with replacement by territorial organization and territorial administration (Dolgikh & Levin 1951). However, despite Soviet territorial reorganization, the principle of clan lands and territorial integrity of Nenets clans retained its vital importance in Nenets social and economic interrelations, as well as in their identities up to the present (Stammler 2005a). As Florian Stammler observes, the Nenets clan principle of land use has not changed drastically from that of the beginning of the 20th century (Stammler 2005a:129,131,218-219). Moreover, during the Soviet period, ethnographers noted that Nenets reindeer herding *kolkhozy* and fishermen brigades in Yamal, despite authorities' resistance, were built according to kinship principles where the territories of *kolkhozy* coincided with original clan territories and the members of a *kolkhoz* were mostly members of one clan (Brodnev 1950; see also Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:48).[32]

In this context Nenets kinship is based not only upon the notion of inherited substance, but on the code for conduct as well: the perception of space and territory implies a set of social and moral regulations that are constructed and translated in terms of kinship. And a Nenets should observe these kin-oriented regulations in his/her everyday life in order to be a part of a kinship 'body' (cf. Ventsel 2012 on clan-based landownership and the notion of a 'master' of the land).

The principle of social interaction in the tundra is also kin-based. A Nenets nuclear family household[33] is not an economically independent or integral unity, but of crucial life importance is *ŋesy* –a nomad campsite, integrations of several nomadic households

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[32]The same happened with Yamal residential schools, which were built according to the 'family principle' (Liarskaya 2003).

[33] In the Nenets language there is no term for 'family': it is usually borrowed from Russian – *sem'ia* (Volzhanina 2009:117). In literature, the term 'family' is used to refer to a household, a group of kinsmen living in one chum or a large extended kin group. In Nenets society, family relations can be expressed through the Nenets terms *miad'ter* (a chum dweller) or *ŋesy* – a nomad campsite.

usually related to each other and migrating on a particular territory.The multiplicity of social ties integrates dispersed Nenets tundra *ŋesy* into a clan. And the responsibility of mutual assistance between kinsmen is a basic rule (cf. Brodnev 1959; Stammler 2005a:172).

Moreover, Nenets kinship is not a stable idiom, but implies an aspect of changeability and fluctuation. As scholars point out, although the integrity and solidity of clans is of great social importance, they never functioned as stable units, and kin-based economic associations were relatively unstable, depending on the season, migration routes, availability of resources, as well as animal epizootics that could at times realign the power structure within a kin network (Slezkine 1994:5-6; Stammler 2005a:172, 225-226; Golovnev 1995:51; Volzhanina 2013).

The fluctuation of the Nenets kinship system and the instability of clan-economic associations can be characterized rather as a *potential* kin network than actual bonds of relatives with mutual social and spiritual obligations. Depending on various factors, the potential network can either be organized into a well-structured body or can disintegrate. For example, when reindeer herders, who used to live in kin-based nomadic campsites, lose their herds because of epizootics or other reasons, they can settle down on river banks and become fishermen, living as relatively more isolated families, or they can move into a village until they accumulate enough reindeer to be able to return to the tundra. In this case, the kin-based economic association is disintegrated, though never fully broken, for temporarily or permanently settled Nenets can maintain ties and reciprocal exchanges with their tundra relatives (Khomich 1966:153; Brodnev 1959:73; Volzhanina 2013).

In different seasons, times and places, different patterns of this potential network can be realized. The practice is reminiscent of Kirk Dombrowski's ethnographic observation of Alaskan natives, which points out that Tlingit families do not have permanent or lasting foundations: 'They can shrink and grow and can emerge from nowhere as situations, opportunities, and problems arise' (2001:47).

Another example is Nenets' nomadic temporal economic associations of different households, cooperating for seasonal work. Nenets reindeer herders (mainly in central and southern Yamal) can cooperate into *parma*[34] – united summer camps when several herd owners consolidate their efforts in joint pasturing of their herds during summer time (Maslov 1934; Terletskii 1934; Brodnev 1950:95; Stammler2005a:132, 195-196;

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[34] Note, the Nenets term '*parma*' is a derivative from *părm*, which designates a close neighbourhood (or travelling partner) due to whom one does not feel lonely; another derivative is *parmam'-khos'*, means to get married (Tereshchenko 2003).

Golovnev 1995:53)[35]. The temporal economic bonds are usually formed according to kinship principles, although not necessarily. In other seasons the associations disintegrate.

Whereas a previous kin network can come apart, long-term social ties of neighbourhood, on the contrary, can be translated into the idiom of blood. According to Schneider, kinship as the code for conduct creates the relationships of diffuse, enduring solidarity (1977:67). So endurance through time can be seen as a basis for the construction of an alternative ideology of the family (Carsten2004:144-145), where 'permanence' is the source and simultaneously the proof of the authenticity of these ties.

The Polar Ural tundra can be viewed as an example of this endurance through time that is cast in an idiom of kinship. Since the 19th century this territory has been a place of intensive contact between nomadic Nenets (originating from Asia and Europe), Khanty and Komi, as well as Russians. This partly broke the clan principles of land tenure in this area, and created new kin bonds. Some Khanty and Enets groups were eventually integrated into Nenets kinship, and nowadays there are several Nenets clans that are of Khanty and Enets origins, whose members don't know Khanty or Enets language and consider themselves Nenets (Dolgikh1970:74–77; Verbov 1939). As far back as the mid-19th century Matthias Alexander Castrén wrote: 'The influence of the Samoyed [Nenets] tribe is so strong, that the Ostyaks [Khanty] reindeer herders have not merely adopted religion, customs [*nravy*] and the way of life of their neighbours, but moreover speak their language more fluently than their native one' (1860:192).With other long-term tundra neighbours (Forest Nenets, Khanty, Enets, Mansi, Selkups, Komi), Nenets established social relations such as economic associations and marriage alliances (Verbov 1939:60; Kostikov 1930b:7;Vasil'ev 1985; Perevalova 2004:198-209; Khomich 1970; Volzhanina 2008). Thus, those who have been closely living together as nomadic reindeer herders and fishermen, sharing a common code for conduct, are considered as a kin-based unit.

To sum up, the clearly demarcated division between biological and social aspects of kinship cannot be observed in Nenets kinship. Although the idea of sharing a substance and relatedness by birth is a significant criterion, it is not the only and constituting feature of Nenets kinship. Territorial integrity, lifestyle, economic collaboration and endurance create an alternative foundation for Nenets ideology of kinship.

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[35]Maslov (1934) also wrote about temporary fishing cooperatives, *yedoma*, among those Nenets who settled on river banks. According to Maslov, these cooperatives were also organized according to kinship principles.

The fluidity in Nenets kinship relations mirrors what Edmund Leach argued in his study of kinship in relation to land and property in Ceylon (1961). Leach's argument is that kinship is a flexible idiom, a contentless language used to talk about social structure. It is a way of talking and thinking, rather than an isolated social structure, 'a thing in itself', or 'a distinct category explainable by jural rules without reference to context or economic self-interest' (1961:146, 305-6). Following the same logic, David Schneider examines kinship 'as idiom or code in terms of which social relations are expressed, formulated, talked, and thought about' (1984:50).

Likewise, Nenets kinship is rather the potential repertoire of kin interactions, the potential ties of kinsmen and neighbours, and a way of thinking and talking about land use and about social and economic relations. And as I will demonstrate below, extending this logic, Nenets new religious communities were formulated in the idiom of kinship and were built according to Nenets tundra kin-based networking. So, in a kin-based society, kinship became the idiom in terms of which religious community relations were codified. And it was the fluidity and flexibility of Nenets kinship that contributed to Nenets *bricolage* where Nenets embraced a new ideology of kinship for the production of the nomadic system.

'The Dark Side of Kinship'

However, at the point bridging the two concepts of kinship, there were some significant stumbling-blocks that prevented the easy reconciliation of the Christian community of spiritual brothers and sisters with the Nenets kin-based society.

Schneider (1977:70) argues that religion, kinship and ethnicity are not separate domains, but the three of them are structured by the same terms and the boundaries between them are blurred. In this regard, 'ancestor worship' and 'ancestor religion' – the common terms in indigenous discourse – challenge the distinction between kinship and religion (Yanagisako & Delaney 1995:11). In the Nenets case, too, religion, kinship and ethnicity are domains without distinct boundaries and meanings migrate across domains. Religious conversion reveals these 'blurred boundaries' where religious change provokes realignments of kinship and ethnicity domains. What is defined as Nenets 'ancestors' religion' is perceived as something inherent, similar to people born into a family or nation. It is precisely because religion and kinship are two domains structured in the same terms, religious conversion is interpreted by the non-converted Nenets as betraying one's kin ties, one's ancestors and the whole idea of 'Nenetsness'.

Correspondingly, Christianity is targeted against 'ancestral' blood and 'biological' kinship.As a range of scholars have argued, the discontinuity impulse in Christian conversion leads to a significant revision of traditional kinship and 'cutting blood ties'. Conversion rupture, being 'born-again', means breaking with one's own family, liberating both from relatives and ancestors. Being suspicious of extended family networks, Protestant Christianity aims rather to separate the person from kin ties, reconstituting the person in new social relationships and creating new forms of communities, and therefore acting as a 'surrogate family' or 'family-like community' (Meyer 2004:461; van Dijk 1997; Englund & Leach 2000:235; Marshall-Fratani 2001; Wanner 2009:167). As Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2001:86) has written:

> True conversion means cutting the links with one's personal past; not simply the ungodly habits and sinful pastimes, but also friends and family members who are not born-again. Such individuals provide the greatest threats to a 'new life in Christ', precisely because of the power in ties of blood and amity… Friends, family and neighbours become 'dangerous strangers', and strangers, new friends. The social grounds for creating bonds – blood, common pasts, neighbourhood ties, language – are foresworn for the new bond of the brother and sister in Christ.

Likewise, Nenets conversion was understood by Nenets and missionaries as directed specifically against Nenets 'ancestral' blood and genealogical grid. The intention to disembed the individual from the extended family and the attempt to sever family ties was theologically grounded. 'Blood' or even 'genes' were believed to transmit the Devil's curse and sin. A Baptist missionary in Beloyarsk argued, 'in general, genetics is of great importance here, because the curse is transmitted by inheritance, through generations. And I am grateful to my service in the North, because it showed me how strong this coherence of generations [*stseplennost' rodov*] can be [...] I believe in genetics. Here the curse is inherited in genes [...] and our task is to break this coherence, this curse of sin transmitted in a clan'.

Many missionaries working in the Polar Urals believed that evil spirits operated within the frame of families and groups of descendants, and therefore, spirits got access to a person through blood ties. Evgenii, an Evangelical missionary who worked in Beloyarsk, expressed this as follows:

> [A family] is held by a team of spirits, evil spirits and there is real worship. And when you stop worshiping spirits, the latter begin to demand that you do worship them, if not – people die, drown, commit suicide... There was one chum keeper [*khoziaika chuma,* Nenets *miad' pukhutsia* – a female spirit of a chum in the form of a wooden doll]. She was 500 years old! Can you imagine? [...] So, all these years she has been keeping the

whole family in dependence […] And the Holy Spirit eventually liberated them from such dependence.

In this context, the foundation of Nenets kinship was believed to be an evil spirit that possessed generations of a family. Thus religious conversion also implied the conversion of the very foundation of Nenets kinship – now it was Jesus and his blood that were the foundation of the new kinship.

So it was believed that the Devil operated within the framework of the family, through traditional blood kinship. Moreover, Nenets clan division had been demonized by missionaries: 'The Devil played one cunning trick – he split them [Nenets] into clans and descent groups', argued a Baptist evangelizer, continuing that the curse and sins are transmitted to all by generation – in other words, to borrow from Peter Geschiere, 'the dark side of kinship' was revealed (2003). Therefore, to cut blood ties meant to cut off the vicious chain of sins and curses.

In her study of Ghanaian Pentecostals, Birgit Meyer (1998) observes that the newly converted seek to liberate themselves socially and economically from extended families, thus delivering themselves from the ancestral past and repudiating sins committed by any of one's own preceding generations. All family ties are represented as potentially dangerous. The newly converted inform their families about the fact that they are breaking the covenant which linked them with Satan through their family. 'Indeed, in practice the "complete break with the past" boils down to a break with one's family' (Meyer 1998:329); therefore kin ties are regarded as a matter of the past.

Similar to Ghanaian Christians, born-again Nenets experienced a tension between the crucial importance of traditional kin ties in their nomadic life and the Christian call to make a complete break with their ancestors' sins. In a number of cases religious conversion led to a symbolical or real separation from one's family. Some stories were really tragic with Nenets converts breaking bonds with their kinsmen, as well as Nenets families strongly objecting to their family members' conversion to the point of complete exclusion of the latter from their kin ties and thereafter from the existing tundra economic system. For some converted tundra dwellers, this resulted in their exclusion from the nomadic social system to the extent that they had to settle down in villages.

During my stay in Beloyarsk in 2008, I witnessed a family conflict. A married woman had run away from her husband (who was a fisherman and a reindeer herder in the Polar Ural tundra) and was hiding at her relative's home in the village. The story was not extraordinary for Nenets society and would normally have ended very quickly, but instead, the family fight soon erupted into a great religious conflict with the

participation of the local administration, competing missionary churches and even the police. The husband's relatives revealed that the woman had recently converted to Baptism and she was hiding at her *converted* relatives. It appeared as if the converted woman had severed her family ties, broken up with her non-converted husband and the Baptist community with its leader took the lead in this divorce. For the woman, this act resulted in her settling down in the village and giving up her almost thirty-year-long nomadic life. This, along with the general complaints against Baptists that they destroy family ties, resulted in a village conflict.

On another occasion, I was talking to a (non-converted) young man, who was a tundra dweller from the northernmost part of the Yamal peninsula and who was a rigorous opponent of religious changes in Nenets society. In his eyes, one conversion story happened in the following way:

> Once Baptists [missionaries] were travelling in the tundra through nomad campsites. And in one family, the mother was the first to become a Baptist. She became a Baptist. Then she began to persuade her elder daughters and a son to become Baptists […] She made her two elder daughters Baptists and they were living funny [*prikol'no*]: she and her [converted] two daughters were living on the one side of their *chum*, and her [non-converted] husband and other children on the other side.

In Nenets culture, living separately on two different sides of a chum means to live as two separate families. That is, Nenets society interpreted this case of conversion as causing family destruction.

Moreover, those new forms of economic and social exchanges that converted Nenets entered into – once they joined a new religious community – were considered by the rest of Nenets society as breaking the traditional tundra economic reciprocity that is based on a kin-neighbourly network. For example, the practice of tithe (which in the tundra can be made through reindeer and fish) was a frequently discussed issue in the tundra and in public space. It implied a threat when a converted Nenets left the traditional system of tundra exchanges and broke the kin network. Therefore, the wealth of a tundra dweller and even his/her survival – which greatly depends on the functionality and well-arranged kin and neighbourly interaction – was now under threat. A Nenets woman in her fifties who worked in Beloyarsk residential school expressed it as follows:

> They [converted Nenets] give money to some strange community, they slaughter reindeer. So the money goes away for nothing. They are feeding a guy [*diad'ka*] who sits in Moscow. And somebody takes money from them [tundra Nenets], because they say, if you enter our community and follow

our way, you have no right to look in a different direction and to go a different way. So, looking for money, they [converted Nenets] slaughter reindeer every year! At the end of the day they lose their sense of living in the tundra. Being left without reindeer, what can they do? – Move to villages. But they cannot do anything in the village, because they are not accustomed to living here.

In the same logic, a well-known Nenets politician in the YNAO argued that Protestant missionaries intend to set Nenets in economic bondage, 'They [missionaries] want to take away from us the most valuable thing – our land, our territory. And now they [tundra Nenets] pay with reindeer. As a result, little by little, all reindeer will go over to the ones who made them believe in this religion'.

In other words, unlike converted Ghanaian migrants in Meyer's case, it is difficult in the arctic tundra to get rid of relatives and networking reciprocity, because outside of the family and kinship system nomadic Nenets simply cannot survive in the tundra. Finding themselves in a conflict between two different ideologies of kinship, born-again Nenets were not ready to make that 'complete break' with their families and kin network. Shifting between the two systems, they neither straightforwardly rejected nor simply reproduced the dominant mode of kinship. In rupture they tried to find continuity, bridging the two idioms of kinship.

As I will show below, there were two ways to bridge them: on the one hand – there was a *denaturalizing* of traditional kinship, its revaluation and realignment, when Nenets legitimized blood kinship in terms of religious kinship. On the other hand – there was an *essentialization* of religious kinship, when new forms of relationship were couched in an idiom of 'natural ties'. New religious networks were used by the Nenets according to their traditional understanding of kinship and according to the traditional practices of a kin-based community. That meant that brothers and sisters in Christ became engaged in traditional Nenets economic and social reciprocity. While establishing an alternative kinship network – based not on blood kinship but on Christ's blood – native born-agains sought to plunge it into the traditional practices of the tundra kin web.

5.2   PARTICIPANT CONVERSION

In the following section I will examine the techniques for creating alternative (converted) kin-based networks in the tundra and how missionaries were plunged into

the reproduction of Nenets culture patterns. Following the logic of the term 'participant observation', I have called it '*participant conversion*'.

'Clan Churches'

As I wrote in the first chapter, missionary trajectories in Beloyarsk and surrounding tundra were determined by native missionary guides, usually female members of an extended Nenets or Khanty family, who became inner missionaries within their extended family network. A guide coordinated missionary movement in the tundra and villages. She was supposed to assist visiting missionaries with their logistics in the tundra, opening the geographical and social landscape of the tundra with its nomadic trajectories, the location and composition of campsites, inter-clan and inter-family relations. A missionary agent was also responsible for providing assistance in translation, yet she did not merely work as a language interpreter, but also socially translated the missionary message, preparing a potential recipient for conversion and providing a welcoming and cooperative background for evangelizing. A guide eventually opened her kin network for the missionaries while at the same time carefully watching that missionaries would not breach the conventional regulations of social relations within a kin-based society and would observe the boundaries of a provided kin network.

Hence, native kinship became the platform upon which the mechanism of religious conversion was working, and missionary trajectories depended on its internal logic.

Marina was one of the missionary guides in Beloyarsk. Her social role was to be a node in the missionary flow. Being a *knower* and a point of juncture in her extended family, she was responsible for preparing a member of her kin network for conversion. She decided which relatives, families, or campsites were now ready to hear the Christian message and which were not worthy of it. She directed missionaries according to her inner understanding of the tundra and power relations within her extended family. As a result, this practice caused power redistribution within a particular kinship group and the exclusion/inclusion of kinsmen from the religious community became a means to regulate the politics of kinship networking interrelations and reciprocity.

In the course of year, expecting missionaries' visits, Marina would accumulate the necessary information about the life of her extended family: conflicts, family fights, marriages or divorces, economic relations, births or deaths, nomadic directions, as well as watching and controlling the social behaviour of her kinsmen. She would negotiate with a particular relative, preparing him/her to meet with the missionary. At the same time, she would use her missionary authority as a tool in regulating family conflicts and

power redistribution. When Marina said, 'I might send a brother [missionary] to Kolia this year, let [the missionary] speak to him, let him repent [*pust' on pokaitsia*]', there was always some internal family realignment, conflict and power redistribution behind these words. In fact, it meant that Marina intended to include a particular relative in a new kin-religious community, thus *legitimizing* the kin relation with this person and traditional family reciprocity, making this relationship both religious and blood. It became a practice of legitimizing traditional kinship through religious conversion. And vice versa, the exclusion of a kinsman from religious community could be a matter of his/her exclusion from networking kin reciprocity. In both cases, it is internal cultural logic that underlies the practice of inclusion into and exclusion from the newly organized religious-kinship network.

Once, two tundra dwellers visited Marina. Pasha and Sasha were her remote kinsmen, visiting Beloyarsk briefly to buy provisions (*snabzhat'sia*) and to get petrol for free (*darmovoi benzin*) from the administration. I noticed that despite the Nenets hospitality tradition, Marina did not invite them to tea and they stayed on the porch, talking to her, while she was grumbling at them with unfriendly tone. Then she said (notably, here she switched her conversation from Nenets into Russian), 'Behind this door there is a believing brother, a missionary. Go in there and listen to God's Word, let him talk a little about God. Go, go there! For you think only about vodka!'

I was amazed that these two robust guys obeyed the small woman and knocked at the missionary's room. Marina grumbled, 'Pasha! Take off your hat! Take off your coat! How are you entering a house!? No, you can leave your shoes on'. Pasha was nervously bustling, not knowing where to leave his clothes. Both definitely were feeling ashamed. Finally they entered the missionary's room. They stayed there for about half an hour. And when they came out, they were holding some Christian magazines in their hands. This time Marina said, 'Once they have become our brothers, once they have listened to God's Word, then we can invite them for tea. Lena, make some food for them!' Lena (Marina's niece) began to cook spaghetti and fry sausages for the guests. And Marina said to the guys, 'Once you've listened to God's Word, you can have tea then'.

Marina's life in the village was always like that. During almost the whole year missionaries from different parts of the world lived in her 'guest room'. At the same time, her house was always full of tundra relatives who frequently visited the settlement in order to buy provisions or to get social welfare. Sedentary relatives were not separated from the tundra kin-based system of social and economic reciprocity, but

were fully integrated into all social practices of their extended families. And Marina constituted a family communicative node and its informational, social, and economic junction. In every family fight or conflict (both in the tundra and in sedentary space) she played a role of a controller or arbiter. And since mobile phones are available even in the tundra, she could control her family 'on-line'. Her role as a missionary guide endowed her with strengthened authority: Christianity had become a tool where Marina was able to modify the behaviour of her socially disruptive relatives.

As a result, missionary trajectories depended significantly on which clan and which families they collaborated with and what families and kin webs would be opened to them by their guides. In the Polar Urals the determination of missionary trajectories by the existing clan networking resulted in the creation of 'clan churches'. Similar to the Soviet period, when Nenets *kolkhozy* consisted of members of the same clan (even despite the authorities' resistance), newly established religious communities were also established according to Nenets kinship principles, even though missionaries consistently struggled against the Nenets blood bonds.

The kinship principle, of course, was not fully observed, and sometimes blood relatives got excluded from the converted kinship network, while non-relatives could be included into the alternative kinship systems of the converted. In both cases it was the discursive technique of realignment and reinvention of the kinship ties that entailed such exclusions/inclusions. Believers tended to articulate kinship relations with those who were to be included into a new religious-kinship community, while at the same time they would rather 'forget' existing kinship relations with those who were excluded from the religious yet kinship-based community.

Note that it is not only kinship principles that underlie the foundation of religious communities, but ethnic principles as well. The region of the most intensive religious conversion, the Polar Ural tundra has been historically a place of close inter-ethnic relations between Nenets, Kanty, Komi, and Russians. They developed cultural unity and maintained complicated interethnic marriage relations, while at the same time keeping distinct discursive boundaries between themselves. This also caused the reorganization of religious landscapes according to ethnic principles and newly organized Christian churches had distinct ethnic divisions (i.e. Khanty churches and Nenets churches), as well as clan communities within each ethnic church.

In the Beloyarsk religious landscape there were two Christian communities – Baptist and Charismatic. The first one consisted of almost all the Nenets, while the Charismatic community was entirely a Khanty community. The Charismatic church was known as

the church of *Taishiny* (a Khanty clan), meaning that it consisted of the members of this clan and those families that had traditional marriage relations to the *Taishiny*. Sometimes I got the impression that one could study traditional marriage contacts by studying the family compositions of the Polar Ural churches.

In the case of a breach of this principle, the community always experienced internal conflicts. A pastor of the Khanty Charismatic church once said to me: 'You know, all those in this community who caused a disturbance [*korki mochil*] and later on left the church were Nenets […] They [natives] simply do not accept that Nenets and Khanty could be together in one church'.

In the same way, a range of tensions were evoked if a church consisted of members of different family groups. This was the case in the Nenets Baptist community in Beloyarsk that had two parties from different unrelated Nenets families – the camp of Marina-Nadia and the camp of Galia and her family. These competing family parties were always a source of on-going tensions, conflicts and squabbles within the community. The parties, for instance, always competed with each other for the right to provide missionaries with their resources – i.e., with their tundra relatives who were supposed to be converted. And when missionaries arrived in Beloyarsk, Marina and Galia always argued with each other about where the missionaries were supposed to go: to Marina's campsites or to Galia's. At the same time both parties were always trying to shift some of the hosting and guiding responsibilities onto each other, such as accommodating and feeding missionaries or providing them with transportation – those duties were the most economically difficult.

To summarize, the concept of religious kinship is substituted by the traditional understanding of biological kinship. At the same time, there is a reframing of the traditional concept of kinship, its realignment and legitimization in the frame of the Christian paradigm and a Christian understanding of kinship as something that can be acquired, controlled, and lost. All these ideas are of great importance within the community of believers: who will be considered a new kinsman and who will be excluded from new kin ties – and therefore excluded from all traditional economic and social exchange systems. The new constructions of kinship became a tool in the internal power redistribution within the Nenets nomadic network, in realignment and re-actualization of existing social networks in the tundra and sedentary space. Kinship became a space for social construction and power reassessment.

Missionaries as Mediators and Marriage Matchmakers

Finding themselves as 'hostages' of existing Nenets kin-based networks and traditional nomadic trajectories in the tundra, missionaries moreover were getting involved in the reproduction of traditional Nenets practices, functioning as *mediators* in the tundra.

One of their dominant social duties in the tundra involved marriage arrangements. Missionaries took on the traditional Nenets social role of matchmaker within the marriage arrangement institute. They were now responsible for choosing marriage partners for believers, as well as for the whole marriage arrangements procedures.

Traditionally, Nenets marriage alliances sought the redistribution of wealth, as well as building and restructuring social relations between clans. In the community of the converted, marriage arrangements were no less significant. They functioned as a method for the consolidation of believers into a united religious community. Missionaries tried to control this sphere of converted life, since they believed that only the creation of new Christian families could consolidate born-agains into a tied community.

Russian mediating in Nenets family issues was not completely novel in Nenets society. In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, the Samoyeds (Nenets) often addressed their requests to Russians to settle their family issues and conflicts (Kostikov 1930b). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Head of the Orthodox mission in Obdorsk (nowadays Salekhard, the capital of the YNAO), Archbishop Irinarkh (Shemanovsky) wrote in his diaries and reports that the Samoyeds oftentimes turned to the support of a *pop* (priest) in case of family conflicts or marriage issues (2005[1910]:97-102; 2005[1905]:24-5). When a wife ran away from her husband or a Nenets man stole a woman after her parents refused to give her in marriage to him – in these cases Nenets appealed to the *pop* Irinarkh, asking him to regulate the conflicts. Father Irinarkh wrote that a church wedding solved the conflict provoked by a run-away couple, when a Nenets man could not pay a brideprice; and after the church ceremony the bride's parents (though not baptized) had to accept the situation of a violated marriage arrangement. In other case, simply a letter written by Irinarkh and sent to the tundra was enough to make a Nenets wife return to her husband (even though neither the husband nor the wife could read).

Nowadays, it was particularly the Baptist Brotherhood's missionaries that did not merely arbitrate Nenets conflicts or implant Christian marriage practices, but went deeper into the reproduction of Nenets nomadic social practices.

In Spring 2011, the Beloyarsk community was notably agitated. While expecting the arrival of missionaries soon, they already knew that the missionary leader was going to arrange a few marriages there. Two tundra young women – the church members whose destinies were going to be decided – were a matter of excitement, rumours and jokes within the community. Who will be their bridegroom? Who was chosen for them by the missionary leader? From what part of the tundra? What are their names and how wealthy they are? At the same time, everybody discussed the remaining unmarried brothers and sisters in the community and wondered when the missionary would define their fortunes. Some families were interested in 'demonstrating' their children who had reached marriageable age, trying to put in a good word for him or her.

Once the missionary had arrived, he functioned as a Nenets traditional marriage matchmaker. In general, he was responsible for choosing a potential bride for a particular male community member – in many cases a couple did not know each other and quite often lived in different parts of the Nenets tundra. If a Nenets man was ready to get married, the missionary would make a trip to a potential brides' parents place and negotiate the possibility of marriage with the parents. Following the Nenets tradition, the bride did not participate in such negotiations. Here is a story of one engaged Nenets young woman, a tundra dweller from the Baidarata tundra:

> Sergei [a missionary] brought the groom with Alexei T., a Nenets minister from that place [*sluzhitel' tamoshnii,* meaning from the *Bol'shezeme'lskaia* tundra]. Sergei explained to the groom that there is a good girl here, she is a believer, and her mother is a believer too. He always described me like that. So they arrived – the two matchmakers, Sergei and Alexei T. They arrived to Beloyarsk. My mother was in the village at that time. They were holding a [religious] meeting, and then they went together with my mother to the tundra, to our chum. We did not know anything! They did not even tell anything to my mother. So, they arrived at our chum, and held a meeting there too. They prayed. And then they said to us: we have one more thing to talk about, on another topic. Sergei then read a Bible passage, it seems from Genesis, where there is a passage about a husband and a wife. And then he said to my parents that I am already grown up, that I am already a marriageable girl and that they already have a groom. I was taken aback! All this was so sudden to me!

Finding a marriage partner was always a significant issue in the tundra, because of exogamic rules and complicated brideprice regulations (Islavin 1847:126; Shrenk1855:429; Verbov 1939; Zhitkov 1913:216-217). The existing exogamic rules forbid marriages between members of the same group of clans. As far back as the 1930s, ethnographer Gennadii Verbov noticed the issue of limitation in marriage partners' choice amongst the Nenets, due to exogamic rules and the limitedness of a

variety of Nenets clans, living on a particular territory (1939:47). The Nenets were quite consistent in following traditional exogamic rules and cases of breach were rare (Brodnev 1950:96-97; Khomich 1966; Verbov 1939:51). Young Nenets men could travel hundreds of miles from the very north of the Yamal peninsula to the south (the lower reach of Ob' River) or to the east (Gyda peninsula) in order to find potential wives (Verbov 1939:47-48). Although nowadays the Nenets clan exogamy rule is frequently breached, it still regulates most Nenets marriages. Finding a *proper* marriage partner in some part of the Polar Ural tundra can be a tricky issue to be decided.[36]

Moreover, although Yelena Liarskaya argues that in Yamal there is no a problem of a 'brides deficit' (2010:26), I observed in the Polar Ural tundra that there was a frequently discussed issue of a '*grooms* deficit', where finding a *proper* husband in the tundra (who was not an alcoholic person and who could support a family properly) was perceived as a significant issue. Frequent contact with sedentary kinsmen and incomers (both are significantly increasing in number) could also destroy the imagined ideal of 'Nenets traditional marriages'. Nowadays, statistics report the increase of inter-ethnic marriages, single-parent families and the violation of exogamic rules and other marriage and family regulations in Nenets society (Volzhanina 2005; 2010:Ch.4). And Nenets often discursively frame these changes in terms of cultural loss.

Inter-ethnic marriages among the Nenets have slowly increased, particularly in the region of my research focus (Volzhanina 2005). As Volzhanina found out, although the number of mono-ethnic marriages still predominates among the Nenets and they still prefer to marry Nenets and traditional marriage partners – Khanty and Komi – in the second part of the 20th century the policy on choosing marriage partners among the Nenets had changed. While Nenets men pattern their marriage strategies toward Nenets women or those from close 'ethno-cultural spaces' such as Khanty women, Nenets women prefer to marry not only Nenets men, but Russian newcomers as well (2005; see also Kvashnin 2000:13). Some scholars stress that marrying 'Russian' newcomers is considered prestigious, since the latter have obtained a higher symbolic status (Ssorin-Chaikov 2002:34; Vitebsky & Wolfe 2001). However, such marriage tendency often can be stigmatized in Nenets society and labelled as wrong, as a breach of tradition. Marina complained, 'I cannot understand at all why they [Nenets women] marry Russian men. As if they don't understand that a Nenets woman and a Russian man are

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[36]It is a particular concern of the European side of the Polar Ural tundra. During my field research in Spring 2011 I met a Nenets family in the Ural Mountains, where two daughters in their thirties were still unmarried and their 30-year-old brother had recently married a 39-year-old woman; this did not seem normal for Nenets society where people usually marry young.

not compatible with each other. They will never understand each other. Not in any way, they won't be able to live together, she will leave him any way and will go to a Nenets man. It's impossible for Nenets women to marry Russians'. Even Nadia, a cornerstone of the Beloyarsk religious community, described how she was upset and ashamed when her daughter married a Ukrainian man (even though he was the leader of the religious community by that time!): 'I didn't want my daughter married to a Russian,[37] because people would laugh at us… They could tell something. It was so bad. I was even ashamed to go out at first… So embarrassed I felt [*neudobno bylo*], so bad it was' (cf. Liarskaya 2010:31-32).

Religious conversion made the marriage issue even more complicated, due to a very strict religious endogamy, particularly within the Baptist Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has developed an ultimate expression of this endogamous principle.[38] It is a principle without exception that a church member can only marry another church member; otherwise (in case a believer marries a non-converted) the rule breaker will be excluded from community life. And as I noted earlier, in the Nenets case an exclusion from congregational life could imply an exclusion from the kinship and kin based reciprocity.

In order to prevent the destruction of a fundamental principle and therefore to strengthen a recently built community, missionaries got the role of marriage mediators. Simultaneously, the Nenets shifted the traditional role of marriage matchmaker onto new religious leaders, seeking to solve quite typical social problems for the tundra.

As I already discussed in the previous chapter, for the Brotherhood's system of values, the tundra life is prestigious and even obtains ideological meaning. Hence, Baptist missionaries tend to preserve the mono-ethnicity of marriages as well as the 'tundra-tundra' rule in arranging marriages. Cases of Nenets-Russian marriages within Baptist communities are not typical. Moreover, as I will show later, the ideas of marriage, family and gender roles in Brotherhood culture came into accordance with those imagined as 'traditional' or 'pure Nenets' ideas of marriage and family in Nenets society. Therefore, it was the missionaries' agency and Baptist matchmaking that was viewed by the Nenets as a foundation for the preservation or revival of traditional Nenets marriage and family rules, thus providing cultural continuity.

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[37] She uses the term 'Russian' similar to Nenets *Lutsa*, which does not refer to an ethnic group, but rather to an incoming population.

[38] Note that in the European part of the Ural Mountains tundra the principle of religious endogamy has led to a reverse social problem. Here the majority of the Nenets were converted, and few families left unconverted. Therefore, it is the latter that experience difficulties in finding marriage partners, because converted Nenets refuse to marry them.

Christian Weddings in the Tundra

Traditionally in Nenets tundra society, the social role of matchmakers (be it a specially invited person or the groom's father) was very significant in marriage arrangements. As far back as the mid-1920s, Russian ethnographer Leonid Kostikov described the procedure of marriage arrangement in Nenets society, particularly stressing the crucial importance of a matchmaker (N.: *ŋev*). He was supposed to be a respectable and venerable person, so the bride's father should consider his opinion (1930b: 13-14; see also Khomich 1966:164-176; Kuroptev 1927:20; Zhitkov1913:221). Similarly, a missionary who has indisputable authority in the community is seen as perfect mediator. Once, a Nenets young woman told me a story about her cousin's marriage arrangement. When I asked who the matchmaker was, she answered, 'Sergei [a missionary] was, he was a father'.

Although the main role of the traditional matchmaker was to negotiate the terms of marriage, i.e., the size of brideprice (N.: *ne'mir'*), contemporary Baptist matchmakers deny the idea of brideprice itself. 'Samoyeds say that *kalym* is in payment for a bride's "soul"', Kostikov wrote (1930b:30). But now Christ's blood is in payment for her soul. A Nenets born-again, a mother of an engaged daughter, said, 'We are now believers [*veruiushchie*] and therefore a Christian does not need any brideprice or dowry. Believers do not buy brides, indeed'.

Therefore the marriage arrangement was much simplified and was free from economic obligation. And in some respects, Baptist missionaries altered the Nenets wedding ceremony, considering many elements of the traditional wedding as pagan and inappropriate for Christian behaviour. Now the wedding preparation (even in the tundra) has become a missionary prerogative, and female missionaries ('sisters'), who usually spend months living in Nenets chums, control the preparation of Nenets wedding ceremonies.

For instance, they prepare wedding invitations that are quickly spread all over the tundra.

They also help in sewing the wedding dresses, significantly changing the Nenets fashion: now it is 'European' white dresses and male suits that have become Christian Nenets wedding costumes. 'Sisters' helps in decorating chums with Christian posters, bright curtains, bows and balloons – all those typical for 'Russian' urban wedding styles. A missionary described a Nenets wedding in the Polar Ural tundra in the following way:

> The wedding ceremony [*brak*] was very good. This was a real Christian wedding. The bride was in a white dress, the groom in a black suit. Everything was just like in the city, but it was in a chum. The chum was decorated with Christian posters – the sisters did their best. I took the floor and preached a long sermon [*vzial bol'shoe slovo nastavleniia*]... Then there were a lot of songs, poems, congratulations, gifts… It was a real Christian wedding. Everything was like in the city, but in a chum.

More about Love

However, in spite of changes to Nenets weddings, Baptist marriages were considered by the converted Nenets as a return to the real Nenets tradition.

It is generally believed by the Nenets that moral norms in the tundra are more regulated and stricter rather than in sedentary spaces, so the increasingly more intensive contact of tundra dwellers with the urban space was perceived by some Nenets as spoiling and destructing traditional moralities. Nenets families in the tundra were

regarded as more stable than those in villages, where divorces were more frequent than in the tundra (cf. Liarskaya 2010:25-26). As scholars argue, mass-media production, TV and the Internet that are all freely accessible nowadays, even in the tundra, have impacted on gender and family relations (Habeck & Ventsel 2009; Ventsel 2010).

As I already discussed, the 'Russian' sedentary space was sometimes described through the Nenets notion of *sia'mei* – ritual impurity. And contemporary changes in the marriage regulations and sexuality were considered as socially destructive, as breaching 'Nenets traditional norms'.

In this frame, the notion of *love* appears as a background for marriage choices. In Nenets popular discourse, however, love was discussed as being a violation of the Nenets tradition. 'In the tundra there is no such notion as love!' repeated Marina. 'Now people marry for love, therefore everything is getting broken'. The idiom of love and sexual attraction was often defined as new, 'Russian' and not an authentic Nenets concept. Although the Nenets narratives were full of true love stories, they were, however, frequently considered as breaching social norms and therefore wrong. A Nenets tundra woman expressed it as follows:

> [Nomadic Nenets] often come to a village from the tundra, and now there is [electric] light and light bulbs everywhere in chums; they watch a lot of TV, all sorts of films. There was a young woman… And she watched films so much, so… she could not live without men at all! And this was the only reason she got married to the first man, she nearly even split someone's family… They [Nenets women] watch films about love, so they want love and chase men [*Fil'mov vsiakikh nasmotriatsia pro liubov' – khotiat liubvi, za muzhikami begaiut*].

In Nenets expectations of 'traditional', it is not a man and a woman who choose each other, but it should be their parents (with the mediating assistance of a matchmaker) who arrange the marriage of their children (Kostikov 1930b; Khomitch 1966:163-165). In his detailed description of marriage arrangements among the Samoyeds, Leonid Kostikov wrote in 1930 that only parents negotiate the issue of marriage and the daughter was never even present during such negotiations. As Samoyeds said to Kostikov, 'We do not have cases when a daughter disobeys her parents' will' (1930b:15). Nowadays, as many Nenets reported to me, there are more cases where young people choose their fortune without their parents' guidance. These cases are often frowned upon by the older generation and are a matter of gossip both in the tundra and village societies.

'It is different youth now,' a Nenets woman says, 'they choose themselves whom to marry. Therefore they often choose those wives who cannot live in the tundra, who

cannot sew or live in a chum'. Still it was perceived as the social and moral obligation of young men's parents to find (or to buy) him a good wife, even if she was barely known to them personally. The main criteria of choosing a match was the compliance with exogamy rules, the economic and social status of bride's family, the size of bride's dowry, and no less significant, the bride's capacity to work hard, her skills in sewing and running a household. Up to the present, a young woman known as a good sewer and a hard worker is considered an 'expensive' wife and her parents expect a good price for her. As Nenets say, 'if you can sew properly, you can get married'.

Nowadays, all these criteria for marriage arrangements do not necessarily always define Nenets everyday practices; however, they definitely exist as a pattern of *ideal*, and *right* in Nenets discourses – as belonging to genuine Nenets traditional culture.

Love and the Brotherhood

All these narratives about love as a sign of moral contamination of true Nenets modesty, about marriage as something to be regulated by society, about family stability and strictly regulated gender roles – all these became a platform upon which Nenets and Baptist social expectations were bridged.

The concept of love is an on-going discussion in the Brotherhood too. As Baptists believe, love should not be a motive in finding a marriage partner. It is only God who binds couples and the main issue is just to hear His voice. In practice this idea is realized in the strictly regulated, even ritualized marriage-arrangements procedure in the Brotherhood.

Even in the urban environment, in such Europe-oriented cities as St. Petersburg, where one of the biggest Brotherhood churches is located, community leaders supervise and control believers' behaviour and its compliance with the congregational requirements. A minister is often in charge of marriage arrangements, suggesting a match for a flock member. Sometimes a church minister can find a marriage partner for a member of a congregation in a community located in another region, so in this case the couple would barely know each other. Even if a 'brother' intends to choose a marriage partner for himself, he nevertheless should first discuss it with a minister and ask for his preliminary agreement before the marriage proposal.

Here also dating, going out, dinner parties, flowers, first kisses or any other forms of romantic relationship are rigorously labelled as improper behaviour for a believer. Instead, a young man who intends to propose, after discussing it with a minister, must pray intensively and fast over several days, asking God to bless the choice. Then he

should approach to a woman (who of course should be a Brotherhood member) and speak certain conventional phrases that express his intention. A marriage proposal should resemble a prayer, rather than emotional romantic event. A woman is not supposed to give her answer immediately. Only three days later, after fasting and prayers, should she give back an answer. A Brotherhood missionary explained it as follows:

> In general, it is not a sister who must think of a marriage partner, she must not think of marriage or choose a husband for herself. It is a brother who should think about that, but not a sister. A brother should hear God's will in regard of marriage; not listen to his own heart – whom I like and whom not – but listen to God, what sister He gives you as a wife. When all is said and done, and a brother has made a marriage proposal, it is now a sister's turn to think. She must pray and undertake a fast, and then accept the proposal or not.

After the engagement the couple never dates, their relationship does not imply intimacy or expressed emotions, and the community carefully watches the couple. Their first kiss will be a 'holy kiss' during their wedding ceremony. Generally speaking, expressing emotions in everyday life is not perceived by Brotherhood members as true Christian behaviour, unless these emotions express believers' religious feelings (and even here, indeed, arguing with Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians, conservative Baptists insist on sedateness and abstemious conduct).

Reading through it carefully, one can find in such regulated and even ritualized engagement practices and bodily experience much in common with Nenets attitudes and Nenets expectations of how things *should be*.

Lena, a young tundra Nenets woman, is a member of the Beloyarsk community. She had recently gotten engaged, though she met her future marriage partner for the first time at her engagement when Sergei (the missionary and a matchmaker) arrived at the Baidarata tundra with Ivan, a young Nenets from the European side of the Polar Urals. The next time the couple was supposed to meet was in two years – the marriage date set by her parents and the missionary. But unexpectedly Ivan, her future husband, began to phone her. Each time Lena was very confused – it all looked like a breach of social norms. She refused to answer his calls herself and asked an elderly woman to talk to Ivan. Shortly after this, Lena and her family were preparing to go to the town of Labytnangi in order to buy provisions for the summer period. They learned that Ivan's family were staying in the tundra not far from the town at that time. I asked Lena whether she and her parents were going to visit Ivan's family on their way to Labytnangi. She blushed and said, 'No way! How could I go and stay overnight at my

groom's chum?! Not at all, it's impossible! In addition, we all will be in [Russian] coats and won't take *yagushki* [Nenets traditional hand-made fur coats] with us. Surely you don't mean that I should show up in a coat in a chum, as an urban dweller!'

Eventually Lena's very typical Nenets behaviour was interpreted by missionaries as true Christian modesty, and the missionaries' attitudes were interpreted by converted Nenets as a return to true Nenets tradition

Ideal Baptist Family

In general, the similarity of Nenets and Baptist Brotherhood attitudes towards family and gender roles was another aspect that made the articulation of Nenets and Christian notions of kinship possible and eventually allowed the two conflicting networks to be reconciled. In both Nenets society and the Brotherhood, family and gender issues were a matter of power and social control. What I argue below is that the Baptist notions of ideal family and gender roles have come in accordance with Nenets social expectations and their ideal of domestic life.

The nuclear family is highly important in Christianity, similar to a family (i.e., nomadic nuclear household) in Nenets tundra society. In both Brotherhood and Nenets society, the domestic sphere implies gender hierarchy and a thoroughly regulated differentiation of men's and women's social roles.

The Baptist notion of family is particularly stressed and developed as a matter of the Brotherhood's ideology. What is evident and popularly discussed is that Brotherhood's families are large (families with 10-15 children are not rare) and patriarchal, with strictly regulated and hierarchized gender roles.

In general, Baptist men dominate the positions of leadership, and gender attitudes of the Brotherhood proceed from a predominantly patriarchal pattern that does not allow women any leading status within the community or in their 'earthly' life. The established official male hierarchy reveals itself in the fact that men take all the leading positions in the Brotherhood (ministers, evangelizers, deacons, etc.) and are responsible for doctrinal teaching and preaching '*ex cathedra*'.

Plate 5.2 Only men on the Congress of churches representatives,
International Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Tula 2009.

Even though the unofficial leaders and communicative nodes in the Beloyarsk community were mostly women, official leading positions were held by men. It was only men who were permitted to preach and lead religious sermons and prayers, though there were only three male members in the community. All of them were young (two of them are in their early twenties), unmarried, and in the view of Nenets, far from obtaining any authority within Nenets society, in which the social power is usually delegated to elder men (cf. Brodnev 1950:51 on Soviet struggle against the Nenets practice to nominate elder men as candidates for brigade, *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* leadership positions). However, visiting missionaries tended to involve these three young men in religious leadership, training them in preaching, reading Bible and praying.

Brotherhood leaders tended to resist the social activities of believing 'sisters', and in general, leadership attitudes, business and management abilities, energetic social activity, sharp temper, and abrupt manners – characteristics considered to be potential and valuable for a woman's life career in the 'worldly life' – were perceived to be inappropriate characteristics for a true Christian woman.

Instead, women's social roles in the Brotherhood were firmly determined by the domestic sphere, with regulated family roles. It was one of the reasons why believing women were not encouraged to continue their education after school – higher education was believed to be unnecessary or distracting from 'the narrow path'. Once, in talking about a young Nenets girl who studied at the college in the town of Labytnangi, a Baptist missionary expressed his concern:

> It would be better for her not to study there at all. While studying there and living on campus she has completely gone out into the 'world' [*sovsem v mir ushla*]. And she already is wearing pants and her talk is 'worldly' [*razgovory mirskie*]. It would be better to make her get married as soon as possible and bring her back to a chum. She does not need this education at all. Generally speaking I cannot understand why [believing] girls study! In

any case they get married afterwards, and none of them works. Why do they need this education at all? They get married and that's it! The only thing they have is their homes, children, husbands, how to make their homes comfortable, all sorts of curtains and so forth. All those sisters [*sestrichki*] I know who used to study, none of them works now, after they married… I can't see any sense for women to study.

Thus, a Baptist woman's social role was reduced to the domestic sphere, and her working place was supposed to be her family. And given the strict prohibition of contraception and any kind of 'family planning', a believing woman was supposed to give birth to as many children as possible. In some respects, the number of children could be considered a measure of devotion in a believer's Christian life. For instance, my personal extent of faith was judged by missionaries and converted Nenets in Beloyarsk according to my status as a mother. Once, I was openly accused by Sergei, the missionary leader, of having never lived a Christian life, nor following Jesus. 'Why do you think so?' I asked. 'Because you have only one child!' he answered. And conversely, the larger the family, the more it is interpreted as sincerely devoted to God.

Plate 5.3 Typical images of women in the Brotherhood.
Pictures from the children's journal '*Svetil'nik*',
published by the Children's Department of the IC EChB.

In combination with Baptists' spatial orientations, with the basic principle of the separation of the 'Church' from the 'world', and their attempts to socially isolate believers from the 'modern life', we have an ideal image of Christian family constructed in the Brotherhood. It is a peasant patriarchal life of a large family with regulated and hierarchized family roles. A man is the head of the family and a Christian mentor, a woman is a modest wife devoting her entire life to raising many children and running

the household. It is considered a true Christian act if believing parents, being consistent in separating themselves from a 'worldly life', do not send their children to schools or public day care. Preferably they live a rural life, away from the spoiled modern world, with its sins and temptations.

Ideal Nenets family

All these Baptist family regulations are reminiscent of the Nenets imaginary of the traditional Nenets nomadic family (N.: *miad'ter',* chum dwellers) that usually consists of two generations (parents and their children, sometimes with grandchildren) Volzhanina 2010:230-264).

Traditionally, Nenets tundra families did not have many children, which can be explained by the high infant mortality in the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries (Islavin 1847:123; Zhitkov 1913:219; Khomich 1960:63-4; Volzhanina 2009:119-20). However, during the 20th century the number of children in Nenets families increased, which can be explained by the improvement of medical services in the tundra, traditional attitudes towards high fertility and the less-developed (than in urban environment) practice of contraception (Volzhanina 2010:250-2).

Single-parent families would be more typical for settled Nenets. In Beloyarsk, for instance, more than one third of Nenets settled families were single-parent, whereas only 10-17.5% of the tundra families were single-parent (Volzhanina 2010:236-239).

As I already discussed, sexual and emotional patterns are generally not considered significant for the foundation of a Nenets family. The family unit in the tundra is a matter of survival, and the violation of strictly prescribed gender and family roles was believed to harm the well-being of all family members and the viability of a nomadic household.

Each family member was responsible for a particular part of tundra life, and female and male roles in the tundra were differentiated and complementary; therefore, scholarship usually stresses that only by living in a family could a Nenets survive in the tundra (Kostikov 1930b; Golovnev 1995; Tuisku 2001; Liarskaya 2010). If a man, for some reason, lost his spouse, he faced the danger of having to cease his nomadic life as an independent reindeer herder or fisherman; and correspondingly, a woman in the tundra depended upon her husband's ability to perform his functions.

In the tundra, women were rarely heads of families and the leading and managing positions usually belonged to a husband. While men's roles revolved around reindeer, fishing and hunting, the women's space was in the chum (including making it, putting it

up and taking it down during migration) and everything inside it. She was responsible for minding children, cooking food, supplying water and firewood, sewing and mending clothes. In Stammler's words, in the tundra the 'workplace' and 'mother-place' of a Nenets woman are one and the same (2005a:119).

Of course, nowadays these symbolic boundaries between male and female spaces are not so firm, and men sometimes can help women in (de)constructing the chum or logging firewood. Moreover, traditional family and gender roles were often violated by the Soviet politics of women's emancipation (Khomich 1966:303; Volzhanina 2010:244). The Soviet ideology sought to abolish the division of labour between sexes (Ashwin 2000). Amongst indigenous societies of Siberia and the North, Soviet authorities declared a policy of women's liberation, attempting to transform traditional patterns of gender relations and to overcome old customs and 'patriarchal' gender roles (Khomich 1960; 1966: 297-298; Tuisku 2001:42-43). In the 1920s, laws were implemented forbidding polygamy, bride price and levirate (Khomich 1966: 297-298;Kostikov 1930b). Women began to get involved in Soviet clan councils (*rodovye sovety*), though it was met with strong resistance by Nenets men, who refused to participate in those councils attended by women (Khomich 1966:186). For nomadic societies, the Soviet project of 'scientific reindeer herding' and 'industrial nomadism' pursued a goal to alter the tundra into an increasingly mechanized professional male space, whereas women and children ought to move to villages and towns. In many northern societies this policy dramatically changed the native conceptualization of space, the family model, and gender roles, such that sedentary space became a predominantly female space, while the tundra and nomadic economy was masculinized (Tuisku 2001; Vitebsky & Wolfe 2001; Vitebsky 2002:182-184). However, despite the Soviet politics, nowadays in Nenets society the clear division of gender roles and family hierarchy is still believed to guarantee social order and is thus regarded as true Nenets tradition (cf. Liarskaya 2010).

Marina once said with regret and irritation about the contemporary changes in gender roles:

> Nadia has no luck with her daughters-in-law. They both are too modern [*sovremennye*]. All the time they come out against her, [saying] 'don't teach me' or 'why are you jumping on me [*chto vy vz"elis' na menia*]?' Nowadays women in the tundra are not the same as they used to be. They are too modern and want equal rights [*khotiat ravnopraviia*]. They don't want to obey. Why don't they keep silent and do as their husbands and mothers[-in-law] tell them? Because a woman in a *chum* has to be prompt and obedient… otherwise there won't be any order in a *chum*… A woman in a *chum* should be able to do everything, she has to be prompt. But now men

even chop wood and bring water, and women don't do anything! When Misha arrives late in the night, his wife does not even wake up, but lies in the middle of the bed. And he makes a fire himself and makes tea himself. And when her mother[-in-law] points out that it is wrong, she resents it […] They are now so modern .[..] But if men will do everything, what will women do in *chums*?

Plate 5.4 Sunday gathering in a chum. Nenets women read the
Bible. Baidarata tundra, 2008.

Gender issues also arose most significantly when Nenets converts in Beloyarsk tried to explain their change of religious affiliation from Charismatic and Evangelical to the conservative Baptist church. As many scholars argue, Pentecostalism brings the idea of women's emancipation, involving women in leadership, providing opportunities for them to develop public leadership skills and to maintain new relations outside their kin networks (see review in Robbins 2004b: 131-134). The ideas of women's autonomy and equality, as well as female social enterprising are developed patterns in Charismatic churches in the Polar Urals and Yamal.

A male Nenets Baptist explained it as follows:

If we take Charismatic churches – it is mostly women who have power and dominate [*glavenstvovat'*]… They tend to dominate and to take first place [*pervenstvovat'*]. Most Nenets consider it as abnormal. On the contrary, Nenets women themselves try to raise men's status, because, as they say, they don't want to doom their families to misfortune. Khanty people [who were converted into Pentecostalism] got such religious freedom, and they violated the prohibitions.

In this context, the re-conversion to Baptism was regarded as a return to true Nenets traditions and true Nenets families where gender and family roles were set in their proper places.

Plate 5.5 Two Nenets women in their traditional dresses
among Russian Brotherhood 'sisters'.

Renewed Marriage Alliances

In missionary mediation there was another aspect, a *territorial* one, that bridged Baptist and Nenets ideologies of kinship and strengthened the tundra kin networks.

In both the Nenets tundra and the communities of the Brotherhood there is a tendency to look for marriage partners in remote places. In Nenets society this practice was developed due to exogamic norms; Gennadii Verbov, for instance, described young Nenets men who travelled hundreds miles in order to find wives for themselves (1939:47). Nowadays, as my research participants noticed, Nenets marriages are also often arranged between people from different villages and parts of the tundra. A Nenets woman from the Baidarata tundra explained it in the following way: 'Often matchmakers come from other villages. They come to us, we go there. We won't know the people yet, who are they in reality. But here we know everybody inside out [*znaem kak obluplennykh*]. It is better to marry a stranger, so that you don't know [him/her]. Or maybe she [a bride] would not show what she is made of [*pokazyvat' sebia*] in front of strangers. She would be ashamed and quiet.'

This logic is similar to that of Baptist descriptions of marriage arrangements. Some Brotherhood members also noticed the tendency to marry woman from other Brotherhood communities. 'That is clear', said replies Sveta, missionary's wife. 'They [brothers] know their community's sisters very well, what they are and what they are capable of, they know all their shortcomings; therefore, they go to other churches in search of wives. Because they don't know anybody there and so it seems that the sisters there are better'.

Since missionaries in their evangelization work were covering a larger tundra space than traditional Nenets nomadic routes, they therefore united Nenets families in new marriage alliances, thus maintaining social contacts with those Nenets groups that could not meet each other without mediating interposition.

In some cases missionaries even re-established previously lost marriage alliances, for example between European and Asian Nenets. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nomadic routes through the Ural Mountains (dividing European and Asian tundra regions) were more widespread than in the present. And in the mid-ninteenth and the early twentieth centuries there were intensive migrations of some groups of European Nenets across the Ural Mountains to Siberia (Khomich 1966:151; 1970; Vasil'ev 1985). In 1939, Verbov wrote that intermarriage relations between Yamal clans and European Nenets (from Bol'shezemel'skaya tundra) were popular (1939:48). However, Soviet territorial re-administration and the practice of residence registration led to a reduction of contact between European and Asian tundra dwellers and regulation of migration routes according to established territories of *kolkhozy* or *sovkhozy* and rural districts. Social interactions between European and Asian Nenets are now less profound and marriage strategies are more endogamous within a particular administrative unit (cf. Volzhanina 2005). Hence, the increasingly widening religious network in the tundra re-established previous contacts across the Urals. I observed some cases of Christian marriages between Siberian Polar Ural Nenets with Nenets from the Bol'shezemel'skaya tundra, which Beloyarsk Nenets considered to be a return of previous marriage partnerships.

Moreover, every year more than two hundred converted tundra Nenets from all over the Yamal, Polar Ural, and European tundra travel to Vorkuta city (Komi Republic) for a big religious event – the all-tundra Christian conference. They come for common prayers, for studying the Bible, as well as for arranging future marriages. These annual gatherings became a frame where Nenets from different regions – from Bol'shezemel'skaya tundra and Vaigach Island up to northernmost parts of the Yamal peninsula (Yar-Sale, Novyi Port, Se-Yakha, Tambei tundra and even Malygin Strait) – met each other for first time and communicated. Of course, this place became a frame where most of the marriages were being arranged and where most weddings ceremonies took place.

Although the marriage arrangement principle was being changed among the converted Nenets – it was no longer clan exogamy, but congregational endogamy that formed the basis for marriage strategies – the mono-ethnicity of Christian Nenets

marriages in the tundra was still being observed. Missionaries often encouraged converted tundra Nenets to marry believing tundra Nenets, and when searching for potential marriage partners, they were careful in keeping the tundra framework. Note that this principle was not consistently observed in sedentary space, and believing Nenets did not seem to be obligated to keep clan/ethnic/territorial or lifestyle boundaries; they could marry, for instance, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, or Germans (inter-ethnic marriages are typical for all groups of sedentary Nenets [Volzhanina 2005]). This tendency can be explained by the high symbolic value of tundra life within the Brotherhood, where the tundra achieves the potential to become the new Holy Land, and the Nenets are seen as masters of this land. Therefore, in order to convert the land, missionaries sought to establish more Christian families in the tundra – those cells within the network that are regarded as strongholds of spreading the Gospel.

To summarize, Nenets tundra kinship was strengthened by Baptist marriage strategies. Although missionaries did not follow Nenets traditional clan exogamy, they created a foundation for new tundra marriage alliances, and thus, for an alternative kin-religious network. And the creation of this new extended network throughout the Nenets tundra realigned yet strengthened the Nenets nomadic system.

Conclusion: Tundra Web

At the northernmost point of the Yamal peninsula, near Malygin Strait, there is one of the biggest Nenets sacred sites – *Yamal khekhe'*, which sometimes is referred to as 'Seven *chums*' (N.: *Si'iv' mia'*). Located a long distance from each other, there are seven *chum*-like hills made of reindeer antlers, and each refers to a particular Nenets clan, with a central one that is believed to be all-Nenets (Lar 2003).

In Spring 2011, at the foot of the Yamal peninsula, near the Polar Urals, a big Nenets nomadic campsite consisting of seven *chums* was set up. It was one of the biggest campsite gatherings by converted Nenets. They celebrated a Christian wedding and many missionaries from different parts of the world arrived to this place – a new Nenets sacred place, the Christian seven *chums*.

Nenets kin-based practices and Nenets notions of kinship are being realigned and revised within the Christian paradigm. However, I argue that despite being altered and revised, new religious-kinship network contributes to the reproduction of traditional Nenets economic reciprocity, marriage alliances and eventually *Nenei il'* – 'true Nenets life'. The consolidated community of Nenets believers has created a new extended

alternative network of brothers and sisters throughout the Nenets tundra, thus building a new foundation for the traditional nomadic system.

Once, a young Nenets tundra man, originally from the northernmost part of Yamal, explained to me his understanding of the system of traditional Nenets sacred places. He compared them with the Internet – the World Wide Web. Located in different parts of Yamal and the European North, it is believed that the Nenets sacred sites are interconnected with each other in such a way that they create a hyperlink. So when you are at one sacred site, you actually can make a sacrifice that will be referred to another one. In this way, the sacred web embraces the whole Nenets universe. The contemporary Christian web in the tundra is being developed according to the same logic: being distanced from one another, newly created religious communities are interconnected and thus organize a new base for Nenets integrity.

Facing contemporary problems of increasingly frequent breaches of clan exogamy and other traditional marriage norms and family regulations, the Nenets see in Baptist social attitudes and missionary cultural mediation the possibility to restore their cultural continuity and genuine authenticity. And paradoxically, by changing their religious affiliation to one of the most conservative religious movements, they move closer to their own very much desired but constantly slipping away pure 'Nenets tradition'.

Despite the fact that Nenets clan exogamy can be found to be in contradiction with religious endogamous practices, it was precisely these new forms of Christian marriages that were considered by converted Nenets as a return to Nenets traditional marriage norms and even as preserving Nenets kinship in the tundra. Since the Baptist form of marriage arrangements was giving power back to religious and clan leaders (in cases where the latter was converted), marriage trajectories therefore became much more socially controllable and manageable. In this possibility to control the 'spoiled' youth, Nenets elders saw the hope to slow down the dissolution in modernity and to return to the true 'Nenets tradition'– be it lost, imagined or desired.

CHAPTER SIX

JUSTIFICATION OF CULTURE AND HISTORY:

RADICAL CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF CONTINUITY

Most people, in most places, have highly ambiguous relationships with what anthropologists and others have come to call 'culture': the methods – ceremonies, customs, stories, manners, and resulting patterns of ideas – through which people attach meaning to their lives and to their relationships with one another, and through which they make sense of the world around them.

Kirk Dombrowski
'Against Culture'

We are lost among cultures.

A Nenets man

6.1 AGAINST CULTURE: TO MOURN THE PAST AND TO FOLLOW THE LORD…

'Who will we eventually become– Russians, Nenets, Baptists?' a Nenets believer mused to himself one day as we were conversing. Similar to the case of Alaska Natives observed by Kirk Dombrowski in his book *Against Culture* (2001), Nenets religious conversion raises the issue of native culture and its place in Christian life. In other words, as religious conversion is understood to be a radical change in Nenets' personal life, it provokes the question of what to do with the native culture, whether to reject it as a heathen legacy or at some point to contextualise the Christian message within it.

Protestant conversion among the Polar Ural Nenets met with violent anti-conversion attitudes from native society and local authorities, to the extent that the socialization of native born-agains in a wider religious network turned into alienation from their home society. When I first arrived in Yamal I was surprised by the degree of tension between missionaries from different congregations, between converted and non-converted Nenets, as well as between religious communities and local authorities. All were involved in discussions revolving around the relationship between Christianity and 'traditional culture'. Missionaries working in the same villages argued with each other, and it was the notion of 'Nenets culture' that became a general stumbling block in their

debates. The final conversion in Beloyarsk to radical Baptism triggered particularly heated debates between religious communities. The issue was whether missionaries had to tolerate Nenets culture, or should they struggle with it as a pagan legacy that must be overcome by Christianity? Is native culture actually a barrier on the path to salvation or, on the contrary, should it supplement and enrich Christian culture?

The conflicting environment of the missions corresponded with the generally hostile anti-conversion attitudes in native society evoked by religious rearrangements: non-converted Nenets took a relentless stance against their converted fellows. And again, it was the notion of 'Nenetsness' and its compatibility with Christianity that was discussed by all parties and triggered tensions. Converted Nenets were now believed to be betraying their 'people', their ancestors' legacy, and hence, they were considered to be not Nenets enough. Their lost authenticity was at issue.

Nenets are now engaged in their own *culturing* of their radically changing world. And the issue of the compatibility of Christianity with Nenets culture in many respects defines the development of missionary strategies, as well as native responses. This is the question that triggers social conflicts and inspires new modes of collaboration, that sometimes makes Nenets families fall apart and creates new life strategies, that influences local public discourse as well as regional policy toward missionary activities, and eventually, as I will show below, that mobilizes a language of indigeneity and stimulates ethno-consciousness.

In this chapter I explore anti-cultural attitudes initially taken by converted Nenets and missionaries (Charismatic, Evangelical and Baptist) and those social outcomes this stance has led to. The chapter aims to analyse the process of the Nenets construction and reconstruction of their authenticity, and their strategies of 'reasoning-out' (cf. Gable & Handler 1996; Bruner 1994). I also examine Nenets engagement with Christian logic and Christian ideology and the most wrenching challenge that it carries – the experience of a Damascus Road conversion.

Negotiating rupture and continuity with their past and present, Nenets converts thereby are involved in the process of articulation, revision and re-invention of what they call 'Nenets traditional culture'. 'Culture' becomes a reifiedentity, a property that is in need of defending. Converts legitimize their right to have Nenets identity and Nenets culture (cf. Jackson 2007). To borrow from Jean Jackson, they 'articulate and adapt their ethnicity to an evolving global reification of diversity as well as fashion a symbolics of citizenship that critiques modernity, but cannot be seen as "traditional" (2009:521). They bring Christian ontology and Nenets ideas into dialogue as part of a

strategic manoeuvre for empowerment and claims to authenticity. Because they need the authority of authenticity to legitimate their power (Gable & Handler 1996:568).

Blood and Idols

In 2006, when I first met Nadia, she told me her conversion story. The dominant structure was built upon the story of burning 'idols' and the motive of rupture from the Nenets legacy:

> And when we were baptized, we returned to our *chum*, took all our 'idols' and went out with all my children in the night to the forest – we were afraid that people would see us – then threw petrol on the 'idols' and burned them. We were so afraid that people would find out about that. But rumours spread quickly that we had burned our 'idols'. People swore at us that we were out of our mind, that our children would all die soon.

Her daughter continued later on:

> At that time we really did not understand, we simply burned ['idols'] and that's it. We were told that idols are bad. So we took them and burned… We were so afraid! I could say that it terrified us to hit *miad' pukhutsia* [N. term for a ritual doll personifying a master of a *chum*]! But afterwards we had no such fear, because already we knew that it was just dolls, and nothing was within them.

At the beginning of the conversion era in the Polar Urals, there were a number of cases when the Christian rupture and born-again impulse led to a rigorous denial of 'traditional Nenets culture' – whatever it was that every converted native understood by these words: from burning Nenets sacred sites and ritual articles from the home to the point of giving up an entire nomadic way of life and settling down in villages and towns. The *anti-native-culture* position occasioned a series of complex confrontations and negotiations between different religious communities, evoked tensions within the native society in general, as well as raised heated debates in regional public discourse.

As in Dombrowsky's case(2001), the practice of burning 'idols' in the Polar Ural tundra was an expressed ritualization of discontinuity, or as Robbins (2003:224)calls it, 'rituals of rupture'.

This was particularly the case at the beginning of the Beloyarsk community conversion career, when the practice of burning sacred articles (N.: *khekhe*) was believed to be a significant part of the religious experience, an expressed sign of full conversion (cf. Vallikivi 2011).

Nenets *khekhe* (in a Russianized way vernacularly referred to as 'idols', *idoly*) are usually images of deities or spirits (N.: *siadei*) and home ritual articles (N.: *miad'*

khekhe). These are typically wooden, stone, or occasionally metal anthropomorphic or zoomorphic images. The Nenets keep some of them on specially designed sacred sites in the tundra. *Miad' khekhe* (from N.: *mia'* –home*, chum*) are kept in chums or nearby outside, in specially made sacred sledges (N.: *khe-khe' khan*). Some of *miad' khekhe* live in chums and are treated as living persons (*miad' pukhutsia* – 'a chum's old woman', a wooden doll, dressed in multiple female coats, believed to be a female master of a chum; *ŋytarma* and *sidriaŋg* – images of male deceased relatives). Nenets can talk to them, feed them and make clothes for them. Up to the present, almost every Nenets and Khanty nomadic family (mostly among Siberian groups) carefully preserve their ancestral *khekhe* and follow detailed and multiple regulations and rituals surrounding this sphere. (Islavin 1847:116; Khomich 1976; 1977; Kostikov 1930a; Prokof'eva 1953; Shrenk 1855:358-62; Veniamin 1855:58-9).

Plate 6.1*Miad' pukhutsia*. Salemal tundra 2011.

Plate 6.2 *Ŋytarma* in a 'bed' made of an ambulance box. Baidarata tundra, 2008

All these highly valuable sacred articles (from the tundra dweller's point of view), which are believed to safeguard the well-being of tundra people, became a target of converts' religious outbursts. As one converted tundra Khanty woman expressed it: 'It is most important for me: if a person burns his idols, [that means] he is one hundred percent converted… Because nobody can serve two masters'.

The 'anti-culture' stance was even more intensified by the practice of *diabolization* of traditional spiritual beings (cf. Meyer 1994). The first missionaries, who arrived in the tundra with the aim of converting the last pagans, often interpreted Nenets 'idols' not simply as empty dolls, but as dangerous things embodying real evil spirits that they preferred to call 'demons' (*besy*). And they openly called their missionary work a 'spiritual war'. Sometimes, not just Nenets artefacts, but the tundra as a whole was considered to be filled with 'demons'. Shamans were called 'antichrists' or people serving Devil. Tundra people in general were often described by missionaries as having a special 'idol consciousness' (*idol'skoe soznanie*). Thus, nomads were believed to live special spiritual lives and have special abilities to feel and interact with the 'spiritual world'.

'Why do they worship their traditional spiritual beings? Because they can see them', confidently stated a Pentecostal missionary from Vorkuta. 'Because this spiritual power influences their life. Spirits make them feeling terrified; their children die when they stop worshiping spiritual beings or if they do it in the wrong way. This is big. So if you [as a missionary] don't know the spiritual world, if you cannot feel it and if you are not strong enough in your faith in God, you have no business being in the tundra, you'll just break yourself'.

An Evangelical missionary, who worked in Beloyarsk during the first years of the Nenets conversion story, described his understanding of the tundra in the following way:

> The land here [in Yamal] is affected by pagan sacred places. It is a quiet place, nobody is here, there are no people here, but only spirits. Do you know how powerful [*krutye*] these spirits are? There is a special war here. A team of evil spirits possesses a village. And these are real idols with real sacrifices and real blood! Terrible things are happening here [*krutye veshchi zdes' proiskhodiat*]!

In the same terms a Baptist missionary explained his goal: 'And our aim is to break this coherence and this possession'. Or another Baptist missionary insisted, 'We cannot tell them to preserve [all their 'idols']. It prevents them from being Christians. It is all against Christianity'.

Here is a passage from the published diary of a Baptist missionary, who was among the first in the mid-1990s who undertook missionary trips to the Nenets tundra:

> All people here [on the Kara sea shore] consider themselves as believers, each in his own way. We explain to them the difference between God and idols. We tell them that serving idols means serving evil spirits. I ask them, do you have idols? An old man and a woman looked at one another and the mistress showed me [idols] that she kept under pillows in their *chum*. The Lord let me convince them to burn their idols. The woman was already about to throw them into a stove, but a teacher [who was in the same tent] interfered and began to dissuade them from burning idols. The old man hesitated. I talked to the teacher this time […] When we were ready to go out the woman asked me to stay and pray, she still wanted to burn idols in my presence. The idols went in the fire. The couple was begging God's forgiveness.[39]

Thus, as a result of this diabolization technique, the first converted Nenets did not merely reject or deny the old meanings and practices, but they actively struggled with everything that could be associated with 'demons'. And for the first Nenets Protestants, stories about burning idols were essential parts of their conversion narratives and Christian testimonies.

Apart from the practice of burning 'idols', there was another, no less discussed, 'blood issue' and in general the problem of a breach of nomadic traditional ritual and everyday prohibitions and rules by newly converted Nenets. Traditionally, nomadic Nenets and Khanty people use raw reindeer blood and meat (N.: *ŋaĭabad*) for food which is considered a valuable nutritious supplement for tundra people. They usually strangle a reindeer so that no blood should spill on the ground, except in the case of a sacrifice. While collectively eating the freshly slaughtered animal, the Nenets fill the animal's abdominal space with blood, dip pieces of raw meat into the blood and eat them and drink the blood.

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[39] Goncharov, Nikolai. 1997. U Kraia Zemli. In: *Vera i Zhizn'*. Vol.6. http://www.lio.ru/archive/vera/97/06/article08.html

Plate 6.3 *Ŋaĭabad* – eating raw meat and blood of freshly
slaughtered reindeer. Baidarata tundra, 2011.

Meanwhile, the use of the blood and meat of strangled animals for food is forbidden in the Bible; the prohibition is mentioned several times in both the Old and New Testament (Lev 17:10-12; Acts 15:20). Therefore, the traditional Nenets practice of consuming blood is excluded from accepted Christian behaviour. Converted Nenets often stopped using blood for food and changed their way of killing animals.

Besides, Nenets and Khanty tundra life is full of various prohibitions and rules of conduct, which particularly restrict women's behaviour. A range of travellers and scholars often noted these unusual (to their eyes) practices, particularly those related to women's everyday life (Islavin 1847:25,120-1; Khomich 1966:185; Kostikov 1930b:40; Shrenk 1855:425-6; Zhitkov 1910:217). Usually a Nenets woman is excluded from most of the ritual practices: she cannot participate in the rituals of sacrifice, eat sacrificial meat, attend sacred sites or touch sacred items. Not only in the ritual sphere, but her everyday life is also full of various restrictions: a Nenets woman is not allowed to step over children's and men's clothes, tools and harnesses, especially those related to reindeer husbandry. She is forbidden to eat or even cut some sorts of fish, as well as to eat reindeer head. A *chum*, where she is mistress, is also a highly regulated space for her. She is not allowed to cross the space behind the fire place, where a special pole *symsy* is located and constitutes the sacred space in a *chum*. She is forbidden to climb up the framework of a *chum*, or step on a bed (even when she sleeps her feet should be out of the bed). Her periods and childbirth experience are surrounded by numerous prohibitions and rituals of purification (*kўv-kўv*). The violation of all these regulations is believed to entail misfortune, disease or even damnation, not so much for the violator as for her family, herds, and men's success in herding and hunting. In this frame, again, as

with the practice of burning 'idols', it is the social order and well-being of the entire family and the success of the family's economy that depends on the observance of tundra regulations.

However, in the frame of conversion, the emphatic denial of this custom was often a marker of a new religious identity. Many converted Nenets women said that soon after their conversion, they began to eat previously forbidden sorts of fish, cross the space behind a fire place, climb up the framework of a *chum,* and stopped following other tundra regulations. Nadia describes her early conversion experience in the following way:

> Soon after I became a Christian, I began to cut a fish, a pike. Previously I was so afraid even to touch it and to cut its bones. Pike is considered a holy fish and a woman is not allowed to cut its bones as well as not being allowed eat it [...] Otherwise something bad would happen with my family, or I will get sick, or reindeer will get ill or die. But now I cut everything myself and eat everything. Now we can do everything [...] We have gotten rid of fear.

WhenYelena Liarskaya and I first visited Nadia's *chum* in 2006, our host made a bed for us, and insisted that we sleep in the Nenets *chum* in a 'Russian' way – lengthways with our feet *on* the bed, instead of Nenets tradition of sleeping across, leaving feet outside of the bed. This was an outright violation of a prevailing prohibition that would not be allowed in any other Nenets *chums*.

'Num is Angry'

All these emphatic denials of everything that is considered by the native society as 'traditional', 'sacred' or ancestral provoked numerous social conflicts within the native society and raised significant agitation in public discourse.

It was a much publicized massive burning of 'idols' by one Khanty family in the Baidarata tundra that triggered the most acute tensions within the nomadic society. This Khanty clan was considered in both Khanty and Nenets society as one of the most powerful shamanic families. Their clan 'idols' were considered to be the 'strongest' and many Khanty and Nenets people venerated these 'idols'. However, when the majority of the clan members were converted to Charismatic Christianity, they started burning their ancestral sacred sites. Below is the story of a participant of those events, Valia, a Khanty woman who was the first in her extended family to be converted into Charismatic Christianity:

> When people repent [*kaiatsia*], they stop worshipping idols. You can't imagine how many idols we destroyed! We destroyed all our clan's [sacred]

sledges. My brother once said, 'You often visit me and tell me about God, so I repented, but our brother O. [who recently died] left his wife and children living with idols. Let's go there and burn them'. I was gripped by fear – how can we burn someone else's idols!? Although it was our ancestral [sacred] sledge [where ritual items are usually kept], and it was transmitted from father to son, the brother's wife, however, would not allow it […] Eventually we did that, we burned this big sledge, we all were praying so much, because we were so terrified! The sledge was so huge, unusually huge! Sacred! But we destroyed it, even though we all were so afraid of these idols. Then we destroyed all our brothers' and my sister's idols. Liuda, my sister, and her daughters took their [sacred] sledge and towed it into the forest. In the forest they poured petrol over it and destroyed it. Liuda says that she had mortal fear. I remember, when we were destroying her idols and icons, she told me, 'Burn this one, oh no! don't burn it!' And then she was taking something back. So I said to her, 'Don't play with it! Come on! Give it to me! I destroyed all my idols, all my icons; I destroyed even that 'grandfather' [a ritual image of her deceased relative]. And look, nothing happened to me. Look, God protects me!'

You know, miraculously, it is those families who have come to God, who had the biggest idols and the strongest shamans. And all of them have now burned their idols and God has protected them. Igor too belongs to a famous shamanic clan. Once, his sisters, Slava [a Russian pastor] and he himself burned his famous lodge with idols. And they too were so afraid when they were destroying idols. But pastor Slava could not understand, he asked, 'Why are you so afraid?' They said, 'We have mortal fear, we are praying, because we are exorcizing the Demon.' Slava could not understand this fear, because he did not understand where this fear came from. We have been worshiping them [idols] all our lives. We were afraid that something terrible could happen to our families, but moreover, we were afraid of the people around, that they would do something bad with us.

People who burned 'idols' knew what to be afraid of and what was sometimes hidden from missionaries' eyes. Later on, when the practice of burning 'idols' became widely known, native society was agitated by stories about the punishment of the sacrilegous. In Se-Yakha tundra (Northern Yamal) rumours circulated that soon after a young woman had burned her family 'idols' her mother disappeared. Her frozen dead body was found several months later, half eaten by dogs. This lamentable death was interpreted as the spirits' punishment for the burning 'idols'. In another part of the tundra there was an accident when a converted man fell victim to a bear, which attacked and crippled him. 'A bear was a sign for him, surely it was a sign for him to stop attending the sect', people said.

But of course, converts were much more afraid of the people around them than spirits and animals. Born-again natives whose parents disinherited them and took back all the reindeer; converted families left alone by their kin, without crucial support; husbands punishing their wives for ritual disobedience – they surely knew about all

these stories when they were burning 'idols'. A tragic story was narrated to me by an old missionary who has been working among Khanty people for many years. He told the story of a young woman, converted into the light of Christianity. She was originally from a shamanic family and her close relative was a shaman. Her dead body was found in a cemetery, tied to one of the graves. 'She was ritually killed – little by little, by seven knots, strangled by that shaman, because she gave up her ancestral faith and accepted Christ in her heart', whispered the missionary to me.

Often missionaries were met in the tundra with guns, in some native villages local inhabitants nearly declared a war on missionary families who arrived to establish a church. Converted Nenets, in the eyes of their native fellows, were often considered morally corrupt, socially dangerous or weak, sick people and out of their minds (*nenormal'nye*). They were often marginalized from traditional tundra society: in some parts of the northern Yamal tundra there were cases where converted Nenets were excluded from traditional tundra interrelations, from nomadic campsites and ultimately from tundra life.

A Nenets tundra dweller explained it as follows: 'They are not Num's children anymore, Num is angry with them: he gave reindeer to them as his children but now he is taking them back, since they [converted Nenets] are not his children anymore'. In general, in the stories of punishments of the sacreligious, a plot usually dominates where a convert suddenly loses his reindeer herd (they have died or have been killed by wolves), as this is the greatest disaster that can happen in Nenets life.

So conversion was not simply a matter of religious preference, but was believed to be an event challenging the continuity and well-being of an entire family or clan.

'If he stops believing in his traditional gods, if he burns his idols, how would he survive? They [converted] will die in poverty, because they had burned their roots! [*Oni korni svoi sozhgli*]', exclaimed a tundra Nenets woman from a wealthy reindeer herding family. The same logic was used by a settled Nenets woman, a teacher in a native residential school in Yar-Sale:

> In Nenets Okrug, in the Arkhangelsk Oblast', the Nenets gave way [*poddalis'*] to missionaries and now there are no Nenets there anymore; there are no reindeer and no Nenets. Theydon't even speak the Nenets language. Because the missionaries there burned all the [Nenets] gods – therefore there are no Nenets there. And we will soon have the same here.

A no less rigorous reaction to burning 'idols' came from local authorities (many of whom in the YNAO are themselves indigenous). This new tendency was unexpected and obviously contradicted official discourses and practices concerning indigenous

policy, within which 'indigenous culture' and tundra sacred sites were viewed as authentic markers of the region and as tools in political land-rights claims. Besides, these practices of burning sacred items, publicly represented as vandalism, apparently disclaimed the regional law on the protection of religious and worship places of indigenous peoples of the North, debated at that time in the YNAO State Duma.

In public discourse missionary activity in the Polar Ural and Yamal tundra is regarded as endangering 'traditional culture' and challenging authenticity. In my interview with the Head of the Department of Affairs of Indigenous peoples of the North in Salekhard, Lidiya Vello, she called it 'blurring the spiritual genuineness' (*razmyvanie dukhovnoi samobytnosti*). She was also convinced that Protestant conversion 'is a system of destruction of traditional culture, destruction of those traditional values that from time immemorial have preserved native people, helping them to survive in the harsh climatic conditions'.

The blood issue has become another burning question in religious communities, as well as in public discourse. A range of opponents of religious changes – including local officials – use the 'blood issue' in their arguments against new religious movements, portraying them as endangering not only native 'traditional culture' but also the health and well-being of the tundra people. In my interviews, several Salekhard government officials insisted that 'sectarians' propagandize very hazardous things. 'They [converted Nenets] can't live in the tundra, they can't eat meat, and they can't drink blood. But blood is haemoglobin, it is the only source of vitamins in the tundra! How will they survive?' argued one of them.

The reaction of native society is not much friendlier. Many non-converted Nenets regret that their fellows expose themselves to such danger. A Nenets tundra woman expressed it as follows:

> Nowadays, it seems, almost all the Ural Nenets have become believers, Baptists. I think that it just harms them. Because they must not eat meat with blood, they should wash meat, thus they wash away all vitamins. But they have no vegetables; they have nothing to replace [blood]. It doesn't suit them to be Baptists. In the tundra everything is connected with blood, with reindeer slaughtering.

Nevertheless, being under the threat of spiritual punishment and social reprobation, the first Nenets born-agains kept burning their 'heathen past', because they fully embraced the Christian system of meanings, and its message, 'You shall have no other gods before me'. Burning cultural items was a way of cementing their own 'rebirth in Christ' and at the same time it was a ritual of rupture and a complete break with the

past. 'The living God is the only God. One must not [worship] two gods at the same time, solely the One', said Tasia when I first met her.

A Baptist missionary in Se-Yakha (Northern village in the Yamal peninsula) told a story of a Nenets reindeer herder Yangova and his wife. Yangova's parents were so outraged by his conversion and the fact that he and his wife gave up worshipping ancestral 'idols' and following Nenets rites, that the parents disinherited their son and took all their reindeer back. Being left without reindeer, Yangova had to move to a local settlement. With the help of missionaries he and his family were accommodated in a trailer and began their new, converted and settled life. During his presentation at the Brotherhood annual conference in 2009, the missionary showed a picture of Yangova's last day in the tundra, saying, 'Here is a photo where he [Yangova] is taking down his *chum* once and for all, even though he spent all his life here. He was afraid of a settled life, but God has helped him'.

Thus, the 'spiritual war' against the tundra 'heathendom' sometimes resulted in the development of the image of the tundra as a place unsuitable for Christian life. A sedentary Nenets woman in Beloyarsk was convinced that, 'there are no believers in the tundra: when they become Protestants they move to the settlements'.

As an outcome, soon after the first cases of conversion, 'born-again' Nenets began to get excluded from tundra life. 'Nenets culture' and 'Baptist culture' were being symbolically and geographically separated as belonging to tundra space and settled space respectively. Nenets society was convinced that the 'Russian faith' should belong to the Russian world, while the 'Nenets faith' should stay in the world of the tundra.

However, this life strategy and this principle of geographical division of faiths were obviously not acceptable for the majority of converted Nenets. Most of them would never surrender their nomadic life, not even in the name of Christ. Therefore, it was not accidental when,several years later after my first visit to Yamal in 2006, I began noticing that many of those Nenets converts and missionaries who previously were the most ardent followers of spiritual rebirth from their 'heathen past', began revising their previously radical position. At times, I began to hear notes of regret from tundra converts about their previous intolerant attitudes towards native culture and tundra regulations.

Mikhail, the first missionary in Yamal who is Nenets by origin, told me: 'Yes, we have various prohibitions in our culture. But if you neglect them, you will be simply left outside society. Ask Nadia whether she wants to be left outside? No, she doesn't!' And Nadia – one of the first converted Nenets in the tundra, who has been struggling for

many years for her large family to be brought into the light of Christianity now confesses:

> They say about us that we have completely given up our [ancestral] faith, yes, that we do wrong things. They call us Baptists. And they are afraid of […] If we are Baptists they won't even have tea with us, they won't let us come into their homes. If I arrive somewhere, they won't let me come in, I mean they won't invite me to their *chums*. They are so afraid of this word – 'Baptists' – I don't know why. When they hear these words, 'Oh! Baptists have arrived!' they all close up and nobody even goes out. We are having a hard time now. It is difficult now to communicate with our people [*s nashim narodom*], especially [difficult] for my sons, because men always travel a lot in the tundra, gather reindeer, visit other campsites […] And people laugh at them, call them differently, that we are Baptists, that we betrayed our faith, that we don't drink blood.

Conversely, here is the explanation of one of Nadia's unconverted neighbours, 'When you arrive at their [Baptist] nomadic camp, you see that they don't follow any customs. Women run anyplace, wherever they want and however they want, jump everywhere, step over everything. All prohibitions in the *chum* are violated, for example [the prohibition] to cross behind the fire. They put women's things everywhere; they never clean up garbage… It is a total mess there [*polnyi bardak*], it is impossible to stay with them in the same campsite'.

Increasingly, Nenets converts express their regret about their ancestral 'idols' that they had burned earlier, about their defiant behaviour, which brought conflict to the tundra and even caused their extended families to fall apart. Some of them eventually realized that ritual items were not personal ones, but things belonging to the family and were the only memory of passed away fathers. The set of codes for conduct and the regulations were in fact systems of etiquette and the way to be respectful in tundra everyday life, rather than heathen rites.

Only a few converts remained willing to perceive religious conversion as it was defined by Nock as a 'definite crossing of religious frontiers, in which an old spiritual home was left for a new one once and for all' (1933:7). The rest, however, have given to their indigenous cultural order another hope. While some Nenets and Khanty born-agains continue to view the native culture and Protestant Christianity as hopelessly at odds, many of those previously antagonizing over any continuity between pre- and post-converted lives have now become deeply committed to asserting, reshaping, and expressing what they call their 'traditional culture'. They seek to find alternative ways to bridge Christianity and Nenets culture and in this framework the idea of

contextualization or indigenization of Christianity occurs as the most discussed issue in the Protestant milieu.

While facing the moment of choice in their lives and the danger of being excluded from their home world, born-again Nenets need to articulate what it means to be a Nenets and a Christian and to find a bridge between these two notions. It was early-conversion phase religious conflicts and cultural tensions that particularly stimulated Nenets to begin the self-conscious construction and articulation of cultural and ethnic boundaries and the reshaping of Nenets indigeneity.

6.2   CHRISTIANITY AND NENETS *RE-INDIGENIZATION*

A Nenets woman who lives in the Baidarata tundra and is a member of the Baptist community justified her doubted authenticity and demonstrated that she has a distinct culture:

> Somebody accused us that we have forgotten our gods and don't worship them anymore. But in general, we preserve our culture all the same, we never forget our culture. Although I don't follow [Nenets female prohibitions], I follow my culture.

Through the rhetoric of cultural break and continuity with the Nenets traditional past, Nenets converts have become engaged in the process of 'appropriation, contestation and re-fashioning of the western meaning of "culture" (Jackson 2007:232). They articulate, revise, and re-assemble the notion of 'Nenets traditional culture', while trying to suit it to their Christian life; hence, new cultural constructions are put into play. Within the discourse, 'culture' becomes a property to protect; it is reified and objectified such thatthe taken-for-granted pattern turns into ethno-consciousness. 'The objectification of identity, in short, appears here to have produced a new sensibility, an explicitly new awareness of its essence, its affective, material, and expressive potential', point out Jean and John Comaroff (2009:2).

In addition, while legitimizing the idea that converted natives are, nevertheless, entitled to have Nenets identity and Nenets culture, they have begun to mobilize and concretize their indigeneity. When converted Nenets find themselves in danger of losing their Nenets authenticity and experience the threat of exclusion from the native society, when they are accused of not being Nenets or 'traditional' enough, they develop a strategy of *reindigenization,* i.e., they seek to recover their indigenous culture and identity (Jackson 2009). Hence, the justification of Nenets indigenous culture arises, similar to the discourse of culture that Jean Jackson (2007:232) writes about where the

issue of rights to indigenous culture becomes a mode of imaginary of the 'real' indigeneity. Likewise, converts' claims to having rights to Nenets native culture and Nenets identity have become a strategy to ensure their threatened ethnicity and to return their lost authenticity. Reversely, by re-articulating and re-defining the notion of 'Nenets traditional culture', Nenets converts have developed new schemes that allow them to make sense of their chosen religious path in their Nenets life.

The Project of Nenets Christianity

In the process of justifying 'Nenets culture' both missionaries and their native adherents often seek to contextualize the Christian message within a local context.

One of the ways to shape indigeneity is the project of *Nenets Christianity* – the idea of a specially developed ethnic version of Christianity. It carries a message of the salvational role of Christianity in Nenets history, where Christian faith is believed to transform and to restore the Nenets as the god-blessed people. In his study of the Swedish Faith Movement, Simon Coleman argues that such a contextualization approach that celebrates 'the virtues of locality and patriotic attachment' nevertheless contributes to a globalizing orientation: 'Faith rhetoric appropriates symbols of nationhood in a way that is entirely appropriate to an imaginative construction of the possibility of translocal influence and empowerment' (Coleman 2000:209). The localizing approach has become a way of translocal empowerment for the Nenets too, whereby they envision the specific place of the Nenets people in the history of Christianity and in world history in general.

The main advocate and promoter of this adapted Christianity, translated and contextualized within Nenets culture, is the Evangelical church '*Blagaia Vest*', based in Salekhard. The Beloyarsk community (being previously affiliated with this church) often manifests a similar approach. The initial aim of the project was to reconsider the previous rigorous conversion strategies and missionary principles that frequently brought social conflicts and tensions to the Polar Urals and Yamal, and to make those strategies more compatible with local cultures in order to make it easier for the native people to accept Christianity without rejecting the key patterns of their culture.

A Russian Evangelical missionary, one of the advocates of the Nenets Christianity, in 2006 generalized his understanding of the project in the following way:

> They [nomadic natives] are not ready to accept [Christianity] with our context, they are not ready to admit [*prinimat'*] our culture. We need somehow to get the message across [*prepodat'*], but substitute the packaging [*podmenit' upakovochku*]. Let them keep their own culture. If I

respect their culture and pray to God in their language, it will be the same anyway. We'll just correct things a little [*chut' podkorrektiruem*] […] In other words, I am totally convinced that Nenets culture should be fully preserved, fully. Their language, their prayers, and even their rituals [*obriadovaia storona*], you know. We need to bring the Gospel while not disturbing their culture.

He continues with the story of a missionary who witnessed a Nenets traditional reindeer sacrifice and instead of refuting the ritual, he used the tactic of negotiating between the 'heathen' ritual and Christian ideas: he tried to convince them that the ritual just performed was actually good and right – as good and right as the Old Testament is – but that this ritual belonged to the Old Testament and now he had brought the New Testament; and then he continued with his usual preaching.

Appropriating missionaries' ideas on the compatibility of Protestantism and Nenets traditional culture, some converted Nenets have gone further and argued that the new ethnically framed Christianity is not merely possible but will be the foundation for native survival and will prevent the destruction of native traditional culture. When I first met Mikhail in 2006, a Nenets Evangelical missionary in Yamal and local indigenous activist, he said:

> Today there is a new page of history in our [Nenets] life – everything has changed and Christianity has arrived. I am telling you, here and now, history is happening, something entirely new that has never happened before in the world. It is the history of the awakening of the people, of the entire people [*tselogo naroda*]. And while we are deciding these issues, people from other cultures often interfere with us [*nam meshaiut liudi drugoi kul'tury*]. They impose their own will. But we have to decide by ourselves. Christianity is a good thing, but together with Baptists comes Baptist culture, together with Pentecostals – Pentecostal culture, together with Americans – American culture, and Russian culture comes with Russians. And all these are wrong. Don't be hard on us! We should sort it out ourselves.

Several years later, in 2011, he said to me that he had seen God's foresight: Christ does not want Nenets to believe like Russians, he wants to see the creation of Nenets churches, 'within their own culture'; God wants the glorification in Nenets language. Hence, Mikhail sees the preservation of nomadic culture and the creation of purely native churches (Nenets and Khanty) as the fulfillment of God's will.

The Evangelical missionaries from Salekhard have developed their indigenization strategies in a traditional way for world Protestantism. The project of indigenization of Christianity has a long history in Protestantism and is considered nowadays as the major global trend in Christian missions (Protestant as well Catholic). Various Protestant institutions came to have a compatible relationship with indigenous cultures. From

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in nineteenth century, The World Missionary Conference in 1910, the works of the Fuller Theological Seminary, David Bosch, The Summer Institute of Linguistics, all the way up to Billy Graham and the International Congress of World Evangelization at Lausanne in 1974 with the subsequent Lausanne movement, Protestantism has been elaborating its new missionary theology, indigenous mission church theory and the idea of reframing Christian missions in the modern world (Stoll 1982, Burridge 1985; Stott 1997; Lindenfeld & Richardson 2011; Hunt 2011). This tendency in world Protestantism was influenced also by new doctrinal ideas emanating from the Catholic Church, particularly after Vatican II (1962-1965), Paul VI's call in Kampala in 1969 ('You may and you must have an African Christianity') and the 1991 encyclical of John Paul II entitled 'Mission of the Redeemer', in which he expressed the necessity of inculturation in the contemporary mission of the Church (Arbuckle 1985; 1990; Rahner 1981; Schineller 1992). Eventually, such missionary principles as 'church planting', 'group targeting' (the elaboration of mission work for particular social groups), drawing indigenous people into religious work and leadership, as well as translating the Bible into indigenous languages came to characterize the world mission tendency (Gallaher 2007).

However, Russian Northern missionaries have not developed their missionary principles in as much detailed as their 'brothers' in Latin America and Africa and only a few of the arctic 'warriors of Christ' now elaborate these liberal missionary principles on a serious ideological basis. The project is not widely regarded by the natives and is promoted only by the Evangelical Church in Salekhard. Here in Yamal and the Polar Urals you will not find striking forms of indigenization of local churches such as 'exotic-like' Christian services with drums and native music, with liturgy that reminds one of native shamanic rituals, indigenized images of Jesus, etc.

What distinguishes the Polar Urals and Yamal from the world trend is that the contextualization project still raises debates within the missionary milieu and even causes inter-congregational tensions. Unlike Pelkmans' statement that the most successful churches in the Post-Soviet space are those that attempt to contextualize their religious messages (Pelkmans 2009b:10), the indigenized version of Christianity in the Polar Urals has brought with it ambiguous outcomes, an awkward situation of missionary 'warfare' revolving around the nature of contextualization and the danger of syncretism.

The Evangelical church in Salekhard advocating liberal missionary principles and the Baptist Brotherhood claiming the most rigorous rupture in converts' lives are two

implacable opponents in the arena of indigenization. While the former develops an ethnic version of Christianity, the latter is very cautious toward incorporating 'ethnic' elements into their religious practices. The Evangelical congregation is the main host for all projects on translations of the Bible into Nenets and Khanty languages conducted by the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Pioneer Bible Translation, and the Institute for Bible Translation – those world advocates of indigenization of Christianity. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood denies any versions of the Bible translations conducted by the Evangelical church. The Baptist community in the remote Yamal village of Se-Yakha even burned pieces of a translated New Testament that Evangelical translators had sent to them. The Brotherhood leaders sent a letter to the Evangelical translation centre in Salekhard accusing interpreters of unacceptable syncretism and the use of 'pagan' Nenets notions while translating significant Christian concepts.

But at the same time, both mission-churches have organized missionary projects and special religious ceremonies targeted at Nenets and Khanty people. The Evangelical mission-church in Salekhard convenes the Christian conference of Finno-Ugrian peoples every year in order to consolidate international missionary initiatives. The Baptist Brotherhood organizes winter religious gatherings of nomadic Nenets annually in Vorkuta city, and every autumn assembles numerous missionaries and Nenets nomads in the tundra for Christian camps. All mission-churches in the Polar Urals consider it crucial to draw native converts into missionary initiatives and teach them to be future community leaders, pastors and deacons. The final goal for both congregations is to build a special Nenets church.

Politicizing Conversion

Although the indigenization project is not very developed in the Polar Urals, those attempts to contextualize the Christian message within Nenets culture obviously have led to the stimulation of Nenets indigenous awareness. And in this frame, Nenets indigeneity has been shaped and mobilized in such a way that their conversion experience has developed into a strategy of empowerment and stimulation of indigenous political agency.

In general, the situation is not unique for the Polar Urals and reflects many other cases of Protestant conversion in the situation of colonial and post-colonial encounters. As observed by a range of scholars, the interrelation of neo-Protestant missionaries and native cultures in Latin America and Africa have frequently resulted into the so-called 'indigenous awakening' and politicizing indigeneity (Gallaher 2007; Parker Gumucio

2002b; Dow 2005). In Latin America of the late twentieth / early twenty-first century, new-wave Protestant missions have been particularly successful in regions with a high population of indigenous peoples (Dow 2005). And as scholars argue, the 'emergence of indigenous' here, the constitution of indigenous ethnic identities, ethnic claims and in general the eruption of an indigenous movement onto the political scene have been profoundly influenced by the great expansion of indigenous neo-Protestantism, as well as Catholicism revitalized by liberation theology (Parker Gumucio 2002a; 2002b; Gallaher 2007; Trejo 2009).

In post-Soviet Siberia too, scholarship reports that oftentimes Protestant leaders are at the vanguard of the local indigenous revival (Broz 2009:23-24; Vaté 2009:41). Although it would be an exaggeration to look at Nenets conversion as a developed political opposition or indigenous movement, the Protestant flux among indigenous populations in the Polar Urals has followed the logic and approaches of post-Soviet indigenous movements. It has contributed in many ways to a 'recovery' of ethnic identity in that it mobilizes indigeneity as a political tool, where indigeneity reveals its political agency, its social and political usage. In this way, the Protestant conversion experience has become a new channel through which to involve the transnational indigenous culture discourse.

Note, almost all missionaries (Charismatic, Evangelical or Baptist) with whom I spoke were not very concerned themselves about political issues. However, officials in Yamal generally believe that it is precisely Protestant missionary initiatives that make the Nenets more politically mobilized, hence making them difficult to govern. I assume that it is not the missionary work in the Nenets tundra that is politicized, but Nenets themselves recycle the missionary message in a way that strengthens their indigenous awareness and agency. The most politically and socially active church in the region has been the Evangelical church from Salekhard, which organizes various social projects targeting the native population and supports Nenets and Khanty in establishing fishing and herding *obshchiny*. However, the degree of politicizing of a community oftentimes does not depend on its denominational affiliation, but rather on the public activity of its native members. Hence, Charismatic and Baptist native communities are also more or less politically mobilized.

This new political indigenous mobilization is often viewed as an expression of opposition sentiments and, therefore, as threatening political stability in the region. Perhaps, this happens because Protestantism (popularly regarded as 'sectarianism') was always historically associated in Russia with opposition to the state (cf. Tumarkin

1983:21-22). A Charismatic minister from Salekhard generalized it as follows: 'Here [in the YNAO] Protestants are treated badly by local administrations, because we teach indigenous people [*korennoi narod*] to speak proudly, they get more confident. But nobody needs that here'. Conversely, using almost the same terminology, one of the leading politicians in Salekhard accused Protestant missionaries of teachingnomadic Nenets the basics in law (*pravovoi likbez*), hence making 'sectarian' Nenets hard to communicate with:

> They [converted Nenets] become so competent [*gramotnye*] […] An absolutely uneducated reindeer herder or fisherman tells you, 'Why do you force me to believe in other religions? According to the Constitution I have rights to choose it myself'. And our *FSBeshniki* [Federal Security Service workers] were thereby put into a corner. They cannot do anything.

Similarly, in the widely known on-going land conflict between the cooperative 'Krasnyi Oktiabr' (based in the city of Vorkuta, Komi Republic) and private reindeer herders of the Polar Ural tundra, the Baptist missionaries were often mentioned as one of the stimuli for the conflict. The tension revolves around the land issue: the cooperative management complains that numerous Nenets private reindeer herders pasture their herds on the lands that belong to the cooperative. They demand that the private herders either leave the pastures (due to the harsh polar mountain environment they in fact have no other place to go) or join the cooperative (in such case their herds will not belong to them anymore and will be a property of the cooperative). The head of the cooperative 'Krasnyi Oktiabr', Grigori Pasynkov, has argued publicly that Baptist missionaries propagandize among the nomads that they should refuse to comply with the law and instigate the herders to claim that these lands actually belong to them, and the tundra as a whole belongs to indigenous peoples. According to Pasynkov, following missionaries' instructions, private herders claim their land back and make complaints about the violation of their rights as *indigenous people* (*korennye narody*).

Pasynkov is right; several mission-churches in the YNAO support native cooperation in *obshchiny*, stimulate indigenous political claims-making and the identity of people with the right to have rights.

Anatolii, an Evangelical missionary in Salekhard, told me a story about how he and his mission-church helped converted Khanty fishermen unite into a fishing *obshchina* and their subsequent struggle with local authorities:

> [We] helped them organize a fishing community; we registered it and took care of all juridical things for them. They say, 'They will kill us!' But I said to them, 'Nobody will kill you'. And when they'd already started fishing themselves, their previous boss [*khoziain*] saw them fishing on the

same part of the river [*peski*], and he shouted at them, 'What you are doing here?!' But I said to them, 'Don't be afraid and answer him that this land is yours and you are its rightful masters'. And since that time they have become rightful masters of their river.

The Evangelical church in Salekhard has registered an NGO with a typical name – Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North '*Nasha Zemlia*' (Our Land). In cooperation with some charity organizations, the church conducts different projects in support of nomadic indigenous people. During last few years veterinarian projects, health projects 'Healthy children of tundra', 'First aid in the tundra', 'First aid kit into every *chum*' and other humanitarian aid projects have been running.

As an outcome, some converted natives are now engaged in social and political initiatives and play an appreciable role in the region's social life. Mikhail, the only missionary in Yamal who is Nenets by origin, at the same time is the organizer and the head of two native communities – the reindeer herding cooperative '*Yasavei*' and the indigenous *obshchina* '*Obnovlënnaia Zhizn*' (Renewed Life) in the Priural'skii district of the YNAO – and he is also engaged in the activities of the indigenous association of the Nenets people '*Yamal – Potomkam*' (Yamal to Its Descendants) as the head of one of its departments. One of the Khanty's leading Charismatics is the people's deputy in the Aksarka municipality of the Priural'ski district. Both consider their social and political activity as part of their Christian mission.

Although the majority of native born-agains are not so active in the social and political life of their region, their new religious experiences and their practice of justifying and defending 'indigenous culture' influence the increasing indigenous awareness.

6.3   NENETS ETHNO-THEOLOGY

By the term 'ethno-theology' Michael Scott defines the process of indigenous theological speculations and constructions where Christian converts 'evaluate indigenous ideas and practices in relation to those of Christianity and situate ancestral identities and histories within Biblical history' (2005:102). Similar to Scott's observation, Nenets Christians select and reinterpret the content of Christianity in a way that allows them to reconcile their pre-converted past with their born-again present.

Eventually the communication between the two systems of meanings is transferred into a deeper symbolic and categorical level, when missionaries and converted natives undertake serious conceptual work on translating, interpreting and revaluating both

traditional categories and Christian ideas. The ultimate goal of such negotiation is to build a bridge and reconcile Christianity and Nenets culture.

Disenchanting Traditional Culture

What to do with all those native symbols and practices that at the beginning of the conversion era were regarded by the majority of converts and missionaries as heathen?

It is the *disenchanting* of traditional culture that at times becomes one of the discursive methods that enables 'traditional culture' in Christian life to be kept. In the discursive negotiation between Christianity and native culture, the 'dangerous' symbols and practices (previously regarded as part of heathen religion) become de-sacralized, and 'culturalized', i.e., they are taken out of the sphere of 'religious' and brought into a sphere of 'culture', translated now as secular or 'rational' patterns (cf. Broz 2009; Vaté 2009). Here, again, the culture and religion discourse is a key concern. As Virginie Vaté rightly points out, '[D]issociation of "culture" and "religion" appears to be a way for converts to reconcile their indigenous identity with Christianity' (2009: 49). Examining the contextualization of Protestant Christianity among the Chukchi, Vaté argues that missionaries replicate the typical Soviet rhetoric, 'national in form, Socialist in content', developing their missionary strategies as 'national in form, Christian in content' (2009:48).

In order to prevent social tensions evoked by conversions in the tundra, some missionaries and converts have developed the technique of interpreting 'pagan' practices and notions rather as etiquette or ethnic features, rationally or even scientifically grounded. The religious meanings are denied or believed to be completely lost. The 'Nenets religion' is eventually turning into 'Nenets philosophy'. 'All these are not heathen but ethnic – all these rituals, customs, prohibitions', is the most common justification tool I have heard in native Christian communities.

A Korean translator of the Bible into the Nenets language, who has been living in Salekhard for many years and is now one of the most sincere advocates of Nenets culture, argued:

> When you ask them [why a woman is not allowed to cross the space behind a fire place] – nobody will answer you. It is simply a custom now, simply a custom. Even if it used to have a previous religious meaning, nowadays they [Nenets] separate it, hence, it is simply their custom [...].
> It is philosophy, Nenets philosophy. They purify with smoke [meaning ritual purification *kўv- kўv*] – it is a science, but not religion. We should respect this. There always is a reason we just don't know it yet [...] It kills bacteria, it is necessary, and if you destroy it people in the tundra will get sick [...].

The practice of using reindeer blood for food has also become rationalized and essentialized: it is considered now as the only source of vitamins, or even something inherited in Nenets genes, without which nomadic people 'will pine' (*zachakhnut*) and get sick. 'The culture' now is not a 'heathen' construct, but something that runs in people's blood and is inherent in the genes.

At times, Nadia, the born-again Christian who was the first who burned her ancestral 'idols' and began to follow the most rigorous attitudes toward 'Nenets heathendom', returned to her 'Nenets culture' and tried to justify it, following the same logic of *disenchanting*. When I stayed the third time at Nadia's *chum* in Autumn 2011, she told me her conversion story again. This time, the framework and intonation of the story differed from that one narrated to me five years earlier. When I heard it for the first time in 2006, she told me mostly about burning her ancestral 'idols' and her liberation from society's traditional prohibitions and restrictions on behaviour. The message of rupture dominated throughout her narrative. Something significantly changed in her story she told it in 2011. Nadia then told me that she had returned to following some traditional customs, making excuses for her previously rigorous attitude toward 'the culture'. She was almost whispering this and I got the impression that she was sharing a secret with me, that she was now trying to justify herself. The story she told was about the prohibition against crossing the space behind the fire place, near the *symsy* pole that traditionally marks the sacred space in a Nenets *chum*. Nadia told me that some converts were sure that their conversion allowed them to stop following this prohibition and so she also stopped. 'But this place is like a kitchen for us, we keep groceries and kitchen utensils there', she argued. And then she asked me: 'You don't step over dishes and groceries in your kitchen? So we don't either. We used to call it a sin, *hyvy*. But now I don't call it a sin – it is just something inappropriate [*neudobno*]'. Then she told me about the Nenets prohibition against stepping over clothes and men's tools. In the same way, she removed a veil of 'sinfulness' while interpreting these practices:

> To step over [clothes and tools] is uncomfortable too. How can I step over my child's pants or shirts?! I won't call it a sin, but at the same time I won't feel comfortable to put these clothes on my child afterwards [...] *Hyvy*, I used to call it a sin, but now I am in God, so I won't cross over men's lassos [*arkan*], not because it is a sin, but because it is unpleasant [*nepriiatno*] and inappropriate.

The woman who five years before courageously said, 'Now we can do everything [...] We have gotten rid of fear'; the woman who put us (two female anthropologists) in

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2006 on the Nenets bed with our feet on it, thus violating the prevailing prohibition in the Nenets tundra, this woman now restored all these customs back. She argued that she needs them because she believes that all these regulations keep order in tundra life. She criticized her daughters-in-law, saying that they are 'too modern' (*slishkom sovremennye*) and do not follow the tundra code for conduct, violating the regulations surrounding male and female social spaces; she now taught them to live as of old. At the same time, she remained a sincere believer, one who reads the Bible, who prays, who attends community gatherings, and who taught me how to live a truly Christian life.

Nadia disenchanted her culture, thus legalizing it in her life in Christ. She functionally revaluated the system of knowledge and meanings underlying those traditional practices, now basing them on new concepts such as 'ethnic', 'rational', 'genes'. She stretched traditional categories and provided them with new values. She needed that to maintain the continuity-in-change.

Conversion of History: The 'Old Testament' Nenets

'A group's vision of its future… arises out of its embedded understanding of its past', argues Jean Jackson (2009). Likewise, Marshal Sahlins points out that when people undergo culture change, encompassing 'the existentially unique in the conceptually familiar', they embed their present in the past (1985:146).

This is what converted Nenets are doing when bridge Christianity and their traditional system of knowledge. Some of them do not see in Christianity and Nenets culture merely compatibility or complementarity, but essential unity and continuity. They have come to embed Christian logic and the Christian message in their social and personal histories, thereby not only defending their 'culture', but sacralizing it in Christian terms. In this framework, Christianity is represented as reflecting the most profound aspects of genuine Nenets culture, and the conversion experience brings the reformation or purification of authentic 'Nenetsness' and *Nenei il'* – true Nenets life. This approach allows Nenets to embrace Christianity by focusing on the essential community of their native tradition and Christian patterns rather than on the conflicting 'heathen' discourse.

One of the most common techniques of symbolic bridge building between Christianity and the Nenets world is the representation of traditional Nenets culture as the *Old Testament* and non-converted Nenets as Old Testament or Biblical Nenets (Vagramenko 2007b). In such a framework, converted Nenets represent themselves as having been custodians of God's law all along, those who primordially belonged to

God's plan for humanity and whose 'traditional culture' and ancestors' religion are 'expressions of imperfect but innate inclinations towards Christian truth' (Scott 2005:109).

Hence, Nenets culture is not regarded as simply heathen anymore nor Nenets people as backward, but rather as Biblical God-chosen people who prophetically are meant to find salvation, who have always lived according to the old Jewish laws. The approach is not unique for Nenets conversion; it can also be traced in some other cases of missionary-indigenous encounters where indigenous culture is represented in Biblical terms and is compared with Old-Testament Hebrew culture, thus ensuring the continuity between pre- and post-converted lives (Badmaev et al. 2006:97-99; Broz 2009:23; Vaté 2009:51-53; Wiget & Balalaeva 2007; see also Scott 2005).

Note that it is the image of reindeer and Nenets nomadic life that has become a crucial means for translating 'Nenets culture' as Old-Testament. The reindeer, around which Nenets nomadism and their general world-view is concentrated, has become an important symbol in Nenets Christian life as well. In Nenets tundra life, the reindeer is a source of food, transport, clothes, housing, and economic exchanges. It is, in general, a dominant category of Nenets culture, and the majority of Nenets tundra regulations and rites seek to guarantee the safety of the reindeer. As Liivo Niglas argues, the reindeer is the moulder of the ethnic identity of the Yamal Nenets (Niglas 1997; 2000). A Nenets woman from Yar-Sale village expressed it as follows: 'Reindeer are life, reindeer are everywhere, they are all around in [Nenets] life. Reindeer, reindeer, reindeer'.

In Nenets Christian life the reindeer have become a token and a measure of God's blessings (a true believing Nenets is blessed with a wealthy herd), and a form of church tithe. The reindeer is a Biblically pure animal and reindeer herding is reminiscent of the ancient Jewish pastoral society; thus through the reindeer and nomadism Nenets have gained legalized status within Christianity.

Nenets rituals and sacrifices, for example, are considered analogous to ancient Hebrew rituals. Nenets love to read the Old Testament and interpret Hebrew nomadic pastoral society as a prophetic description of traditional Nenets society, comparing Hebrewshepherds with Nenets reindeer herders.

One Nenets missionary, Mikhail, used this technique as the main strategy in his justification of Nenets culture:

> The Old Testament is still alive among us, because we, the Nenets, live according to the Old Testament […] Take the Nenets people – they are nomadic people. They have cattle – reindeer. And take Israeli people – they used to be nomads too. Then, in the Old Testament there are such notions as

clean and unclean animals. And Nenets people too have the same notions! Birds, fish. Scavengers are unclean animals, as well as all those who eat someone else's flesh. Whitefish [*muksun*] have proper scales – everybody understands that it is a clean animal. But pike is unclean. We also have peaceful sacrifices: when we wish to thank God we can bring, for example, berries, cloudberries. We know that it is silly, God won't eat them, but this is the way we express our gratitude to Him. That is, we have the same system in our culture'.

When I stayed in the Beloyarsk community, we often read the Bible and this reading was the best way to call up old memories of Nenets tundra life. Beginning with 'we also used to live according to the Old Testament', 'we lived as of the Old Testament life [*starozavetnoi zhizn'iu zhili*]', Marina then described various Nenets traditional rituals, customs and myths. Nenets prohibitions of the use of some species of animals and birds for food were reminiscent for readers of the ancient Jewish distinction between pure and impure animals. All rituals and behavioural regulations surrounding Nenets women during their periods and childbirth could now be justified by the Old Testament notion of ritual impurity and defilement of a woman and the Jewish idea that her *impurity* 'infects' others (contamination by menstrual blood). Reading the Flood story, Marina told about *sikhirtia,* the Nenets mythical small underground people with conical heads that are believed to be the Nenets' predecessors (Vasil'ev 1970). She explains the legend on *sikhirtia* through the Biblical image of the Flood:

> *Sikhirtia* is closely connected with the Biblical story about the Flood. All the earth was flooded – everything and the land where the Nenets lived was also flooded, everything was flooded. And when the water had gone all the people had died. But *sikhirtia* must have survived, hidden under the ground. But the water stayed for a long time, therefore they stayed under the ground for a long time and did not see the sun. It might be because of this that they are now afraid of sun light. So everybody died, but these conical ones survived.

Alternative Soteriology

Another discursive technique is to construct 'Nenets religion' according to Christian monotheistic paradigm. The approach goes as far back as the nineteenth century Russian Orthodox mission among the Nenets, when one of the local spiritual beings of the Nenets cosmology – *Num* (N.: *num'* – sky) – was constructed according to the concept of the supreme deity, as the major God of heaven, responsible for human life and the guardian of moral order (cf. Khomich 1976; 1979; Kostikov 1930a; Islavin 1847:109; Beliavskii 1833:149; Veniamin 1855:56-57). And *Nga* – the spirit related to the underground world – was conceptualized as the Devil or moralized evil.

The Russian Orthodox archimandrite Veniamin, the Head of Arkhangel'sk mission among the European Samoyeds wrote in the mid-nineteenth century that 'the heathen faith' of the Samoyeds consists of the belief in God, the Devil, spirits, and 'idols': 'The Samoyeds refer to God as Num and regard him as a supreme being, eternally existing, and name him alone *Tiavui Num* – Supreme God. They believe God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and every living thing and [they] think that all beings depend on him, and that he is the only who rules over all things... He is the bearer and the source of all the good' (1855:56-57).

Finnish researcher Mathias Alexander Castrén (1858:293) was among the first who recorded the change in Nenets beliefs about *Num*. He wrote that the Nenets *Num* was often associated with the sky and sun and that the stars are parts of *Num* and the rainbow is the border of Num's coat. Castren added that oftentimes he heard from the Samoyeds that the earth, the sea and nature as a whole were also *Num*. He continued that it was most likely the influence of Christianity that caused Num to be worshiped as the Creator of the world who blesses virtuous people and sends poverty and death to sinners.

In his analysis of religious conversion, Robin Horton views the strategy to develop the cult of supreme deity, active and morally-concerned, in general as one of the main outcomes of the encounter between what he calls 'traditional world-view' and world religions (Christianity and Islam). According to Horton's understanding, the notion and the cult of supreme deity is not fully elaborated in the traditional worldview. But in the frame of religious conversion into such 'world religions' as Christianity and Islam, as well as in the wider frame of colonization, the boundaries between the microcosm of local community and wider world macrocosm are blurred, and such weakening of microcosmic boundaries increases attention on the concept of a supreme being (Horton 1971:102). Hence, the concept is being profoundly elaborated and new techniques for approaching God and directing his influence are being constructed (Horton & Peel 1976:428).

Nowadays for Protestant missionaries, similar to Orthodox missionaries in the nineteenth century, this concept of a supreme deity similarly bridges two cultural systems of meanings. Contemporary religious changes in Nenets society inspire the same techniques of remoulding and construction of traditional beliefs according to the Christian paradigm. Nowadays the terms *Num* and *Nga* are used in Bible translations in the Nenets language to refer to God and the Biblical Devil respectively. Nenets converts see the Christian idea of God as referring to their own supreme being, and draw freely

on such ideas in elaborating their justification of 'traditional culture'. One Nenets believer argued:

> The Nenets are very spiritual people. They believe in gods, they believe that there are good and bad gods. And they understand that there is a Supreme God, the Creator. And when they hear the Gospel, they already understand that the Bible's God and their own God are one and the same.

Eventually, their 'ethnicity' is replaced by 'spirituality', as some Evangelical missionaries argue that the Nenets 'are not Nenets, but spiritual people'. As an Evangelical minister from Salekhard expressed it:

> It turned out that these people [the Nenets] have the greatest, the richest culture, which is close to Biblical visions. This people don't need to discover that God does exist, unlike the Russians who used to live in an atheistic society and believed that they came from monkeys. The Nenets and all their culture are soaked with spirituality [*propitany dukhovnost'iu*] [...] They have a clear understanding of God the Creator – it is Num. They have their understanding of evil and sin. They have a Biblical conception of sacrifice for the sake of god's excuse and propitiation [*umilostivlenie*] [...] They are highly spiritual people.

In this way, traditional Nenets culture is not simply legalized within a Christian system, but is *sacralised* – the Nenets are *God's chosen people* whose duty is to fulfill God's will in the modern world. Tundra life and non-converted nomadic Nenets are regarded as closer to Christianity than everybody else in the modern world, because they essentially have been living in the Old Testament. Even though some of the natives continue to live according to the Old Testament, believing in 'idols' and resorting to the help of shamans, their lives were regarded by their convert fellows as prophetical.

Native born-agains re-narrated their personal stories and local histories, while internalizing Christian values and key concepts such as *prophecy*, *salvation*, *predestination* and *damnation*. They revised their histories, situating them within Christian *soteriology*. Hence they did not merely embed their present in the past, but plunged it into their future – foreseeing their own, specifically Nenets, role in carrying the Christian message out into the world.

Religious conversion entails the creation of new oral histories, the invention of new family stories and hence a new history of salvation. When Nenets people told their Christian testimonies and personal conversion narratives, they usually started by telling stories not about themselves, but about their grandparents and great grandparents, reconsidering their ancestors' lives as God's prophecy and Providence.

In winter 2011 I arrived in Aksarka village, where Valia lives – a Khanty Charismatic leader and an internal missionary of her extended family. I intended to visit

her and to listen to her conversion narrative. It was a six hour story – the story of the conversion of her entire clan, a conversion that started as far back as her grandfather who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century – a reindeer herder, a famous shaman who had never heard such words as Charismatic, or even Christianity, and knew only a little about the Russian god. Her conversion narrative began with the story of the miraculous salvation of her grandfather, who had been lost in the sea, drifting on an ice floe for three days:

> He never knew God as we know Him now. But he began to pray to God the Father, because he realized that there was no sense anymore to ask 'idols' for help – none of them could help him now. So he began to pray, 'God! Save us! Help us!' [...] And then God made a path for him – a path made of ice that led him to the coast [...] Imagine, we are all destined to be saved, Satan knew that from the clan of this man a big branch [of Christians] would come out. Because there are many believers in our clan nowadays. And Satan wanted to cut this branch down, to uproot it. Our grandfather prayed not even knowing God, and God replied to him. It was a miracle.

Then Valia continued with her father's story, who was also a reindeer herder and who inherited the ancestral shamanic gift. He participated in World War II, where he saw for the first time Russians praying to their God, to 'some Jesus'. At the moment of crossfire between the Germans and Russians, he followed some Russian soldiers and kneeled down invoking God's name. Valia narrates it as follows:

> There was heavy fire from the German side. And my father often told us, 'People around cried, "God, save us!" And I knew too that God the Father helps, since he saved my dad out of the sea. And I also kneeled and prayed. And I heard God's voice, "Don't be afraid, you will return home alive". You see, he did not know God, but God talked to him anyway. Afterwards, he had so many revelations in his life, he did not know the Bible but he had such big revelations about the spiritual world […] There was a miraculous salvation – God saved my father during the war. He saved him and therefore all his offspring, because He knew that through him his offspring will be reckoned and will be saved as Christians.

While re-narrating the oral history, native Christians constructed an *alternative soteriology*, in which God prevented the Devil's intent and saved those whose offspring would be future religious leaders. It is significant that such key concepts as prophet, priest, shaman, God's chosen leader have been developed into a common semantic field. 'Simply because now we do not have a worthy priest… But we had one, and we called him a shaman', said Valia.

To sum up, along with *disenchanting* 'native culture' as the means to justify it in Christian life, it is also the sacralisation of 'the culture' and immersing Christian logic

and Christian concepts into the native history that worked as the strategy for reconciling Christianity and indigenous identity. Moreover, this strategy was developed by native converts and missionaries in a way that it became a means for empowerment, replacing the conventional 'second-classness' of the Nenets (and Khanty) by the notion of their chosenness and exceptional/ prophetical status within the Christian paradigm.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the conversion era in the Polar Urals, the cases of conversion in the tundra brought significant tensions within native society and agitation in public discourse. Initially, in a number of cases, Nenets converts rigorously followed the Christian rupture impulse of being 'born again', emphatically denying those symbols and practices of their 'traditional culture', now regarded as heathen. At the early stage of their conversion careers, Nenets burned native traditional ritual items and ceased observing tundra behavioural regulations and ritual prohibitions. The anti-native-culture position occasioned a series of complex confrontations between different religious communities and evoked tensions within the native society in general. From the perspective of native society, Nenets converts were accused of not being Nenets enough, of being morally corrupt and socially dangerous. Ultimately, some native converts were forced to give up the nomadic life in the tundra and to move to sedentary space.

At times, finding themselves on the frontier of the worlds, under the threat of being excluded from the native society, with their authenticity lost, converted Nenets and Khanty began to reconsider their previously intolerant stances against 'native culture'. Henceforth, many of those who previously antagonized the traditional culture now became deeply committed to asserting, reshaping, and expressing what they called their 'culture'.

The chapter has examined how religious conflicts and cultural tensions eventually stimulated Nenets towards self-conscious construction and articulation of cultural and ethnic boundaries, and how this led to the reshaping of Nenets indigeneity. Nenets converts have become involved in the process of articulation and re-assemblance of the notion of 'native culture'. Drifting between the 'Phoenix Knight' of their native system of meanings and the 'Juggernaut' of the Christian message, born-agains haveadapted and developed traditional cosmology, modifying and developing their own categories, symbols and practices to the extent that it has acquired a legitimized status and a meaningful, livable function again.

They have developed a strategy of *reindigenization,* and have legitimized their rights to have Nenets identity and Nenets culture, thereby mobilizing and concretizing their indigeneity, both as ethno-consciousness and as political agency.

In this chapter I also examined the two strategies of bridging Christianity and indigenous culture. This first is *disenchanting* indigenous culture, when some native symbols and practices are revised as 'cultural' or rational, rather than 'heathen'. The second is, on the contrary, the *sacralization* of native culture and history according to the Christian paradigm. In this alternative way of world-building the Nenets ensure their own survival, they embed the present in their past and construct a new project of the world future and salvation in which they play crucial role.

The next chapter continues with the analysis of the strategies used to reconcile Christianity and Nenets culture, and dwells upon another method, namely, a demarcation of Christian and Nenets patterns within the situation of double culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CULTURAL DOUBLING

It may seem paradoxical that one way of symbolically bridging Christianity and Nenets culture is to maintain more distinct boundaries between the two domains. When converts fail to discursively justify their native culture and to pull it into their Christian life, thus facing never-ending social tensions and missionary 'warfare' revolving around the native-culture issue, they start to build boundaries between Christian and Nenets culture patterns.

In some respects, I could observe this in the Beloyarsk community that was gradually turning from the initial religious outburst against 'native culture' towards a liberated version of ethnically indigenized Christianity, proposed by the Evangelical church, and then further turning to maintaining more distinct boundaries between the two cultures.

However, the situation of demarcation of the boundaries does not necessarily imply the need to choose between the two – it does not mean that they now must reject either their Christian calling or their assertion of native culture. They have chosen something more familiar and habitual – to live simultaneously with two cultural logics. As I will show in this chapter, the arrival of Baptist Brotherhood missionaries and the missionary struggle for/against 'native culture' has furthered the development of a *double culture* situation, within which the Nenets have been living for a long time.

The situation of co-existence of two cultures within a common social space, as an outcome of Christian conversion, was central to a range of discussions (Austin-Broos 1997; Barker 1990; 1993; Bond 1987; Kiernan 1997; Robbins 2004a). As argued by scholarship, conversion does not necessarily entail indigenization or assimilation processes, adopting new patterns within native cultural systems, or modifying native concepts in order to fit a new situation. As Joel Robbins posits, conversion can result in grasping a new culture wholly without sacrificing the old one; he calls it the '*process of cultural doubling*' (Robbins 2004a:4). Robbins suggests that for the Urapmin (Papua New Guinea), the conversion experience does not result in a mixed, hybrid or indigenized version of Christianity, but it is a new cultural situation which requires living with two cultural logics: 'It does not assume that as people take on a new culture they must of necessity transform their traditional one… The kind of process this model lays out, one in which people self-consciously work to grasp a new culture on its own

terms, is one that can lead to a situation in which people live with two largely distinct and, in important respects, contradictory cultures at the same time' (Robbins 2004a:10). There is interplay between two cultures that are operative in the same place at the same time, and each competes to make its own demands dominant.

Basing his research on Sahlins' work on cultural change and Dumont's understanding of values, Robbins develops his analysis of religious conversion and the double-culture situation. Values, according to Louis Dumont, are embedded in the culture as an aspect of cultural structure, i.e., they are formed and expressed in the way that culture is organized; and it is *paramount values* that create cultural orders (Robbins 2004a:11-12). For Robbins, this observation is necessary for his theorizing of cultural change, which is not only Sahlins' transformation of categories, but values as well. It is when paramount values change that real cultural change takes place, and Robbins stresses the significance of contradiction and struggle between competing values for the paramount position, to the extent of 'a stable synthesis of the old and the new in situations of change' (Robbins 2004a:12). However, Robbins continues that such adoption can lead to an enduring dual cultural situation, in which people live with two cultures with distinct paramount values that are in a struggle with one another (Robbins 2004a:13).

Christianity always works towards devaluing traditional categories and practices (space and time, morality and sociality, lifestyle); and it is life between two opposed paramount values of different cultures that causes social conflicts and makes people's experience of cultural change so wrenching (Robbins 2004a:314).

This is the case in Nenets conversion too. However, the Nenets' enduring situation of struggle between counterposed paramount values of different cultures (in this case Russian/Soviet and Nenets) made them accustomed to living within a two-sided culture, and made them capable of calming conflicts and eluding tensions by the technique of *code-switching*, shifting between two domains. Recall the situation of the hidden Nenets religious practices developed throughout the Soviet period of atheist propaganda: in those times, the Nenets spatially separated their religious and Soviet identities in such a way that Nenets ritual practices were observed in the tundra, while Soviet atheistic attitudes were followed in sedentary space; as a Nenets man described it, 'Let there not be a God in the village, and here [in the tundra] I will have my own life and I will keep my sacred sledge and will sacrifice'. Marjorie Balzer (1983:635) generalizes this 'bicultural' behaviour, or acquisition of multiple identities, as typical for the Soviet era, when native cultures remained viable in the background of a no less sincere adoption of

the Soviet ideology: where an urban Russian Communist Party member could bring his child to a village baptism, where a Khanty educated and politically active librarian was a key participant in a traditional graveside memorial feast. Balzer also views biculturalism as not insincere or necessarily temporary. This view is similar to Caroline Humphrey's observation, when she writes that 'the complex of Buryat culture, which contains "shamanist", Buddhist and syncretic fusions of both elements was linked with Soviet ritual', and the movement between these complexes did not entail a simple rejection of one of them, but rather the *bricolage* of 'the here and now', by which people attempted 'to make sense of the disjunction between local or personal problems and a social system' (1983:374).

In this chapter I examine how religious conversion is inscribed and further develops a Nenets bicultural situation. In the Nenets case, the switching techniques are facilitated by the *spatial* distinction of two culture domains: while the Russian culture domain belongs to sedentary space, Nenets culture belongs to tundra space. However, as I will show below, it is also *time*, *language* and even *body techniques* through which Nenets biculturalism and the possibility to maintain boundaries between Christianity and Nenets culture are ensured.

7.1   SPACE: 'INAPPROPRIATE FAITH'

It was not accidental when a Nenets woman in her late forties said that she went to the Protestant church soon after she had finally settled in a village in the late-1990s. She believed that her new identity as a church member might help her in her 'Russian' life, although she could not have expected that her act of conversion would complicate her relations with the wider society and would stigmatize her as a 'sectarian'. Another woman in her fifties told about her children, two of whom were settled in cities and had converted to Charismatic Christianity, whereas the other children remained in the tundra, following the 'Nenets way of life'. When asked what she thought about her settled daughters' religious conversion, she answered, 'If it helps them in their life, why not, let them go [to the church]. If they benefit from it… Probably in a difficult moment her faith in God helps her…' But when she was asked how she would react if her tundra children would convert into Christianity, she was astonished, because she could not imagine this and was sure that her tundra children would never do that. Her answer was typical for early conversion phase in Beloyarsk: new faith is 'inappropriate'

[*neudobnaia*] in the tundra, 'it doesn't suit to be Baptists in the tundra'. Here, the two 'faiths' – Nenets and Russian – are demarcated *spatially*.

The Nenets spatial dichotomy is reminiscent of what John Barker (1990) suggests for the Maisin society in Papua New Guinea. Focusing on Maisin biculturalism, Barker writes on the practical environments of an Anglican mission station and the surrounding village of Uiaku. The Maisin have adopted Christianity remarkably quickly, but despite their long-term involvement in the mission station's everyday life and ritual practices, they still keep distinct boundaries between village and station activities and their associated values and orientations. Barker interprets the station and the village as two distinct and incongruent practical environments, between which the Maisin people easily move. He argues that these two environments should be regarded as complementary aspects of one society. The adoption of Christianity and the long-term participation in station life does not mean a break with Maisin traditional social order and culture values. The Maisin have internalized variant values of both domains: an alien social system was implanted in the heart of a traditional community, such that 'church is something that belongs to them' (1990:190), but at the same time it remains symbolically and geographically distinct. 'Maisin can oppose the station and the village as cultural patterns but they can hardly reject one for the other. To do so would mean rejecting part of themselves' (Barker 1990:183). Barker posits that such relatively harmonious and peaceful co-existence of two domains – which are kept in incongruence and distinctiveness – in Maisin society is ensured by the *spatial division* of two culture domains. The on-going exchange and balanced reciprocity between the village and the mission station make the Maisin biculturalism relatively comfortable; they rarely perceive any contradiction between the two domains.

Similar to the Maisin people, the Nenets have successfully developed a bicultural society that allows them to have something of two worlds. The Nenets have adopted sedentary space in a way that it has become 'part of themselves', although the two domains ('Russian' and 'Nenets') remain distinct and incongruent. And they easily move between the two domains, negotiating the dual cultural situation. Thus, Nenets biculturalism is ensured by the spatial division of two domains: tundra and settlement.

In her comparative study of settled and nomadic Yamal Nenets, Yelena Liarskaya argues that sedentary life is internalized into the nomadic Nenets culture as an alternative culture version; hence, life in settlements and life in the tundra are considered by the Nenets as two acceptable life scripts (2001). Liarskaya posits that the Yamal Nenets have developed two modes of culture (sedentary and nomadic) that are

spatially marked: villages/towns and the tundra. Each locus is assigned its own set of cultural practices. And when Nenets move between the two domains – for instance, when nomadic Nenets temporarily visit or permanently move to settlements – they shift their cultural competence and accept those codes for conduct that dominate within a given socio-cultural space, even though settlement practices can contradict those developed in the tundra. For example, wearing 'Russian' clothing, eating 'Russian' food, as well as speaking Russian are all normal and indispensable for the settled space, whereas they are seen as absurd in Nenets tundra life. So, according to Liarskaya, Nenets do not merely easily move between these two cultural domains, but this motion also implies that social practices and discourses are switched at the same time. The violation of symbolic boundaries is considered ridiculous, absurd or even dangerous. The distinctiveness of boundaries between the two cultural domains has been observed by the Nenets very carefully in all respects of everyday life.

When they found themselves between the 'traditional Nenets' space and the 'Russian missionary' space, converted Polar Ural Nenets used the same techniques of code switching. In such a frame, the 'new faith' or 'Russian faith' is regarded as belonging to a set of sedentary social practices, as one of the resources for a Nenets in her settled life. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, Nenets sought to separate 'Nenets culture' and 'Baptist culture' not only symbolically but spatially as well: 'Russian faith' should belong to the Russian, i.e., settled world, while 'Nenets faith' should help in tundra life (Vagramenko 2007a). Correspondingly, in some cases, the new religious practices that a Nenets adopted in her settled life could be changed back into the 'old' ones when she moved back to or briefly visited the tundra. For example, a set of Nenets traditional purifying rituals and prohibitions that seem unnecessary or even inappropriate in settled and converted life can regain their cultural significance once a person arrives in the tundra.

Moreover, the 'inappropriateness' or 'unsuitableness' of the new faith in the tundra came to be perceived in terms of morality. 'Nenets' tundra and 'Russian' settled realms are not simply two social spaces, each with its own set of cultural competence; they are two *moral* domains, and the violation of either is considered to be the violation of moral order.

Hence, the most significant conflicts happen when social boundaries are violated and the two moral domains are mixed, i.e., when 'Russian', 'settled' faith is brought to the tundra world. For that very reason 'Num is angry', and for that very reason the majority of conflicts are triggered in the tundra. However, despite the cultural tensions it

evokes, conversion to Protestantism forces a blurring of the distinctiveness of the two cultural environments. Religious conversion problematizes the relationship between space and culture; it mixes two domains and goes beyond the territorial borders, thus resulting in the phenomenon of '*ruptured landscape*' (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:8). Missionaries and converted natives function in both the tundra and sedentary space. This is particularly true for the Baptist Brotherhood that targeted its missionary initiative particularly upon the nomadic population and created its church in the tundra. Unlike the peaceful and harmonious co-existence of two cultural environments in the Maisin case, Nenets conversion has brought about the violation of symbolic and spatial boundaries, hence, causing their new religious experience to be so wrenching.

Although maintaining biculturalism today is a far more complex process, Nenets have developed alternative ways to preserve it. In this case, when spatial borders are no longer distinct in a 'ruptured' religious landscape, converted Nenets maintain other symbolic boundaries that keep the two culture modes unblurred. Besides that spatial, temporal, linguistic and bodily dimensions are also affected in the Nenets double-culture situation, and I will discuss each of them below.

7.2   TIME: FLUCTUATING CONVERSION

The religious life of Polar Ural Nenets communities pulsated just as Nenets nomadic everyday life did.Similar to the Nenets drift between the tundra and settlements, their religious experience was also temporal and situational. The intensity of religious agency depended on the frequency of missionary visits, on the geographical distance of converted nomads from the religious community base, and on the frequency of their visits to settlements.

This constituted a fluctuation of religious experience, as well as a fluctuation of the religious community itself. It was always almost impossible for me to count even the approximate number of church members: the on-going Nenets movement, the inflow and outflow of followers, depended on the frequency of missionary visits as well as on seasonal migration of reindeer herders. Nenets tundra religious life did not fit the notion of 'church' or 'religious community' in term of those social institutions as they are understood in an urban context. Similar to the fluctuation and instability of economic units among the Nenets nomads, where long-distance seasonal migration and frequent epizootics can radically change the composition of campsites or nomadic units and at times render a wealthy reindeer-herding household impoverished (cf. Slezkine 1994:5-

6; Volzhanina 2013), there was a fluctuation of religious communities in the tundra. A lack of institutions for coordinating membership and authority over large social expanses combined with the seasonal long-distance migrations led to variation and inconstancy in religious life and religious communities in the tundra. Likewise, the Baptist community in Beloyarsk existed in a nomadic form, its centre migrated depending on both missionaries' and Nenets' nomadic routes.

In his study of Pentecostal conversion among Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, Mathijs Pelkmans uses the notion of *temporary conversion*, arguing that conversion is not a unidirectional process (Pelkmans 2009c). Similarly, Nenets conversion also implied the notion of temporality – it was a kind of *fluctuating conversion*, back and forth, depending on the life situation, on seasonal migration, on missionary visits, etc. The situation is reminiscent of the nomadic form of the early Soviet state in Siberia; as Ssorin-Chaikov argues, Soviet statehood in Siberia was built by short visits of reformers, whose expeditions intersected with migration routes of the nomads. Newly established organs of state power in Siberia fell apart once the reformers were gone and only recommenced their activity during their next visits (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:67-68).

The life of the Beloyarsk community mainly depended on missionary visits, as well as the visits of its tundra members who constituted the biggest part of the church. When missionaries arrived in Beloyarsk, previously passive believers now became consolidated into a united and well-ordered social body: community gatherings took place every day, church members intensively communicated with each other and settled urgent community issues. Tundra Nenets tended to arrive to the village right at the time of missionary visits in order to combine their business with participating in religious life. They could even modify their traditional nomadic ways depending on the missionary routes. Some community members stopped drinking for the period of the missionaries' visits, stopped watching TV, changed their clothes, even rearranged and renovated their houses and in general followed a set of Baptist moral rules. Conversely, when visiting missionaries left the community, Nenets religious activity became 'frozen' and latent.

When I stayed in Beloyarsk in 2011, there was a short period of absence of missionaries in June. I could easily see the difference in believers' appearance, in their behaviour and even in their houses. The majority of believing young girls wore jeans instead of Brotherhood-accustomed skirts and veils, they used make-up, many openly used TVs in their homes (prohibited in their Christian life), and some even freely smoked tobacco and drank alcohol. When, a couple of weeks later, missionaries arrived

to the village, everything changed greatly. All TVs and computers were hidden, furniture was rearranged, carpets were removed, all make-up was washed off, jeans and pants were changed for long skirts and dresses. Nadia was laughing at that sudden change in dress code (from pants to skirts); 'Once Sergei [a missionary] has arrived, I see that everybody has become girls! Tania, you too? You too have become a girl?'

They taught me, too, how to live this dual life and they were convinced that this practice of switching codes was a normal behavioural mode and did not contradict their born-again life. Nadia and Marina were my main guides in Christian life. Nadia usually reads the Bible to me, and her favourite piece was the Epistle of James; she would read it carefully and tried to explain every verse to me in order to make every idea profitable to my life. Marina laboured to convince me that, once I decided to follow Christ, I had to renounce everything that could disturb my Christian life. But at times, the two of them opened their hidden (from missionary eyes), inner life to me. Once the missionaries had left the village, Nadia would take her TV out of a box and invite me to watch some new program, and she would ask me to buy cigarettes for her kin in the tundra. She would ask me, 'Do you use make-up in Petersburg?' This question referred to my presumably second, *inner life* – the life outside of a 'missionary domain'.

Marina was one of the most active community members, the main host for all visiting missionaries, who read the Bible and prayed every day, who put much effort into bringing her extended family into the church. However, during the absence of missionaries, she could start drinking alcohol, she secretly used chewing tobacco. Even in the presence of missionaries, every night, when all the missionaries had gone to bed, she would switch off the lights, take out her small TV set and turn on her favourite Indian or Arabian films. She purposefully has bought the smallest television which is easier to hide. 'Turn the sound down so that Oleg [a missionary who lives in the next room] not may hear us', she would whisper. During my several months stay in Beloyarsk in 2011, we watched every night in complete darkness, under the blanket, some new Indian film that she had ordered by mail. It seems that along with learning about Nenets culture, I have acquired a substantial knowledge of the culture of Bollywood – or maybe Bollywood has become an essential part of Nenets culture.

In the tundra, too, believers maintained their double identity by temporal switching practices and moral orders. For example, several 'believing chums' could temporarily move in together and set up a campsite in order to organize a joint Sunday prayer meeting or Christian summer camp; meanwhile, the rest of the time, they would do their Nenets business separately and follow the Nenets moral order.

What does this mean? Are they not really Christians if they have parallel lives?

Two Moral Orders

As Balzer (1983:635) rightly points out, bicultural behaviour does not necessarily mean insincerity or temporariness. It is a movement between the two moral orders, each of them implying its own set of moral 'codes and rules of behaviour' and 'forms of moral subjectivation', according to Foucault's account of morality (Foucault 1990:29-30). Both 'Nenets' and 'Christian' moral domains have their own codes of prescribed and prohibited behaviours, and converted Nenets acquired both and masterfully used the proper code in a specific social situation.

But it is not simply a list of behaviours that marks each domain; the double identity implies Foucauldian *'practices of the self'* or, in Robbins' expression, 'ethical self-fashioning' (2004a:217), which means a kind of *self committing* to those moral laws. Living between the two moralities, a Nenets does not merely follow a proper list of conduct, but sincerely endeavours to form herself as an 'ethical subject', to use appropriate practices that enable her to transform her own 'mode of being' (Foucault 1990:30). A Nenets puts much effort into making herself adequate for the moral domain that a given situation demands. In Christian moral order, for instance, the techniques of relations with the self would imply sincere prayers, repenting, witnessing, fasting, specific language and even a new mode of agency – all that brings about self-transformation and commitment. Meanwhile, to correspond with the Nenets moral domain means the adherence to the Nenets language and 'traditional' embodied actions, a deep devotion to all aspects of 'Nenetsness' that sometimes results in making a mockery of everything 'Russian'. In other words, they are really and truly Christian in their Christian life, while they are really and truly Nenets in their 'traditional' life.

For the situation of double morality Robbins suggests definingwhich ideas are considered most important and which are understood only through their relations to more valued ones (Robbins 2007:16). Similarly, Barker seeks to observe which moral order (mission station or Maisin village) is the ideal model for Maisin everyday life (Barker 1990:187). However, both moral orders in which the Nenets live are considered as crucially liveable, each for its own time and space. Moving between the two domains, Nenets choose the proper moral order and make it functional, practically realizing it in a specific social context.

Discussing the double-culture situation through the notion of moral domain, Robbins defines it as 'a place where change comes into consciousness. For those caught

living between a traditional cultural system and one they have newly adopted, morality is likely to provide the window through which they can see the contradictions which they have to live' (Robbins 2004a:14). Thus, the moral domain is a conscious one and the contradiction is usually perceived in moral categories. The Nenets situation of a double moral system is a conscious one too; they discuss and compare Christian and traditional morality, they teach me what is moral in their Nenets life and what is immoral in their converted life. However, it appears that they seek to dilute the contradiction and eventually see the situation of a double moral domain as normal and have no concern that it somehow can discredit their religious sincerity. Although the competing nature of Christian and Nenets culture values must be admitted, the Nenets converts seek to relieve themselves from the conflicting situation by moving between the two domains that are demarcated spatially or temporarily.

7.3   LANGUAGE: DISCURSIVE BICULTURALISM

In winter 2011 I stayed in a Nenets campsite on the European side of the Polar Urals. There was an aged couple with six adult children. All of them were converted into Pentecostalism, all were illiterate and had very basic Russian. However, I noticed that they prayed only in Russian, even though they experienced serious difficulties with speaking and understanding Russian. I asked them why they did not pray in their native language. 'No, I cannot pray in Nenets, I even don't know how to do this. I can pray only in Russian', answered a Nenets woman in her thirties. 'I don't understand how to pray in Nenets. I couldn't manage it', repeated her younger sister.

Nenets almost never used their native language in their converted life – their religious life was translated into Russian. The distinct allocation of language competence became another alternative way to ensure the double-culture situation. Converted Nenets developed their biculturalism as discursive practices.

Religion is discourse, Birgit Meyer argues, and referring to Johannes Fabian, she adds that the aim of this approach is 'to understand the creation of meaning, or of a meaningful praxis through events of speech and communication' (Meyer 1994:47). Christian conversion is a *logocentric* experience; it is deeply plunged into discursive practices and entails the specific use of language: words and phrases, special lexicon and language formulae, prayers, chanting, witnessing, evangelizing and conversion narratives constitute the central pattern of conversion experience. So, the Nenets religious experience, too, is constituted by discursive practices: the word should

convince, the Word should save. Those missionaries who came to Yamal are described by the Nenets as spreading 'the word', which is understood both as the Word of God and also new words to learn (missionaries have taught illiterate Nenets to read and write). Hence, as a central part of their conversion careers, Nenets learned restricting and prescribing forms of speaking, learned to reformulate their personal experience in terms of canonical language. 'Speaking is believing', argues Susan Harding in her study of American Baptist fundamentalism, 'generative belief... comes only through speech' (2000:60).

Conflicting Language Ideologies

However, the embodiment of Christian language as a conversion-generating agent entails more profound language issues, revolving around conflicting language ideologies, linguistic inequality and linguistic essentialism. Beliefs and feelings about language in Nenets culture are complicated by the bilingual situation and the range of social inequalities that it implies. The historical shift between Nenets and Russian languages is also demarcated spatially: while in the tundra, Nenets speak solely Nenets, but in their encounters with the sedentary world they speak Russian. And in their converted life, too, this allocation of language competence is also observed. However, the conversion frame reveals conflicting beliefs about language, defined by Michael Silverstein as linguistic ideology: 'sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (1979:193).

Although in their everyday life, outside of their encounters with the Russian world, Nenets speak Nenets language, their religious life requires the use of Russian language. The majority of missionaries who have arrived in the Nenets tundra have been Russian-speaking and do not know the Nenets language. Only a few of them would have a basic knowledge of Nenets. Praying, chanting, reading the Bible, listening to religious sermons – all these activities in religious communities are conducted in Russian. Moreover, in the Baptist Brotherhood this language competence is a matter of ideology. As Laur Vallikivi points out, Baptist missionaries see a special place for the Russian language in God' s project to save humanity, while the Nenets language is perceived as soaked with 'heathen' terms (Vallikivi 2009:73). Baptist missionaries see no need to translate the Bible into Nenets, and as I already discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes they take an even tougher stance against the ongoing project of Bible translation into Nenets. Likewise, in some Christian communities in Salekhard I could hear notes of debasement concerning native languages, when Nenets or Khanty

languages were described by native speakers themselves as poor, with a reduced variety of words and meanings, as not being suitable for Bible translation and thus for their Christian life.

On the other hand, although Baptist missionaries prayed and preached in Russian and were very cautious towards 'heathen' Nenets terminology, they regarded Nenets illiteracy and the lack of Russian knowledge as a sign of moral purity. Correspondingly, the majority of Nenets converts adhered to the Nenets language and awarded it high prestige. Nenets language was even endowed with a certain symbolic significance in converted life and Nenets believers converted their linguistic essentialism into Christian categories, whereby Nenets language refers to pure Nenets life, unspoiled by Russian civilization, hence, as being closer to the true Christian life. Conversely, Russian language competence symbolically reflects those inequalities and hardship of Nenets sedentary life, and is therefore associated with sin. Marina expressed this understanding as follows:

> If I could live my life all over again, I would rather not study at all and live somewhere in the mountains and would be illiterate, I would speak only Nenets. Because those who are illiterate and who don't know Russian don't make mistakes, life mistakes I mean. If I were illiterate and lived in the mountains I wouldn't make my mistakes. I would not speak Russian and would only speak through an interpreter and would never make my mistakes.

Following the same logic, a Baptist leader of the Beloyarsk community told me:

> The further into Yamal, the more terrible the morals [*nravy*] are here, the more corrupted the people are, they don't want to accept the Word of God, because they are all literate. They have all been educated in boarding schools and learned [*nabralis'*] depravity and sin from the world. Here in [Yamal] settlements they don't learn good things. But the Ural Nenets and here in the Priural'skii district, Nenets are illiterate, they have pure souls [*dushoi chisty*], they are meek and closer to God.

Likewise, Laur Vallikivi adduces words of a Baptist missionary who is convinced that uneducated and illiterate Nenets, those who do not know Russian, 'are like children who are open to the Christian message' (Vallikivi 2009:73-74).

In the frame of Baptist conversion, the knowledge of Russian meant internalizing the 'Russian' (*Lutsa*) world with its values; hence, this meant living a sinful life. For Marina, illiteracy meant isolation from the *Lutsa* world where she was half socialized and where she had a conflicting, marginal identity. She was expressing the belief that illiteracy could be her freedom from all the social inequalities that the Russian world

brought into her life. Despite the fact that all missionaries she encountered were *Lutsa*, for Marina sin was still associated with Russian influence.

Thus, a certain grain of linguistic essentialism remained both in Nenets every-day life and in ritual life. The prestige of the Nenets was indisputable and inherited in people's minds from their childhood. Recall Marina's story about her father, who hit Marina's younger sister when he heard her singing Russian songs in a chum. 'It is the Nenets chum and there are Nenets gods in it, you can't sing Russian songs here!' he said.

The conflicting language ideologies (Nenets language as prestigious and mirroring pure Christian ideals versus Russian language as the dominant language of conversion life and as playing a salvational role) were complicated by the lack of Russian competence among the converted Nenets. In their everyday life, Nenets in Beloyarsk and the surrounding Baidarata tundra did not speak Russian and sometimes even expressed shame about their bad knowledge of Russian. Their language competence was often not sufficient to freely comprehend all aspects of language use in their new religious experience. In the Beloyarsk community, believers in their forties and fifties – those who were educated during the Soviet law on universal compulsory education (*vseobuch*) – spoke Russian freely. At the same time, the younger tundra generation, those who studied at school in the 1990s, when the system of compulsory education was not so consistent, had acquired less knowledge of Russian. Some of the tundra converts in the Beloyarsk community had only primary education, so their knowledge of Russian was even more limited. Thus, in their Christian life all linguistic aspects of conversion were problematized, became a matter of special concern and revolved around more profound issues of learning or improving the foreign language, reading and writing skills, as well as the issue of translation.

Code-switching

Converted Nenets were living between the two language domains and tried to keep boundaries between them. The double-domain practice wasdemarcated not merely spatially, but also implied different modes of language use and linguistic ideologies. Their linguistic code switching was very skillful, and even in the presence of missionaries, converted Nenets could switch between 'Christian' and 'Nenets' codes. Below is an example.

One winter evening in 2011, when I was staying at Marina's house, two visiting missionaries, Marina, her two nieces, and I were having tea and talking. Marina and her

relatives spoke in Russian about some news in congregational life, while the missionaries talked about their churches in the 'mainland' where they came from. We prayed and sang in Russian too. Simultaneously, Marina and her nieces were talking in Nenets to each other. This talk was full of jokes, sometimes pretty scabrous, sometimes with obscenities. Once, convinced that the 'brothers' did not understand Nenets language, Marina asked her niece, 'Why don't you marry this believing brother?' Rimma, her niece, answered with a laugh, 'No, he's younger than me and his nose is too big'. Next they started laughing at me; I did not understand this joke, but Marina translated it for me once the missionaries had gone: 'You made some awkward move when we were sitting at the table and Rimma had muttered something unclear about you having flung something over. I asked Rimma what Tania had flung over, her tits [*tit'ki*]? "No, she crossed her legs", answered Rimma'.

At the same time, Nenets have learned to skillfully use Christian vocabulary and 'Christian' communicative behavior as necessary parts of their conversion career. Each code ('Christian' and 'Nenets') is demarcated by a relevant set of word-signals. For example, Marina said that she could easily identify who was phoning her, a believer or non-believer: 'If he starts with '*zdravstvuite*' [hello], he is non-believer, but if he starts with '*privetstvuiu*' [more obsolete word of greeting], he is surely a believing brother'. Correspondingly, Nadia, who could easily use obscene words and jokes in her 'Nenets' conversation, corrected me in her 'Christian' discourse: 'Tania, there is no such word as 'cool' [*klassnyi*], this is not a Christian word and a believing sister should not say it'.

The linguistic code switching is accompanied by a switch in communicative behaviour, patterns of language use and language ideology. Unlike Heath's understanding of language ideology as '*self-evident* ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences', or Rumsey's 'shared bodies of *commonsense* notions about the nature of language in the world' (Heath 1977:53; Rumsey 1990:3emphasis added), Nenets assumptions about language were not as unquestionable and obvious. It implied 'the conscious construction of a new self' (Vallikivi 2009:70), the appropriation of new ideas that were not as self-evident, and that were a matter of on-going discussions, conflicts and eventually became a means of social control in communities of born-agains.

Throughout my research on Beloyarsk religious life, I observed how Nenets converts gradually internalized the language authorized in the Christian community, took on new modes of communicative behaviour and learned how to express their personal experience in terms and forms of canonical language. Christian ritual life is

saturated with various canonical forms of speaking practices; at the beginning of their congregational life, born-agains experienced a certain level of difficulty in appropriating new language ideology, new modes of communication, new discursive practices and language behaviour. One of the most difficult practices to adopt was public self-presentation and public monological genres such as conversion narratives, witnessing, evangelizing, public repentance and prayers, through which the self-testimony as a believer is expressed. The utmost verbalization of the religious experience differs from the more intimate and more 'economical' traditional use of language.

The Agency of the Word

In his study of European Nenets conversion, Laur Vallikivi speculates on the rupture and continuity in the concept of words in Nenets and Baptist Christian traditions (Vallikivi 2009). He compares Nenets 'taciturnity', particularly in their pre-converted ritual sphere, with the more voluble approach to religious expression in Baptist Christianity. By the turn of the millennium, the Nenets tradition of long shamanic rituals and epic narrations were disappearing and contemporary family ritual practices do not have such intensive verbalization as Christian rituals. However, in contrast to Vallikivi's observation on the Nenets' relative absence of speech that is being replaced by more verbalized religious experience, I would argue that Nenets have never been silent, but their mode of verbal communication differs from those developed within the Christian culture. Within ritual frameworks and in everyday discourse, Nenets talk about their traditional religious practices and shamanic rituals. And the largely fixed Nenets traditional narrating genres (N.: *siudbabts*, *yarabts*, *khynabts*, *yabsio*, *lakhanako*, *sambdabts*, etc.), though not as widely performed as they used to be, demonstrate the substantial development of voluble expression and excessive verbalization of ritual forms(Fol'klor Nentsev 2001; Pushkareva 2003; Tereshchenko 1990; Epicheskie 1965). However, this mode of communication does not imply a mode of externalization, as something that can be openly shared with everybody. Nenets language behaviour derives from the specific philosophy of the word, and Vallikivi rightly posits that words in Nenets culture are 'understood to be creative and efficacious forces' (Vallikivi 2009:74). Words have visible forces and, vice versa, a word that publicly reveals its hidden, secret or even sacred meaning loses its power. For instance, Nenets have special names that exist alongside 'open names'. The secret names are ancestral and are believed to be *true*, *real*; however, they should be hidden from the ears of outsiders. Their inappropriate utterance can somehow harm the wellbeing of their bearers.

Likewise, no one can call a deceased person by his or her name, for it would disturb the dead person (Khomich 1966:222; Liarskaya 2002:102-103). Nenets names are not an attribute, but an integral part of a person, as Liarskaya points out (2002:102). Similarly, Nenets do not utter the names of illnesses or the names of some animals, because the utterance of a disease can bring on its appearance (Liarskaya 2002:103; Tereshchenko 1967:129). Correspondingly, in the Nenets shamanic tradition a Nenets shaman functioned only within a particular clan or even family, and sometimes representatives from one kin group would not know about the existence of a shaman in a neighbouring kin group. As a Nenets tundra woman explained it, 'If you called him a shaman out loud, he would lose his shamanic power'. Nenets words have not only *referential* but *constitutive* nature.

This perception of the word partially corresponds with the Christian notion of word agency: 'The Word (*Logos*) was God' and the Word should save. Following Nenets folklorist Yelena Pushkareva, Vallikivi also compares Nenets *vada* with Christian Logos, in that both have the ability to create and transform (2009:74). This idea corresponds with Peter Stromberg's reflection on Evangelical conversion narrative as both referential and constitutive (Stromberg 1993). While re-telling their conversion stories, people do not merely re-present their past, their religious experience, but the language used shapes the reality it describes. Re-living their conversion experience in terms of adopted Christian language, people construct new self-understanding, shape and form their personal experience and their moral subjectivation. 'It is through language that the conversion occurred in the first place and also through language that the conversion is now re-lived as the convert tells his tale', posits Stromberg (1993:3).

The Utterance of Religious Experience

However, despite the fact that 'traditional' and 'Christian' concepts of the word represent relative continuity, it is the difference in the mode of intimacy and openness, the necessity of public self-objectification, and public utterance of intimate experience that challenges Nenets religious conversion. Vallikivi interprets the rupture and continuity in Nenets and Christian concepts of language through the notion of *individual* and *collective* conversion (Vallikivi 2009). As he puts it, Nenets conversion, based on fundamental principles of Protestant Christianity, is an individual re-birth, an individual relationship with God; yet, the salvation can be achieved only in congregational life. Thus, 'conversion of Nenets is as much a collective as an individual act... [R]eligious selves are created collectively' (Vallikivi 2009:70). He also adds that

'the concept of sincerity' – the 'inner state' that should be honestly and sincerely expressed and uttered by words –greatly challenges the Nenets conversion experience (2009:74-75).

Newly converted Nenets are encouraged by the community and its leaders to verbalize their personal experience and to develop skills to publicly express it. 'You must pray out loud', a Nenets woman – a more experienced believer – admonished a young Nenets man who had recently joined the community. When a new convert was unable to perform such extensive genres as conversion narratives or public repentance, she was asked to pray in the presence of the community, to say a short repentant formulae or to read a passage from the Bible out loud. This public verbal act was simultaneously a test of commitment as a believer, a token of the conversion process itself and a form of social control and audit. Beloyarsk Nenets were always very cautious toward the practice of public prayer, and after community gatherings they usually discussed who prayed and how. Through public prayers, a leader controlled a believer's life. A man who was caught drunk, a young girl who ran away from the tundra to a village for disco party, they would all be tested by the community, and they would be asked to pray out loud in front of the community, as both an act of their repentance and as a means of social control of believers' conduct.

Note that the ability to verbalize personal experience and to publicly express one's own self-identification indicates not only the phase of the conversion career, but authorizes a believer with social power in congregational life. In the Beloyarsk community, when a believer said of another community member, 'She prays and reads the Bible better', this phrase meant not merely that the person was an experienced believer, but it also referred to her leading social status within the community. Similarly, I was often mistakenly considered by Beloyarsk Nenets as an authoritative believer because of my ability to extensively talk in Russian and eloquently pray during community gatherings. Sometimes Nenets told me with notes of envy, 'You are a good believer, you pray very well, and Russian is your native language. We can't pray like you, because we only have a little Russian'.

To sum up, outspoken personal experience, *revealed subjectivity* complicates Nenets religious experience. Prayer, witnessing, conversion talk, testifying, evangelizing – all these verbal practices exemplify ways of embodying language as a conversion-generating agent. And what I argue here is that although converted Nenets discursively demarcated their double-culture situation, the practice of public self-objectification *blurred* what Nenets had been so carefully demarcating between the two domains –

'Russian' and 'Nenets'. Personal experience and the deeply internal personal life of a Nenets, which normally belonged to an inner Nenets world, hidden from missionaries' eyes and verbalized solely in the Nenets language, should in congregational life be wrapped in, and publicly and sincerely expressed through, the canonical (Russian) language forms and terms that belong to the Christian domain of Nenets culture. Public praying, confessing and witnessing, i.e., the practice of public testimonials of intimacy as a token of a believer's conversion, became that discursive realm in which the two-sided Nenets world *merged*. And the demand to discursively blur the two culture domains is another aspect that made Nenets conversion so challenging.

7.4 CONVERSION EMBODIED OR THE CRISIS OF HABITUS

'We must not only talk about Christ to them, we must teach them how to be a Christian. And this is not a matter of *talk*, but *doing*, we simply have to *do* this'. These words of a missionary working in the Polar Ural tundra imply significant ideas: religious conversion is a complex learning process that involves not only the language aspect, but also appropriating non-discursive knowledge. Not only is it the case that speaking is believing, but the process of socialization is also centred upon the body. Words and phrases, special lexicons and language formulae, prayers and conversion narratives constitute a necessary but insufficient pattern of conversion experience. Referring to the process of learning new bodily experiences as *metakinesis*, Tanya Luhrmann writes: 'New believers learn to identify bodily and emotional states as signs of God's presence in their life, identifications that imply quite different learning processes than those entailed by linguistic and cognitive knowledge' (2004:519). She stresses, 'it is *not* words *alone* that convert' (2004:518). As Simon Coleman argues, believers 'appropriate abstract symbolic tokens as well as language not merely on the level of cognition, but also on the level of tangible, embodied experience' (2000:65).

While translating the Christian message into their own cultural language, Nenets born-agains appropriated new understandings of body and intimacy, routinized new bodily techniques and emotions – those sensational forms that are aimed at forming 'specific religious subjects' (Meyer 2010:122). Nenets religious conversion reveals the emphasis on bodily experience with even more expressed intensity. As I have shown earlier, religious practices related to the language aspect were problematized in the Nenets community by the fact of the *foreignness* of the language of conversion. Therefore non-discursive knowledge and bodily experiences played a role of alternative

techniques that triggered a conversion experience. Nenets believers experienced the Gospel in intensely bodily ways – conversion became as visible as one's own bodies.

Embodied conversion, however, is not solely a matter of personal subjectivity – how do I sensate my religious experience – but it implies complex intersubjective conjunction, and in fact is socially controlled. To use Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of '*intercorporeality*', an inner realm, hidden subjectivity or, in our case, inner religious experience can be understood and shown only through embodied conduct and behaviour, through people's actions. And these actions are socially controlled, judged and moralized.

This is 'the art of using the human body', as expressed by Marcel Mauss (1973) who first introduced the concept of 'body techniques' in 1934. Everybody goes through a certain education in how to use her body in a socially proper way – in our case in a way appropriated in the new society of the converted. Mauss stressed the external authority in such learning processes and the notion of prestige of the person who performs 'the ordered, authorised, tested action' (1973:73). 'The child, the adult, imitates actions that have succeeded, which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him. The action is imposed from without, from above...' (Mauss 1973:73). Likewise, in the Brotherhood, bodily techniques and sensory experience were a matter of particular social control and were acquired by means of training, discussion and imitating. The way a believer learned and appropriated new body knowledge, the way she conceptualized it as a conversion experience, was a sign of God's presence – every bodily movement, deportment, stance, gesture was being carefully taught by religious guides, observed and judged by other members. The body is a site of new social regulation, as Coleman expresses it: 'Even something as personal as a gesture takes on a publicly derived dimension' (2000:62). The body becomes at once familiar and strange – a matter of on-going self and outer supervision and control, a marker of religiosity and a person's phase of her conversion career. As Csordas defines this process: 'The alterity of self is an embodied otherness' (2004:170). The '*otherness*' of self is twofold. It is the 'otherness' of the Holy, of God that is being embodied, and at the same time it is the 'otherness' of foreign *habitus* – commonsensical non-discursive knowledge produced by the foreign community that the Nenets internalize.

Transformation of Self and the Conflict of Habituses

Defining *habitus* as a generative structure of practical action, Pierre Bourdieu stressed that it is the product of history: it 'produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history' (1977:72, 82). Habitus is the immanent law inscribed in bodies by both collective and individual history (Bourdieu 1992:59). Therefore in order to understand habitus, it is necessary to relate the social conditions in which it was *constituted* to the social conditions in which it is *implemented* (Bourdieu 1992:56). Bourdieu posited, 'Therefore sociology treats as identical all the biological individuals who, being the product of the same objective conditions, are the supports of the same habitus' (1977:85). So habitus is an embodiment of history, 'internalized history', and, as Bourdieu argued, in so far as habitus is the incorporation of the *same* history, the practices they generate are mutually intelligible (Bourdieu 1992:58).

But what if we face the process of incorporation of *not the same* history? What if social conditions of the formation or production of habitus are different from a locus where it is reproduced and operates? If habitus is the product of history, 'a past which survives in the present', so converted Nenets internalized a *foreign* habitus which was the product *not of their own history*, but of the history (both collective and individual) of the missionaries who brought them the Christian message. If so, if converted Nenets internalized a habitus that was not the product of their own history, how did the practices they generated become mutually intelligible? In other words, it is the past that tends to 'survive' in the *other's* present. A born-again Nenets internalizes or appropriates new habitus with its (foreign) historical background. While seeing in habitus the principle of continuity and regularity of social practices, Bourdieu did not, however, examine the possibility of changing habitus that seems to be important in the frame of modern globalization, trans-cultural, trans-territorial and trans-religious mobility. As Appadurai points out: '[H]abitus now has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux' (1996:56; see also Coleman 2000:63).

Bourdieu wrote, 'Through the systematic "choices" it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible' (Bourdieu 1992:61). But we have a situation in which a new (Protestant) habitus is found within an intentionally hostile milieu, Protestant habitus that is not pre-adapted to the Nenets social environment. Thus, the habitus that is 'a spontaneity without consciousness' (Bourdieu 1992:56), suddenly becomes a matter of

conscious revision, critical challenge and a series of teachings (here Sahlins' (1985:139) understanding of habitus as *cultural consciousness* would be relevant). Religious conversion reveals *the crises of habitus,* be it evoked by consistent processes of *transformation* of self and habitus, as suggested by Csordas (1997), or by *interrelations or conflicts* between different habituses that an individual may encounter through membership in different social groupings, as observed by Coleman (2000:63).

In the Polar Urals, the 'Baptist habitus' did not arrive in an 'empty' land without history; it encountered a milieu with its own authorized structure of practical action, developed by its own history. Hence, religious conversion transformed the system of Nenets 'commonsense knowledge' and cultural logic. And while restructuring and transforming 'traditional' habitus, Nenets born-agains appropriated new principles of social practices, and, eventually, adopted foreign history. As I argued earlier, the double-culture situation develops the practice of code switching, so religious conversion implies not only an appropriation of a new system of meanings and performing an alternative habitus, but also learning the technique of switching between habituses. Hence, my aim here is twofold: first, to show how converted Nenets transformed and adopted a new set of bodily practices, and second, to discuss the situation of conflicting habituses and the techniques of switching as a means to calm the conflict.

'Believing' Habitus

It was a typical incident, when I first arrived in Beloyarsk in 2006 and met Nenets converts. Rumours spread quickly that two Russian women had arrived in the village (at that time I was conducting my research in cooperation with Yelena Liarskaya) and were asking about the religious life of the Nenets community. I did not know that some believers initially misunderstood that I was a missionary, and therefore expressed a desire to meet me. They willingly talked to me and at the same time watched me strangely, observing my behaviour. Everything became clear when a young woman finally came up to me and said, 'You've disappointed me, you are not a missionary. I can easily see that, because you don't talk and behave like that [*ty govorish i vedesh sebia kak-to ne tak*]'. Language behaviour, body techniques, choice of clothing, the appropriation of religiously marked gestures, deportments, stances become important markers of believers' identity, silent signs of conversion. And if a person fails to express it in a proper way, she fails to practically and morally perform as a true believer. Therefore she is unable to successfully communicate in congregational life.

Throughout my field research in Beloyarsk I was able to observe the gradual process of learning new habitus and 're-formations' of bodily experience in the Nenets conversion career. The Beloyarsk situation is even more interesting and complex because of the series of re-conversions that each time evoked a re-conversion of body techniques. Each time, the re-conversion – Charismatic, Evangelic, Baptist – was accompanied by vivid discussions of new bodily practices conventional in a given church: what was considered true Christian conduct and what was inappropriate, whether dancing and emotional behaviour or, on the contrary, quiet and strict prayers constituted true Christian worship and ritual life. During their conversion careers, Nenets have lived through various modes of body attitudes: from the most emotionally expressed corporeal-cultural techniques of the Charismatic church, with emotional speaking in tongues, dancing, crying, shaking body, etc., to the more restrained and controlled body techniques conventional in the Baptist Brotherhood.

In 2008 there was a peak moment when the community had finally changed its religious affiliation from that of liberal Evangelicalism to the most conservative Baptist Brotherhood, with its ascetic moral code and policed everyday life of its members. The community was shaken by discussions and even conflicts revolving around the body and its role in religious life. One Evangelical missionary, complaining to a Baptist missionary about the old-fashioned appearance of the women's head scarves, said, 'You've put napkins on our sisters!' The other discussed the seemingly confusing Baptist practice of the holy kiss (a kiss on lips between believers of the same sex as a form of greeting during religious sermons). Everybody discussed when a believer should stand during a sermon, when to kneel, how to pray and how to express emotions, when is it appropriate to cry during prayers, etc. Much emphasis was also placed on discussing clothing as a shared style of church members.

The differences between liberal Evangelical (and Charismatic) and Baptist 'physical orientations' are radical indeed. Charismatic and Evangelical bodily practices and 'outward things' are more liberated, without any strict regulations of appearance, with emotionally expressed religious rituals. In the Charismatic and Evangelical churches, believers should express through their appearance and behaviour the health and wealth of a God-chosen person. A modern dress-code, elegant make-up, driving modern cars, dancing modern dance-styles, singing modern songs – all these are signs of the embodied blessings of God and His glory.

The Baptist Brotherhood also places much emphasis on 'outward things', but in a different way, representing contrasting body attitudes. The body and person's

appearance is *moralized* and, like in the Evangelical community, every action is interpreted as denoting God's presence, as an indicator of an inner spirituality. However, the Brotherhood moralizes the body in an ultimately articulated and regulated way and radicalizes control over personal conduct. 'For us, in our church, everything is strict', a Baptist missionary said. 'Every believer has to differ in outward appearance from the world. Women, for example, wear skirts and veils, without make up on their faces. Their motion should not be abrupt, but meek, every move should bear witness to the Lord'. Thus, bodily techniques were no longer a disposition of spontaneity and intimacy but of social control; using Csordas' words, spontaneity became ritualized and conventionalized (Csordas 1997:79). The 'knowledge' assigned to the body was thoroughly regulated and subjected to strict controls in the Brotherhood (cf. Vallikivi 2009; Lunkin 2007).

During the history of its complicated relations with the state, the Brotherhood leaders have protected their congregation not only from the punishing actions of the state, but also from the spoiling influence of 'worldly' culture. Therefore, every believer's action, every pattern of his/her behaviour and dress style is controlled. According to the Baptist notion of the moral body, women should wear long skirts and dresses, married women should cover their heads with veils. Make-up, hairstyles, heels and other women's 'beauty secrets' are strictly forbidden. Men (at least during their religious duties) should wear trousers and shirts with long sleeves, fully buttoned up. Their behaviour should be more reserved, without excessively expressed emotions.

Baptist corporeal-cultural techniques acquire a mode of consciousness and become a matter of explicit teachings. Baptist religious rituals are thoroughly regulated, although without such expressed religious emotions as in Evangelical or Charismatic churches. Being taught by missionaries how to pray, to sing, to shake or to hold hands, to give a holy kiss or hug, to be quiet or to moderately express religious emotions, to sit, to stand or to kneel, to dress, the Nenets learned a set of practical cultural competences and tastes that marked them as 'true Christians'; all these generated the Nenets religious conversion.

I frequently asked Baptist leaders, whether my appearance and body techniques would influence my salvation. For example, if I wore jeans instead of long skirts,would I not find salvation? Jeans themselves would not prevent my salvation, I was answered, but the violation of church rules would shut me out from church membership and salvation could only be achieved in congregational life. In this respect, body and actions are not only generated by the *past* (Bourdieu's habitus as the product of history), but are

oriented toward the congregational *present* and, hence, toward the personal salvational *future* as well. As Nick Crossley posits after Merleau-Ponty, 'Social action… is not simply action which is conditioned by a social past; it is action which orients to a social present and future… Indeed social action is precisely the link between past, present and future. It uses the acquisitions of the past to plunge towards a present and future' (Crossley 1995:135). Thus, embodied actions and sensational forms play a special role in constituting religious experience: they are oriented toward personal socialization in congregational life, as well as toward a believer's personal salvation. Therefore, teaching and training of the body is central to the production of Baptist habitus.

As Simon Coleman points out, new practical cultural competencies are 'learned as much by experience as by explicit teaching, and, indeed, social performances are produced as a matter of routine, without explicit reference to codified knowledge' (2000:62). Missionaries (or during their absence more experienced believers) 'taught' Nenets converts new principles of social practices, new modes of agency. It was a long learning process, and during religious sermons, believers would control each other and communicate with each other by these means. During the absence of the religious leader or other missionaries, these techniques were special tools in communication within the community. They usually were collectively discussed by community members. For instance, during a community gathering in Beloyarsk, a Nenets woman, who was considered a more experienced believer, told a new member of the community how he should make '*privetstvie*' – special greetings that mark the beginning and the end of a sermon, 'You cannot leave like that, you do it wrong, you must do like this' (and then she shook his hands).

The same body techniques can be a means of communication and power control within the community. During my fieldwork in Beloyarsk, there was a believer, a Nenets woman in her fifties, who never liked me and in private conversations with her believing fellows expressed her antipathy towards me. For a long time I had no chance to establish good relations with her, mainly because I was staying with her competitors for power relations within the community. However, being a Christian believer, she could not explicitly express her personal enmity. Instead, she communicated with me non-discursively. At the end of each religious gathering, when the same sex members gave a holy kiss to each other, Galia never did it to me, but just held her hand out for a handshake while trying to avoid eye contact. My believing friends always noticed it: 'Did you see that? She hasn't given Tania a kiss again! She doesn't like you, Tania'. But in time, when I had a chance to prove my sincerity, she changed her mind: although

we never became friends, I gained her confidence. Likewise, she never expressed it verbally, but once after a normal religious gathering she simply came up to me and expressed her positive attitude to me with a holy kiss and a firm handshake. My communication with her was solely non-verbal, I never spoke to her, but the rest of the community was able to 'read' what was 'spoken' by her body and interpret the body language that was used in their congregational communication and power regulations.

Switching Between Habituses

To compare Baptist bodily behaviour with conventional behaviour in Nenets society, Baptist expectations of 'true' Christian behaviour are more emotional, with more close body contact such as handshakes, holy kisses and brotherly hugs. Although the sense of touch is very significant in Baptist worship and identity, it often contradicts the 'traditional' Nenets mode of intimacy. Some Baptist bodily acts (particularly hugs, kisses or ritual weeping) can be regarded as inappropriate in Nenets society in which 'self-self' interactions are more distanced and the expressions of emotions, as rightly observed by Laur Vallikivi, are rarely publicly displayed, 'Non-Christian Nenets regard kissing as immoral and humiliating, something that should never be performed in public' (2009:77).

Likewise, some converted Nenets confided to me that, at the beginning of their conversion career, the new bodily practices evoked embarrassing feelings; they were ashamed to come closer to a sister or brother, to shake hands or to give a holy kiss, although they realized the religious significance of such behaviour as generating their conversion. For many it took a long time in order to routinize Baptist body techniques. But at the same time, even though they had learned religious emotions and body techniques that are conventional in the Brotherhood, converted Nenets would hardly use them in their everyday life. Living between two culture domains, between two social spaces, each with its own generated habitus, Nenets born-agains learned how to apply each set of bodily practices in accordance with the demands of particular situations. The success of living as a Christian believer in Nenets society depended not only on the appropriation of new bodily behaviour, but on the skills of *switching between habituses*.

The situation is reminiscent of Goffman's conception of pedestrian traffic (1971), according to which it is not sufficient to merely acquire a set of body techniques typical for a particular social group, but the *interaction order* of its performance is equally important: each set of body techniques is situational and depends on the *social space* or territory within which it is performed. Pedestrian behaviour depends on a person's

perceptionof social environment, her knowledge of social space with specific social rules and rituals. The knowledge of accessibility, structure and hierarchy of spaces, and the observance of borders between different territories – are what constitute pedestrian behaviour, as well as relations in public spaces in general. So practical competence and the observance of spatial boundaries are substantial in body-space negotiation and in the coordination of embodied action in a particular environment. In this 'spatiality' of embodiment, Goffman stresses the *moral* danger of practical incompetence: nobody breaks boundaries wilfully, for the violations of space borders evoke the violations of self.

Similarly, in order to prevent the moral danger of violation of *self*, converted Nenets sought to observe boundaries demarcating the socio-cultural spaces they lived in. The body and embodied actions become tokens of the Nenets' disposition between two moral orders. The performance of 'Baptist' bodily behaviour was appropriate and sufficient within the Baptist moral order, for example, during religious gatherings or everyday conversations with missionaries. Such bodily acts as hugs and kisses and such publicly expressed emotions as weeping were performed only in congregationally-framed social interactions. Outside of the missionary frame, these body techniques and sensational forms were not functional, and moreover they could be interpreted as immoral. There was a case in 2008 when a believer, Lena, one of the most experienced in the Beloyarsk community, attempted to violate the accustomed space distinction and, hence, caused some tensions in the community. As an experienced believer, Lena had perfectly appropriated the Baptist mode of bodily behaviour and could freely express her religious emotions during religious gatherings without any hesitation. But one evening she decided to share her emotions and to confess her religious feelings to another believing sister. Lena went to visit the believing sister at her home with the purpose of praying together and to talk intimately. However, Lena's 'confidant' considered the situation inappropriate and did not let her come in. Her intimate space of family and household was beyond the space where the 'Baptist' code was valid. 'Why does Lena go from house to house! I don't need her praying at home; if she needs to, we can do it at the gatherings', argued the believing sister.

Public and Private

As we can see in the frame of the Nenets double-culture, each culture domain (with accepted language and bodily behaviour) made its territorial claims. However, it would be a simplistic approach to dichotomize Nenets culture domains as the opposition

between public and private spaces, each with its own language and bodily competence. As I have argued at the beginning of the chapter, religious conversion constantly tends to mix or to violate the borders between social environments, between the tundra and sedentary space, between public and private realm. Likewise, Thomas Csordas in his analysis of the Word of God movement writes on the distribution of intimacy and control between public and private space: 'In the covenant community intimacy is expanded *beyond* the nuclear family... Conversely, control is expanded *within* the domestic unity...' (Csordas 1997:122). Correspondingly, the Nenets religious experience blurred boundaries between the intimate space of the household/family and the public (congregational) realm. Emotions, bodily behavior, and in general the mode of agency that had been regarded by Nenets as intimate were now expanded *beyond* the 'traditional' intimate domain: a believer should publicly express her faith; every pattern of her behaviour, her language, her appearance should openly bear witness to God. The practice of evangelization, witnessing and conversion narratives implied the idea of a public expression of inner/intimate feelings out to the 'world' in order to convert the latter.

Conversely, public control was expanded *within* the intimate space. For instance, one of the religious duties of Brotherhood ministers or their assistants was to regularly inspect believers' homes. Moreover, due to the absence of a church building in Beloyarsk all community gatherings took place at someone's home. Numerous missionaries, arriving frequently in Beloyarsk, lived for months at believers' homes, almost as their family members. They carried out traditional duties in the household: cooking food, cleaning the house, chopping wood, bringing water, sewing, minding children, fishing, pasturing reindeer, etc. Meanwhile, staying *within* the Nenets domestic space, they controlled the everyday life of believing families and family relations, supervised their homes, their choice of clothing, their bodily actions, instructing them not only how to pray and to read the Bible, but generally how to live a 'civilized' life, implanting new habits, bodily skills, styles and tastes. For example, they taught Nenets hygiene and sanitation, how to clean and wash, how to use soap, etc. Here is a conversation between two female missionaries:

> Once you've arrived in the tundra, you'll live in a chum – scrub their kettle [*nadraila im kotël*]. Just do it. Silently. Next time you come to a chum – do it again, clean and scrub everything. As a result of that you implant cleanness and cleanliness in them [*ty privivaesh im chistotu i chistoplotnost'*]. We have to do this little by little – to train them to clean and wash. And then it will become normal to them.

To summarize, teaching religious doctrine and the Bible, as well as teaching and controlling the believing habitus and language, happened not only within the 'Christian' congregational domain, but within the 'Nenets' private space as well. This merging of the two practical and moral orders was what made Nenets religious conversion full of conflicts and tensions and what made their religious experience so wrenching. But even in such a difficult mixing situation, they found ways to demarcate their two worlds – spatially, temporally, linguistically or bodily – in order to maintain continuity in change.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined one of the ways to reconcile Christianity and Nenets culture, which is to maintain symbolic boundaries between the two of them, which then leads to the development of a double culture. I argue that the Nenets enduring situation of appropriation of and resistance to the Russian/Soviet social system made them accustomed to living within the two-sided culture, as well as making them capable of calming conflicts and eluding tensions by the technique of *code-switching*, while shifting between the two domains.

In this frame, the Nenets Protestant conversion fits the Nenets bicultural situation. Converted Nenets have internalized practices, categories and values of both domains (Nenets and Christian), and the Baptist church has become something that belongs to their culture, but at the same time it remains symbolically distinct, and in their post-converted life Nenets develop techniques to demarcate the 'Christian' and 'Nenets' domains.

I argue that the bicultural situation does not necessarily mean insincerity or false conversion, but rather a co-existence of the two moral orders, each of them implying its own set of moral codes and rules, as well as self-commitment to those moral orders. Both 'Nenets' and 'Christian' moral domains have their own codes of prescribed and prohibited behaviours, and converted Nenets acquire both and masterfully use the proper code in a specific social situation.

In this chapter the Nenets double-culture situation is observed through such domains as space, time, language and body. The techniques of code-switching is developed as a *spatial* distinction of two culture domains (the tundra and sedentary spaces), as *temporal* (temporary religious experience and religious community, depending on missionary activity and nomadic seasonal migration), as *linguistic* (shifting between different modes of language use and linguistic ideologies), and as *bodily* attitudes (switching between appropriated 'believing' habitus and the

conventional one in native society). However, throughout the chapter I examined the issue that the conversion experience always seeks to blur the existing spatial, temporal, linguistic and bodily demarcations of the two practical and moral orders ('Nenets' and 'Baptist' or 'Russian'), thus making the Nenets new religious life so challenging.

CONCLUSION: CENTRE-PERIPHERY SHIFT

8.1 NEW SPATIAL PRACTICES AND DETERRITORIALIZATION OF DREAMS

In the spring of 2011, two Nenets women in their early thirties were returning back to their parent's chum in the tundra of the Polar Ural Mountains from their trip to Russia and Ukraine. They were members of a Baptist church and this was their first trip outside of their native nomadic circle. This time, it was a Ukrainian missionary who served as the guide for the Nenets in an unfamiliar urban space, providing the necessary organizational, logistic, and financial support.

The women agitatedly told about their travel experience, seeing for the first time large urban areas like Moscow, meeting new 'sisters' and 'brothers', seeing their lifestyle and the social environment they live in.

Such religious tourism trips are of great symbolic value and prestige among converted Nenets. They carefully preserved the memory, organizing photo albums and producing narratives about new places and travel experiences. In every Baptist chum or house I visited in the Polar Urals, I was proudly presented such carefully organized photo albums, capturing every moment of these journeys.

Plate 8.1 From a tundra photo album. Pictures taken by tundra Polar Ural Nenets during their trips to Ukrainian Evangelical communities.

Flowers, fruits, fountains, dresses and houses, holidays, solemn prayer services, weddings and funerals, picnics, dinner parties and harvests, local sightseeing and of course shopping were the kinds of novel experiences that most impressed these travelling Nenets. The pictures were full of bright colours and everything that according to an arctic point of view looks unusual and strange.

Once, a Polar Ural tundra dweller, a young Nenets man in his late twenties, proudly showed me a piece of paper that he kept in his Bible. This was a handwritten list of 32 churches that he had visited during his recent trip to Ukraine. One reindeer herder who had never studied at school and can now barely read twice participated in International Congresses of the Brotherhood in Tula.

This piece of paper with the list of visited places and these photo albums are tokens of a widening Nenets geography. The Nenets conversion experience implies new 'spatial practices' (Clifford 1997 after Michel de Certeau) that extend the Nenets cognitive map of mastered and meaningful space, and through which they acquire a local/global sense. In fact, we are dealing with the passage of a local and insular community into a translocal phenomenon (cf. Sahlins 2001a:191).

In a few years, missionaries from different parts of the world (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Germany, USA, Canada, Finland, and Korea) have visited Beloyarsk village and the surrounding tundra, opening up to the Nenets community the unexpected proximity of a global network. And this new religious network, available now – with its highly structured organization and well-arranged relations between communities – has become a friendly and easy-to-access route for deploying new mobility. Many born-again Nenets (and there are many tundra dwellers among them, those who never left their home space before) have become engaged in these new spatial practices, making long trips from church to church throughout Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus.

A young tundra Nenets woman, the daughter of a reindeer herder, with an incomplete secondary education, expressed once: 'I need to learn English, because many foreign missionaries travel through chums, and I cannot communicate with them, only through a translator'. Another group of Nenets learned Ukrainian in order to be able to interact with the missionaries from Ukraine who come to stay in their chums for months at a time and become part of their everyday landscape.

It was also through the common prayers for the entire Church and believers throughout the world that the Nenets deployed their imagining of the global world. Nenets from the Beloyarsk community often prayed for Ukrainian and Belarusian churches, as well as for persecuted believers in Kazakhstan, Pakistan, India and other

geographical areas that never existed before on their cognitive map. To cite again Nadia's words, for example: 'Before I did not know at all where Ukraine was situated, or Moldavia, and I did not know at all that such a city as Mineral'nye Vody exists. Now I know, brothers and sisters come here from everywhere. And if I wanted to go there, for example, if I wished to visit Ukraine or Belarus – I would wish to go everywhere, for brothers live all over the world'. In such a way, Nenets dreams and spatial practices reveal their global sense.

Of course, missionary encounters were not the first and the only source to widen Nenets geography. Nenets nomads have never lived socially and geographically in isolation. And as I showed in Chapter 3, as far back as the Soviet period, Nenets, willingly or forcefully, were plunged into new spatial orientations. Many tundra dwellers travelled to big cities for education, school children were sent on sightseeing tours to the European parts of Russia, herding families went for summer holidays to the South of Russia or to multiple health resorts all over the Soviet Union. During WWII, many Nenets and Khanty of the Polar Urals and Yamal went to the front, participating in battles in Europe.

Nowadays, school education, military service, increasing interaction with sedentary space, frequent trips outside of the region, as well as industrialization and the influx of people from different parts of Russia and the CIS, the increasing spread of electronic mass media (satellite television, internet, computers, and telephones) all dramatically challenge the Nenets imaginary and experience of the wider world and its interconnectedness with the tundra edge.

So the question is: do new religious spatial practices play any *distinctive* role as compared with other sources for widening the Nenets geography?

As scholars argue, contemporary Evangelical organizations throughout the world develop their networking communities on a local and a translocal level, maintaining new imagination, religious mobility and 'mobile selves' (Wanner 2009:169). As Catherine Wanner (2009), borrowing the concept from James Clifford (1997), argues, Evangelical movements are embedded in 'traveling culture' that bypasses the nation and deterritorializes identity and culture. Or as Birgit Meyer points out, 'Calling on believers as brothers and sisters in Christ… incite[s] imaginations of community that surpass the space of the ethnic group or the nation as these imaginations are delocalized' (2004b:461).

Similarly, Evangelical membership provides Nenets with the new experience of multiple layers of belonging – local, national, and global, thus establishing the

interconnectedness of the Nenets tundra with the global Christian community (cf. Wanner 2009:164). And the Baptist Brotherhood, though based on patterns of insularity, social separation and high exclusiveness, remains a typically modern Protestant organization. It provides its adherents with membership in a tightly interconnected system of churches and communities throughout the world, thus introducing the pattern of a translocal communityof converted (cf. Wanner 2007).

The Brotherhood's religious network becomes a grid for the believer's spatial practices and imagination. It is believed that a place is alive and meaningful if it is 'sanctified' by the presence of a community of 'brothers'. And a member of the Church is supposed to travel only within this network. Sveta, the wife of a missionary, told me about their recent trip to Germany. I asked her whether the people they visited were also believers. Surprised by my seemingly fatuous question, she answered, 'Of course they were all believing brothers! We would never go to anybody else! We travel only to believers'.

Correspondingly, if one wishes to travel to some city or country, one should find believers there first, to make this place 'open' for travel. With the same logic, in order to go on holiday to the Black sea, some members of the Evangelical community in Salekhard sought to get in contact with the local Evangelical churches there. 'Because then we will be sure that believing brothers will meet us and help, we can rely only on believers', they explained.

So membership in a religious community opens up the proximity of a global network with its resources. Having learned the Evangelical community's communication features, religious language and body techniques, Nenets are assured that this language is common, familiar and recognizable throughout the translocal community of believers. And having acquired this believing habitus, a member of an Evangelical community can freely travel within the tightly-knit network of brothers and sisters. Hence, Marina can freely visit brothers in Belarus; Galia can send her son to Vorkuta knowing that the brothers there will help him find a job; Nadia can travel to Riazan' city for her son's medical treatment, Lena can look for a marriage partner within the network of believers, Sveta can go for a long-dreamed vacation to the sea. They all use inter-network bundles to make their new mobility possible. 'Before, I felt sick when I imagined how I would get off a train or airplane with all my children and bags, not knowing where to go or how to use the metro. But now all these believing brothers are a miraculous escape', said a tundra woman who found out how to enter a global, yet safe and familiar, network of new brothers and sisters.

As I argued in Chapter 3, outside of the religious framework, the imaginary of the global world both provides new levels of belonging and simultaneously sharpens a sense of displacement. As many scholars argue, it often implies a sense of inadequacy and disempowerment associated with peripheral margins. It promotes the hierarchy of self (i.e., native outer edge) and others (Western centre), backward and modern, dividing the cognitive map of the world into the modern centre – the source of modern forces, goods and values – and the native backward periphery – the spatial, temporal and moral outer edge. 'In a world of aspiring imaginations, fantasies of wealth and power easily fuel a sense of being left behind and out of the way', argues Knauft (2002b:132).

However, within the new religious network, instead of fuelling a sense of inequality and disempowerment, Evangelical network-mobility secures homogeneity, equality and predictable familiarity of the widening universe. What I see as crucial is that such a global and deterritorialized network is actually a *homogenous sodality of equals*, of brothers and sisters, united by a common religious language, shared moral code, social norms and expectations, and a believer's habitus that are recognizable and familiar across ethnic and national borders. And this familiarity of language and believer's habitus throughout a tightly-knit network provides a sense of security and equality. In other words, such translocal network mobility cements the 'ruptured landscape', assuring continuity. And this sense of adequacy, promising a religious traveller that he/she is safe and saved, is what distinguishes the religious framework of mobility.

Moreover, the era of spinning mobility leads to what Said (1979:18) refers to as 'a generalized condition of homelessness' – the situation of no return to one's 'native land' or its disappearance altogether (Clifford 1988:275; see also Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Nenets conversion experiences, with the new spatial practices they entail, are also supposed to deterritorialize identities and challenge the notions of 'native land', 'nativeness' and authenticity. And as we have seen, it indeed challenged, but in a different way. Instead of provoking a state of homelessness and displacement, Nenets conversion, on the contrary, induced a return to 'nativeness', while re-thinking and revising the foundation for Nenets authenticity – thus assuring continuity.

While travelling within the religious network, converted Nenets both exoticize and sacralise their 'culture'. In some respects they become 'ex-centric natives'– those travelling 'indigenous' culture-makers (Clifford 1997:25) who learn to promote their 'culture': when visiting foreign communities they wear their bright ethnic clothing, during religious services they perform Nenets songs and prayers. But simultaneously,

they learn to sanctify the tundra space – perceived by Baptists adherents as the ideal place for church-building, a land exempt from the corrupting influence of the state and the 'modern world'– the perfect place to realize a Baptist utopia of pure 'church-space'. They also learn that they are people at the end of the earth, whose nativeness is naivety, and the less they are educated and involved in the 'world', the more they reveal their essential pure Christian nature. Thus, their commonsense backwardness is being converted into the Christian 'blessed are the poor in spirit'; the sense of inequality and disempowerment is being transformed into cultural defence and native awareness; and eventually, their homeland – into a place for God-building.

This symbolic status of the tundra social space is what assures the return of/to a 'native land' – hence, the articulation of culture and place is re-affirmed. The experience of displacement and homelessness is reversed onto re-localization and re-rooting of the tundra dweller within the now sacred space.

James Clifford, in defining the notion of 'traveling culture', talks about the ways 'people leave home and return, enacting differently centered worlds' (1997:27). Similarly, Nenets travel within the network of believers and return home. However, in the Nenets case this 'differently centered' means not the loss of a native land, but the opposite, the reverse of the commonsense centre-periphery perspective (cf. Sahlins 1999b:xviii). They return to a homeland that is no longer a periphery of modernity, but the very centre of a re-assembled meaningful universe.

Nomadism: Imagined and Extended

During the long arctic nights Marina liked to dream of how she would return to the tundra. Her relatives called it, 'Marina is migrating [*kaslaet*] again':

> One way or another, I will return there, I won't live here [in Beloyarsk village] for my entire life. I have already decided. I will keep this flat, so believers could live here. And I will prepare a chum, sew malitsa and will go to live in the tundra. I will put up my chum not far from [the village] and will do well for myself [*budu zhit' pripevaiuchi*]. I will have everything in my chum, I will make a bed, put down floor boards and even linoleum. I'll even get a carpet in my chum! And my bed will be good too: boards, then a mat [*tsinovka iz vetok*], then a mattress, I will buy many blankets and pillows. I'll bring gas and will buy a good gas stove, so when believers visit me I'll cook food for them. I'll get kettles and a cauldron. I'll get everything in my chum! A Nenets table, blankets, pillows and a carpet...

Similarly, Marina and her converted fellows 'migrated' while imagining their travel to Ukraine, or Belarus, or even to India, when they watched their favourite Indian films.

To cite again the expression of a tundra woman, 'Imagine, there are believing brothers and sisters in India too. What if we were to go there! Imagine if we would travel there!'

So, modernity has drawn the Nenets into new forms of mobility, turning them out of the tundra space. But even those who don't travel in the literate sense of the word are still involved in 'mastering' the global space through television, radio, internet, and commodities. As I stressed in Chapter 3, imagination as a social practice makes the space alive and culturally meaningful (cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1992:11; Meyer 2010:117ff; Clifford 1997:28; Appadurai 1996:31). As Birgit Meyer (2010:122) expresses it, 'An imaginary of the world generates a space for personal experience that vests this imaginary with reality and truth'. She continues that the Pentecostal imaginary of the world is not merely conceptual but a very material process, involving bodies, things, and technologies: 'Something is experienced as actually happening' (ibid.). If, for instance, for a young Appadurai the first smell of modernity was embodied in Hollywood movies, the world of Humphrey Bogart, Harold Robbins, and American style (Appadurai 1996:2), for the Nenets in Beloyarsk, their geographical imagination is much inspired by mail-ordered Indian and Arabian melodramas.

The proximity of a religious network also evokes such *deterritorialized* dreams; imagining various parts of the global religious community, the local cultures of this translocal network, becomes a distinguishing feature of converts' daily life. This is *imagined mobility* – the discursive practice of imagining the global community and the religious network.

But how does the new imagined and practiced mobility of Nenets converts dovetail with their subsistence nomadism?

I propose that new Nenets 'religious mobility' does not imply a significant alteration of the Nenets nomadic circle, but rather is inscribed within it, or is even a part of their extended nomadic trajectories. Although Nenets converts travel throughout a translocal religious network, their new mobility, nevertheless, fits into their traditional seasonal migration trajectories. They usually undertake their religious trips in low seasons, for example: in early spring before the busy summer migration to the north starts. Or it might be even during summer time, when herdsmen migrate further to the north, far from the settlements. In this case a large family can afford to leave a (usually young female) relative in the settlement and to let her undertake her religious journey, while migrating without her to their distant northern summer camps. They then reunite in autumn and continue their nomadic circle.

In both cases such practices are quite common not only for religious trips. The practice is similar to the Nenets tradition of visiting neighbours and relatives, even if sometimes in order to reach a neighbour's campsite the journey takes several days. In the same logic, Nenets believers visit 'neighbouring' communities and brothers in Christ.

In other words, what to do with all those new kinsmen, those brothers and sisters who suddenly become a part of Nenets everyday life? The social function of Nenets mobility within the religious network remains traditional and dovetails with the social role of the Nenets kinship network – that is, reciprocal exchanges of goods and ideas. Nenets travelers can bring fish and reindeer meat, but what is more important, they can bring their 'culture' (dresses, songs, poems, prayers) and their conversion stories as tokens of Evangelical missionary success at the end of the earth. In exchange, they bring back to the tundra everything necessary for tundra livelihood: cloth, textiles, binoculars, mukluks, GPS-navigators, etc. Hence, new religious trips are economically profitable and fit into seasonal nomadic migrations.

This is a two-way process: on the one side, this is an integration of Nenets converts into a global and deterritorialized community of believers. On the other side, a new community of brothers and sisters in Christ's blood is embedded into Nenets subsistence livelihood and common sense, the global religious network gets implicated in the traditional Nenets system of social and economic exchanges. As an outcome, religious kinship is naturalized and indigenized according to Nenets internal cultural logic.

To sum up, within the conversion framework, the Nenets pattern of mobility tends to be expanded and *deterritorialized.* It overpasses local boundaries and embraces the wider (translocal) religious network to which Nenets converts now belong. Yet Nenets social orientations remain deeply territorialized, with the tundra homeland as the constituent and meaningful space of their livelihood.

8.2   TUNDRA AS AN AUTHENTIC SOURCE OF CHRISTIANITY

Imagine an Evangelical missionary from country *N* decides to dedicate himself to missionary work in a place where people do not know about Jesus Christ yet. Following popular missionary logic, he heads to Siberia and the Russian Arctic – the territories vernacularly perceived as 'godless' lands and blind spots on the map of world evangelization. And like many other Christian workers from America, Western Europe,

the post-Soviet region and other parts of the world, our missionary targets his zeal to arctic territories where Nenets indigenous people are geographically scattered in the immensity of the European and Siberian tundra. The Nenets are largely promoted as strongholds of 'traditional culture', who survived the Soviet reform experiments and post-Soviet chaotic transitions. Their subsistence nomadic economy, language, ethnic clothing, as well as 'traditional religious practices' are believed to have been preserved and seemingly not affected by outside influences. The much publicized international project on the protection of sacred sites in the Yamal tundra, as having 'moral significance' for Northern society, is further evidence of the 'Nenets phenomenon'.

However, from an Evangelical viewpoint this means that here, at the ends of the earth – as 'Yamal' is translated from the Nenets – people exist whose 'paganism' still lives on in the form of numerous sacred places as well as in everyday life. The last bulwark of heathendom should be converted and God's prophecy fulfilled: '…And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, *and to the ends of the earth'* (Acts 1:8). These holy words become the life strategy for many missionaries and our evangelist is among them.

In this way, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Siberia has become a special target for various international Protestant missionary movements. An 'army' of missionaries from within the post-Soviet space as well as from different foreign countries began their activities, making Yamal and the Polar Urals a 'battlefield' of different missionary principles and strategies.

In order to reach the targeted lands, the missionary has to go through a number of obstacles. He struggles with obtaining a Russian visa as well as with the Russian 'anti-missionary' laws, which restrict foreign missionary activities. The persistent image of 'dangerous foreign sects' make the presence of foreign evangelical missionaries in Russia unwelcome. Beyond this, the missionary tries hard to get permission to enter Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. These territories are regarded as strategically important (it is one of the biggest gas producing areas in the world), and therefore, being 'specially protected', the region is closed and can be entered only with local administrative permission.

Having gotten all necessary documents, the missionary makes a very long and hard journey to the Arctic, overcoming logistical hardship, due to a lack of transportation infrastructure in the Far North, and struggles with the harsh environment. He uses trains, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and reindeer teams, GPS-navigators and satellite telephones in order to reach the remotest nomadic campsites in the tundra.

After many days journey he meets a Nenets *chum* of reindeer herders. He enters the *chum* and starts preaching and singing Christian hymns. Finally he says, 'God sent me here to preach to you and to teach you about Jesus Christ'. A Nenets woman, mother of six children, replies, 'Maybe God sent you to me in order that I should preach to *you* and teach *you* about Jesus Christ'. Then she opens the Bible and starts preaching and telling him how to *properly* believe in Jesus Christ.

This scenario, which actually happened, reflects the main argument of the research: The Nenets indigenous people, who are represented as being exemplary with respect to 'preservation of traditional culture', nowadays eagerly accept (at least the Polar Ural group of Nenets) the Evangelical Christian message. And while being converted mainly into a conservative Baptist movement, the Nenets inventively reverse the common perspective of vectors of modernity, creating their own, alternative vision of modernity within which they live at the centre of the meaningful universe.

Throughout the dissertation I have explored Nenets agency in cross-cultural encounters, for I understand Nenets conversion as a two-way process, within which they are incorporated into a global social order and simultaneously elaborate their response and resistance to it. I investigated how Nenets, while constructing their lives in Christian terms and engaging with the logic of Christianity, sought cultural continuity and social integrity. A key concern was how they used Evangelical culture as a scheme to make sense of their dramatically changing world, and how they 'recycled' it for the sake of what Marshal Sahlins calls the 'develop-man' project. Nenets conversion is a project that seeks to change people and simultaneously to re-root their cultural continuity on renovated soil. This process I call the Nenets *bricolage*.

The previous chapters have shown that the most conservative religious movement, claiming radical change in converts' lives and having the most rigorous moral code, turned out to be the most popular one among nomadic Nenets. The Baptist Brotherhood system of values, their social attitudes, gender roles and even body techniques came into accordance with the existing Nenets cultural system. Baptist patterns of insularity, social separation and high exclusiveness were reflected in the Nenets' complicated relations with Russian statehood, and furthermore, were enhanced by the Nenets into ethnic awareness and defensiveness. In this respect, the Baptist discontinuous impulse has become a connecting link between the Brotherhood and Nenets society. At the same time, missionaries who came to change the Nenets universe and to release them from the darkness of paganism and cultural backwardness into the light of Christianity and

progress instead found that in many respects the Nenets nomadic society was already very close to their own expectation and understanding of true Christian life.

Evangelical missionaries affected the most profound patterns of Nenets everyday life and opened up new horizons of social interaction, as well as redefining the fundamental categories of Nenets culture such as time and space, power and agency, gender and kinship. However, in this two-way process, Nenets agency has revealed its capacity to recycle the internalized Christian message into a re-assembled background for their tundra social and economic interactions, for their sedentary well-being, and hence, for their 'Nenetsness' and authenticity, and as an outcome for their 'ritualized resistance'.

In this two-way movement, it is not only Nenets people who are being converted to a global social order, but it is also missionaries who simultaneously get involved in the reproduction of local traditional Nenets cultural practices, thus contributing to the reframing of the Nenets nomadic or sedentary livelihood onto a new canvas.

Religious conversion also restructures the symbolic landscape in such a way that now the tundra space is perceived not as a *periphery* of the world, but as a religious *centre*. And the Beloyarsk community is an illustration in point: what was originally a village-based community has moved its symbolic religious centre into the tundra space. It was the last conversion into conservative Baptism that caused this shift: the village believers received the Baptist Christian message not from the urban centre, as it usually happens, but from the tundra, from their tundra relatives, who were converted first and developed a new community of believers throughout the Polar Ural tundra. Thus, the tundra has now become the religious centre for converted villagers, the heart of their religious community. And the multiple, networking centre of the Nenets Baptist community is situated in the tundra, while the urban space is considered a cultural and religious periphery.

Moreover the perception of the tundra as religious centre is advanced by the Baptist social and spatial angle, according to which the remote tundra space and native people inhabiting it are depicted as best mirroring genuine Christian ideals.

Thus, the symbolic periphery and centre swapped their places. Tundra has become a centre of religious life and an authentic source of Christianity.

Lastly, the development of a 'mobile self' within the Evangelical framework leads to a widening of Nenets geography and deterritorialization of their imaginary practices. And here too, the common perspective on agency in the encounter of modernity and

periphery is reversed. It is the tundra that overpasses its local boundaries and embraces the global world.

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