

## ”You are of *the kind* of kin, are you?”

*Reflections of the animistic world view in the oral folklore  
of the modern day Kanin Nenetses*

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The following is a brief account of my visit to the most Western European Nenetses in Kanin Peninsula on the White Sea coast in Russia in March 2002. On that trip, my mission was to gather information about the present state of the song culture particularly among the Kanin Nenetses, who usually are reported being the most Russified of the territorial Nenets groups, even only among the European Nenetses. The reasons for this are obvious, only regarding their geographic position and the ensuing obvious turns in their history of contacts with the Russians and Komis. This alleged Russification is also reflected in the present state of the song culture of Kanin Nenetses, about the survival of which I have heard only very pessimistic views this far.

The route of my travel was: Archangel'sk – Pinega/Kuloy – Mezen' – Nes'. First, we visited some of the most southern winter camps of two reindeer herders' brigades in the woods of Pinega/Kuloy area, after which we proceeded to Nes', the central village of the Kanin reindeer herders. At that time of year the peninsula north from Nes' was actually quite empty of people, because all the brigades of the reindeer herders were still at their winter camps in the south. I was a part of a three-member team to the village of Nes'. From Nes', my colleagues<sup>1</sup> continued to the Timan tundra, as I stayed in Nes', in order to be able to gather information about the songs of the Kanin Nenetses. According to my preliminary inquiries, practically all the few possible singers were supposed to be found in Nes', and that seemed to be the case.

As cultural change and death of local traditions are usually quite complex processes, I was intrigued to find out from the ethnomusicological point of view, what is the situation of living, stichic song language, actualized freely and crea-

<sup>1</sup> The president of the association of the European Nenetses "Yasawey", Vlad Peskov (whom I am very grateful for getting me a border zone visa in Archangel'sk) and the journalist from a Nar'yan-Mar newspaper "Nyar'yana Windyer", Aleksandr Leont'ev.

tively in performance. Why? Because from the point of view of my ethnomusical frame of reference of metrical research, the analysis of documented live performance is the only relevant indicator in finding out, how the traditions are alive. If an oral tradition is creatively alive, there are performers who can create folkloristic texts with their experience of the local esthetic rules, with their performance technique and with their individual creative mind to realize their skills in performance. The tradition can also be in an iterative phase, where there are performers, who are only able to repeat, without their own linguistic, stichic and idiosyncratic competence of the text in question. In Nenets case, it is even possible to evaluate the metrical quality of a performance in a larger context, when we begin to have by now relevant analyses of larger corpuses of data available (cf. Niemi 1998, 97–100; 324–325).

The most excited expectations were directed towards the most threatened song genres, like shamanistic and individual songs. However, I orientated very much to the trip with modest expectations. There are several factors, which, unfortunately, have had unfavorable effects on the modern time history of the European Nenetses and thus also to the Kanin Nenetses. In principle, no fieldwork is required to find out the average vigour of the song culture, because a preliminary guess can be inferred from the available information about the distribution of the speakers of Nenets in different regions. This is because full and creative competence in language is the most relevant prerequisite of a creative performance of a song, especially in the northern song cultures, where solistic singing without the accompaniment of any musical instruments dominates musical expression almost without an exception.

From the point of view of song culture, the case of the Kanin Nenetses is especially interesting, because of their distinct melodic style, in the otherwise quite monolithic song style map of the Nenetses. It is only in Kanin singing style that the melodies make dramatic leaps to the limits of a singer's tonal range, whereas in all the other Nenets regions the tonal range tends to be more restricted, corresponding even the intonational range of ordinary speech. Also some details of the material culture of the Kanin Nenetses (Khomich 1995, 143 et passim), or propositions about the two-component origin (archeological Arctic cultures + later stratum of the Samoyeds) (Vasil'ev 1979, 46–60) in the ethnic history of the Nenets groups motivate thoughts of the origin of the Kanin Nenetses not fully converging to the other Nenets groups. Regarding the song style, unfortunately no larger conclusions were possible this far, because of the simple lack of relevant research material from Kanin.

## The historical circumstances of the Kanin Nenetses

One of the factors having an effect on the history of the Kanin Nenetses was perhaps the spreading of the missionary work among the European Nenetses. After several campaigns, beginning from the late 16th century, the general governor of Archangel'sk urged a new, comprehensive missionary campaign among the natives of European north at the beginning of the 19th century. To this period dates also the missionary work of archimandrite Veniamin of Archangel'sk, whose missionaries gained questionable reputation for systematically destroying the most important sacrificial places of the European Nenetses during 1825–1830, of which the island of Waigach was the main target. To gain the stable foothold, churches were built in strategic places. Thus, one of the three first churches in European north was built in the village of Nes' in 1830–1831, for guarding the spiritual progress of the Kanin Nenetses. (see e. g. Evsyugin 1979, 90–95.)

Eventually, the formal conversion was reported having happened without much drama. One of the reasons, particularly among the European Nenetses is geography and the history of the Russian colonisation in the Kanin, Timan and Pechora areas. The Russian Pomori settled along the Viena Sea coast from the end of the 17th century, until the beginning of the 19th century, right at and next to the Kanin Nenets territories. They expanded from the direction of Archangel'sk to Mezen', Pinega, Pustozersk, Ust'-Tsyl'ma and Izhma. The Kanin and Timan villages like Mgl'a, Nes', Vizhas, Oma, Snopa, Pyosha or Indiga had a considerable Russian (or Komi) population right at the beginning of their history (e.g. Evsyugin 1979, 105). The local Nenetses engaged in extensive contacts with the Russians considerably early. This paved effectively the way also for the gradual adoption of elements of their worldview.

Another indisputable factor was the economy. A widely cited (Khomich 1995, 5; Evsyugin 1979, 13) episode about the first mention of "Samoyeds" in the Novgorod chronicle is how the "Pechorans" were obliged to give in fur as taxes already in the 11th century (1096). However, "Pechorans" and "Samoyeds" were not exactly paralleled although mentioned in a very close context (Likhachëv 1994, 144). Still, the northern peoples were not recognized any other way except as fur-givers. The Novgorodians did not have any systematic need to intervene in the way of life of the northern people any other way, or to occupy their territories. A more systematic policy of exploitation of the native north began only after the lands of Novgorod were annexed to Moscow tsardom in 1478 (see Hosking 2001, 86). From the Moscow period the northern natives were in a more controlled po-

sition. First, it was the immediate interest of the government to know exactly, how many able tax-payers there are in the north and second, to prevent them revolting – which they, after all, did, up to the Soviet times. This way, the colonisation proceeded from building of military strongholds (Pustozersk on Pechora in 1499) and encouraged by them, to the appearing of settlers' villages (Ust'-Tsylemskaya, Izhemsckaya). This process of colonization proceeded to Siberian north with understandable delay. The central stronghold of arctic Western Siberia, the fortress of Mangazeya, was built only 100 years after Pustozersk, because the Muscovites had to fight the Tatars first in order to conquer Siberia.

Thus, the Nenets nomads on the European side may have preserved the basic system of the traditional economy, but the language situation is more troubled, the more west they live. For example, the traditional material culture of the Kanin Nenetses has survived surprisingly well, with some obvious adaptations of the modern world<sup>2</sup>, but the full mastery of language, not to speak about the songs has characterized the cultural competence of exceptionally few of the representatives of the oldest generation. Sociolinguistic Russification is reflected also in the family names of the Kanin Nenetses. While the Siberian Nenets groups have well retained their traditional family names that link them to their old tribal formations, the European Nenetses – Kanin, Timan and Malaya Zemlya Nenetses have adopted Russian names or Russified name forms quite early. Especially in Kanin, the early dissolving of the tribal formations accelerated this change. Thus, some of the Kanin families still remember their Nenets names, but the correspondence of the current Russian names to the previous Nenets ones is not straightforward. Of the Kanin family names, for example Ardeev corresponds to the Nenets family of We"lyi and Bobrikov to Syadey. Other Kanin families, like Kanyukov or Latyshev seem to be Russified forms of original Nenets family names. (See further, Vasil'ev, 1979, 134–139.)

Concerning the survival of the song traditions of the Kanin Nenetses, on the basis of information I could gather during my trip there was that a little amount of Nenets individual songs – also in Kanin – have survived to the present. Having at least some examples of the songs in performance, and discussions about the contexts of the songs, it is possible to draw some basic conclusions at least on the realization of the metrical level. Otherwise, the overall picture regarding the survival of the local oral traditions was quite pessimistic, as reported so many times

<sup>2</sup> For example, the nomadic reindeer-herders particularly in Kanin have taken an arched tent in use instead of the traditional conical hut, *mya*". The tent is called only in Russian form as "palatka". Palatkas have been in use for some last 30–40 years.

before (see e. g. Vasil'ev 1977, 4; 40–41; 55 et passim). However, there were singers, who still mastered their art and could perform even lengthy narrative songs. However, true individual songs were regrettably rarer. Some singers, whom I asked individual songs, just replied that "they were never interested" about individual songs or as "they don't drink, they don't master the songs either". It is obvious that replies of this kind must not be thought as exhaustive and satisfactory from the point of view of true existence of competence in individual songs, but interpreted together with the data of known language situation they do not give very encouraging an impression about the present state of the Nenets song culture in Kanin.

### The Nenets individual songs

The general concept of a Nenets song – an individual song in particular – is *syo*. Etymologically it can be traced to a Uralic word root \**sóye-* 'throat', 'voice'. This etymology offers a plausible interpretation for the relevant meanings of *syo*. Defined as 'throat' or 'voice', it is at the same time 'my throat' or 'my voice' – or, as I believe, "my breathing", in fact, "my breathe-soul". This semantic interpretation has come up repeatedly in my discussions with Nenets masters of song or folklore, but proving it would be a subject of special fieldwork.

However, in many Nenets areas, the individual song is referred to with the verb 'to be drunk', *yabyes'*. According to my fieldwork, the most western Nenetses (from Kanin to Malaya Zemlya) speak about *yabye"ma* (*xints*) when referring to an individual song. However, at least in Kanin, the mere word *xints* can be used while referring to a sung tale. In addition, the Taimyr Nenetses along the mouth of Enisey speak about *yabye sho*, a drunk song when referring to a song of individual character (see Niemi 1999).

As Pushkarëva (1990, 85) also notes, individual songs are usually performed when drunk. That is very true, but the performance situation is not exhaustively explained by alcohol. The Nenets expression *yábyé* (*yábyés'*) 'to be drunk' can be etymologically linked to the word *yáb* 'happiness', 'luck', 'health' (Lehtisalo 1956, 101). It is not known, whether the Nenetses have used this expression in connection with some kind of state of relaxation, prior to the introduction of alcohol in the North, but it was adopted to characterize the state created with the use of alcohol. As such, alcohol was introduced in the North already by the Muscovy penetration there and by the establishment of trade connections, perhaps beginning from the late 15th century, but most probably by the time of the Muscovy conquest

of Siberia in the late 16th century (cf. Hosking 2001, 11 about the plausible history of appearance of vodka in mid-fifteenth century Russia).

There are strict rules for the performance of one's individual song. The composer of an individual song tends to sing it in solitude and maybe in the presence of the closest relatives, but not willingly to other people, especially to non-relatives. On the other hand, it is considered insulting to sing or to reveal songs of one's close relatives to strangers. These rules can be evaded, if the performer can be sure that the owner of the song does not hear her/his song performed by somebody else. In singing somebody else's song, the name of the author of the song has to be announced although usually it occurs in the song text anyway. As discussed above, owing to the individual nature of the song, another performer creates in fact another song, an interpretation or variant of the song, like imitating a written autograph. In any case, with the author's name being incorporated every time the song is performed, it can survive long after its author has gone.

The individual song functions also as a medium to describe and contemplate one's individual experiences, it can serve as a soother in long, solitary journeys in hard weather. On the other hand, the singing of someone else's song (in public) is a kind of social statement, an interpretation, through which the singer describes the owner of the song. Thus, in a way, individual songs function as an archive or map of social relationships.

The present status of the few individual songs I could hear and document is well reflected in the discussion we had with the singers. Either they did not remember them at all, or if they did there where no social rules whatsoever attached to the songs. All the songs were created and sung in the past, in the 1930's–1950's; and they were only memorized up to the present day in the heads of the last singers.

However, the individual songs do seem to continue their existence, even after their "classic mode of being" with the function of almost ritual importance and an aura of sacredness, as the expression of self-being, which was not allowed for anybody to be uttered in every public circumstance. After these norms were slackened, the individual songs transformed gradually from an authored into an anonymous form of existence. This seems to be the situation in Kanin, where I expected not to meet any singers at all.

### The singing folk artists of the Nenetses

The village of Nes' at the root of the Kanin Peninsula, March the seventh. The moment of spring is still far away, harsh, frosty wind is blowing outside, and the snowdrifts are high. We are sitting in a house with Elizaveta Ardeeva, one of



the best known singers among the Kanin Nenetses. We are talking about Nenets individual songs, authored name-songs about the life and deeds of concrete individual persons. By the discussion with Elizaveta Ardeeva, it turned out that individual songs were not completely disappeared. She had mostly fable songs or other types of narratives (*xints(à)*) in her repertoire, but as we talked about the existence of individual songs during the days of our meetings, it turned out that she was also able to memorize several songs of the individual type.

She has adopted the role of the interpreter of the songs of the Kanin Nenetses for already a long time ago, as a stage performer. This way, her repertoire is a part of the folklorised discourse, together with the manners of stage performance and performance costumes, the design of which is based on the traditional festive costumes of the Kanin Nenets women. During this week of March, our sessions proved that she was able to memorize and perform her versions these songs, using her productive knowledge and experience of the stichic meter.

Among the Nenetses, there are several outstanding artists of her kind, who still remember their traditional art, like Elena Susoy and Gennadiy Puyko among the Yamal Nenetses, Lyubov' Nenyang (d. 1996) among the Yenisey Nenetses and Polina Turutina among the Pur river Forest Nenetses, to mention only a few. Their mastery of art bases to their capacity and experience of producing versions of songs, using the traditional stichic way of expression, which can be testified with metric analysis.

The individual songs open a gateway to the lives of yesterday people

The individual songs are a form of traditional expression, which can open a gateway into the past of, say, 50–70 years ago. In the following example, Elizaveta Ardeeva memorized a song of a representative of the family of Bobrikov. Thematically, this song was about clairvoyance, seeing things beforehand, in the dramatic wartime context of 1941–1942:

*Bobrikov' yabye"ma*<sup>3</sup>

- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Nyar(a) papowkowi(xe)y, | Three younger brothers, |
| 2. nyar Pob(ey)ryikey ey,  | three Bobrikovs,        |
| 3. syenyadayow senyow      | a long time ago         |
| 4. arka woy(ey)naney.      | (went) to the big war.  |

<sup>3</sup> I thank separately here Maria Barmich, a native of Kanin, the head of the cathedra of Uralic languages in the Institute of the Northern Peoples of the Herzen Institute in St. Petersburg, for the most competent possible help with these texts and translations.

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|---------------------------------|--|
| 5. Nyar(a) nyemyey yawe(xe)y    | Three fiances (left),                  |
| 6. oka nyudyow yagow,           | some children,                         |
| 7. nyudya wadowbyidow,          | to raise the children,                 |
| 8. sawa bokowanow,              | very well,                             |
| 9. manya yexey(ya)waney         | without me                             |
| 10. Odagarey nyaney ey(e).      | in the village of Nes'.                |
| 11. Elowey hangumey             | I shall die soon                       |
| 12. yedyakayey xelacyiyey.      | to great agony.                        |
| 13. Sobalyow(a)yenawiy ey(ya),  | Sobolev                                |
| 14. kadakayow tyidow?           | how to leave (slaughter) the reindeer? |
| 15. Nyana nyuney(ye) nyudyow,   | Very small children,                   |
| 16. nyana nyuney ngokow,        | quite much of the small ones,          |
| 17. mat(a) sawow nyuwey(ye)     | six precious child,                    |
| 18. kadawadownggudow.           | will they survive(?).                  |
| 19. Pida yexey(ya)warow,        | Well, you,                             |
| 20. tot'(a) syidyow(a) nyarey,  | each one having two brothers,          |
| 21. oka nyudyow yagow.          | and not much children.                 |
| 22. Sulyeyow(a)yenawi(xi)y,     | My Sulyeyowna-wife,                    |
| 23. nyadagonowkerow,            | you will help her,                     |
| 24. nyara nyemyey yawiy.        | help the three fiances.                |
| 25. Tyet(a) Powa(ye)ryeki(xe)y, | The four Bobrikovs,                    |
| 26. nyana okow(a)yewow,         | we are many,                           |
| 27. amga xosowewoxow?           | what (destiny) are we looking for?     |
| 28. Towiyey(ye) ngewanow(a),    | As we returned,                        |
| 29. pyelyatow tangow,           | half of us returned                    |
| 30. pyelyaka (gow)...           | and half of us...                      |

Notwithstanding difficulties in interpreting some of the lines, the message of these songs is quite well composed. During the Second World War (the Soviet "Great Patriotic War" of 1941–1944), Kanin Nenetses were sent to the Carelian front in the North, as sharpshooters or in the conveyance, with reindeer sledges. As such, the destinies of the European Nenetses in the war would require a separate study. The separate episodes I have heard tend to repeat the same sad plot of uncertainty: the Nenets soldiers were gathered from the tundra to an unknown destination with a varying degree of basic training. Usually, the Nenetses at the best



had only an elementary command of Russian. Information about soldiers killed in action reached their families only after several years, in some cases – "never".

This song opened the following discussion. In the situation of discussion, I chose a strategy for following and commenting on Elizaveta Ardeeva in the same discourse, because I did not want to intervene her telling with ethnographically or historically more argumented replies in order to keep the discourse open. In general, I wanted to structure and view this kind of discussion from the point of view of discourse, because I was more interested to know how she talks about some facts of the tradition (like things related to the animistic worldview), than to evaluate this discussion on factual terms. In some cases, I suggested alternative possibilities for some of her information, based on my experiences of similar themes among other Nenets groups. Before, during and after the conversation I tried to keep her as well informed as I could of what I "know", either basing to literature or my field work in other areas:

EA: (The singer) advises his wife here. There were three wives, when the three Bobrikov brothers were sent from Nes' in 1941 and he (the singer) was left for the next spring of 1942. The singer was sent from Shoyna, after the opening of the spring navigation. They were transported with steam ships. Well, he sings that "I have this Suleyowna (wife), what will happen to her, when she has six children and they are all so young?"

This man sings that "there are many of us, Bobrikovs. Half of us survive the war but half of us will die, they won't return. Those who will return, they must help each other and the families of those men who won't return." It happened so that the singer was one of the Bobrikovs who didn't return. He didn't return to his six children, he died in the war. Then also the youngest brother died. Two came back, two died. Somehow he saw forward, when he said that two will return and two will die.

JN: He saw forward? But what it is, not everyone can see forward?

EA: Who knows what it is? Maybe it was just a hunch... After all, he did not mention the names of who will return and who will die.

JN: Well. By the way, have you heard that you usually had people here, who... know things forward?

EA: Well, there have been people like that...

JN: Among the Siberian Forest Nenetses, I met this kind of a special person, the likes of who were said to know things beforehand, in their dreams. They were said to travel in their dreams, perhaps to a different world. However, they were not

called shamans, but dreamseers...

EA: Well, I see also...

JN: Really?

EA: Yes. Sometimes when I see (in a dream) somebody, a brother, or a sister, somebody will appear... not necessarily this person, but a hunch of him...

JN: So that you will know beforehand, what will happen?

EA: Beforehand. I see in a dream and then I tell. There was this case. An old man died. We were living at that time in the village of Kiya, for the first years (after the war, at the end of the 1940's) and... this old man lived in Bugrenitsa, beyond the river Shoyna. He used to live there during the winter, hunting the sea animals on the shore, and polar foxes on the land, things like that. He lived there in his own peace. But then, before his death, he got sick and his wife transported him to Kiya. We had horses then... They, however, used to have dogs...

JN: You mean sledge dogs<sup>4</sup>?

EA: Yes, they had special sledge dogs. She drove him in a dog sledge to Kiya, where he had relatives. He still lived there for some time, but then he died. Well, after a person has died, neighbours are invited to the funeral. Well, we also arrived and... usually the funeral guests stay there (at the place of the funeral) and spend the night there, with the deceased. It was a small room like this, the coffin was placed on small chairs, and the body was there. So we also slept in that room with our family and beside us there were two old women sleeping.

I sleep and this old man appears for me in my dream. As if he rose from his coffin and said: - Don't be afraid - as if he said to me - don't be afraid, I won't touch anybody. It is not much I need. And then, as if pointing from his coffin towards the table, he says: - they didn't give me any water. I wish they gave me some water... It's all I need.

Well, then one of these old women woke up – as I also, because it was already morning and time to wake up anyway – and says: ...well you are of the kind of kin, are you, what did you see in your dream? I replied to the old woman: – Yes, I saw, of course I saw when this old man raises from the coffin and asks for water...

JN: Wait a minute... "of the kind of kin"?

EA: Well, the of the kin of the knowing... the ones who know. And I said – triumphantly – that I saw, of course I saw when the old man raised from his coffin to wander around and ask for water.

<sup>4</sup> Among the European Nenetses, dog sledges are reported having been in use especially in the extreme north (the islands of Kolguev and Novaya Zemlya), in the circumstances, where there is not enough lichen available for keeping reindeer in the same pasture area for longer periods.

JN: Well, was he given water, then?

AE: Well, after that this old woman went to look for the men who had washed this old man, Ivan. She found them and asked: – Did you also wash his head? Why didn't you ask me to give you a comb, then? The other man replies that "I washed his head all right... well, or not exactly, I just held his head on my knees to prevent it soaking, while we washed him."

There you are! This is clear, says the old woman, that's what he was asking for! You didn't wash his head. Then they went and washed the head of the deceased old man. The old woman says to me: "what did I tell you, you are of the kin of the knowing ones!"

JN: Well, how about that! So did you actually have any knowing persons in your family?

AE: Well, my grandmother was a knower.

JN: A-ha... How did they, then, call her?

AE: A *tádyebya* ('shaman').

JN: Well, a *tádyebya*?

AE: Yes.

JN: And a female one...

AE: Yes, my grandmother, Malan'ya Petrovna was a *tádyebya*. She was, after her husband, also a *We"lyi* (the old Nenets family name of the Ardeevas), born in the Bol'shaya Zemlya tundra.

Thus, it was not actually her kin, as it was from her grandfather's wife's Bol'shaya Zemlya kin that were "the knowing ones". It is a very plausible possibility that the last persons among the Kanin Nenetses having shamanistic skills were actually originally not from there, but brought there because of the traditional exogamic norms of marriage. Still, reports of actual female *tádebyas* are rarer although there were them (Evsyugin 1979, 33). It is more probable, though, that her grandmother has been only a knowing one, a specialist of the traditional animistic worldview, perhaps of kin of shamans, though.

### Traces of shamanistic songs among the Kanin Nenetses?

From the point of reference of my research orientation, proving a song as shamanistic (see: Niemi 1998, 72–77) requires relevant and reliable information about the performance context of the candidate song, an argued possibility of identifying the song generically and also proofs from the metric structural

analysis of the song. Unfortunately, all these criteria are hard to fulfill among the European Nenetses, due to lack of information about the performance context or unambiguity of the generic context (e. g. a song may have been transformed from a nearly obsolete genre into an existing one). In the few cases of proofs of shamanistic songs among the European Nenetses, the only available criteria are the occurrences of the "shamanistic" tetrameter (usually realized as an octosyllabic line) in the songs (Niemi 1998, 74–76), instead of the "secular" trimeter (realized as a hexasyllabic line).

Unfortunately, this far we could not go this time. The closest we got was, when on 11 March, Elizaveta Ardeeva remembered a song of the individual type about two duelling female shamans. I quote our discussion:

EA: This is a yabye"ma.

JN: About these two women, how they shamanized...?

EA: A-ha. They measured their strength against each other, which one of them was more powerful. They put their own sons, two Yilyeykas at stake. She had a Yilyeyka and the other had a Yilyeyka.

JN: But nevertheless we call this song yabye"ma?

EA: Yes, yabye"ma. She sung the song when she was drunk.

JN: All right. So it is, after all, again a yabye"ma of a concrete person...?

EA: Both they... these old women... were shamans. They wanted to waste... well, wanted to know who is stronger; they wanted to waste the other one's son until death.

JN: All right... Is it known where this song was sung, here on the Kanin tundra, or...?

EA: On the Kanin tundra, yes. It is purely a Kanin one, it was sung here... After all, these people drove very rarely to the Mezen' side, not to speak about Pinega...

JN: The people who sang this particular song?

EA: Yes, they are mostly people from Kanin.

JN: Is it possible to know the names of the people in this song.. or whose song this is?

EA: The other old woman, she was Paraska. She was Paraska and the other one... she was called by a nickname... She was the wife of Yakun'ka, so she was called Yakunyikha. Her Russian name was Anna, but everybody called her Yakunyikha, for some reason.

JN: Do you know her family name?

EA: They were Latyshevs. The others were Tal'kovs. Paraska was Tal'kova and Yakunyikha – Latysheva.

JN: Interesting. Whose song it was, then. They surely did not sing it together, did they?

EA: No, Yakunyikha wants to show to the other one. She was in another camp. She was called there for help, a woman has got ill, and Yakunyikha was called there to cure her. Then she sings and asks, "where is your shamaness Paraska? Why is she not here to cure the ill woman? They said that Paraska always took pride in how she cured people, and took reindeer as a reward for curing people. Now where she is, if it is true that she could cure people? She did nothing to cure this woman."

As if Paraska could not cure this woman. Yakunyikha says: let us have a duel with Paraska and see which one of us is stronger, she has a son called Yilyeyka and I have a son called Yilyeyka.

Yakunyikha' yabye"ma

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. masy(e)ti tadyebyow(a) ngey,                              | Shamanesses are talking,                    |
| 2. Paras(a)ka tadyebyow(a) ngey,                             | Paraska is a shamaness,                     |
| 3. Paras(a)ka tadyebyow(a) ngey,                             | Paraska is a shamaness,                     |
| 4. soyam(an)dawe nyeryow(a) ngey,                            | a seer-woman.                               |
| 5. nyeryabow(a)konow mengow(a) ngey,                         | (untranslated line)                         |
| 6. Paras(a)ka tadyebyow(a) ngey,                             | Paraska is a shamaness,                     |
| 7. ti pereytsyatey(ya) ngey,                                 | guards the reindeer,                        |
| 8. manya yexeynaney(ya) ngey,                                | without me.                                 |
| 9. ti manyesyey(ya)timey(ya) ngey,                           | I also look after the reindeer,             |
| 10. per(a)nyisyeytimey(ya) ngey,                             | I guard them.                               |
| 11. Paras(a)ka tadyebyow(a) ngey,                            | Paraska is a shamaness,                     |
| 12. pida(ngaya) ngilyey(ya)kadow(a) ngey,                    | she is a ngileka [ <i>an evil spirit</i> ], |
| 13. manyabow(a) ngilyey(ya)kaway(ya) ngey                    | but I am also a ngileka.                    |
| 14. syidn... tida... syidyabow(a) nyunyey<br>yedey(ya) ngey, | Each one of us has a son.                   |
| 15. xor(a)panyi xoreykuyey(ya) ngey,                         | Let us try,                                 |
| 16. xinyangey(ya)' (ngey) we...                              | which one of us...                          |
| 17. xinyangey(ya) ngeyey wa'lyow(a) ngey,                    | which one of us is smarter.                 |
| 18. manya yexeywaney(ya) ngey,                               | Without me,                                 |
| 19. syidya(ngeya) nyudyow nuywey(ya) ngey,                   | two little sons,                            |
| 20. pyi(ngeya) yerow pyiney(ya) ngey,                        | are afraid at midnight,                     |

21. yalya(ngeya) yerow pyiney(ya) ngey,           are afraid at noon,  
 22. Paras(a)ka tadyebyow(a) ngey,           Paraska-shamaness,  
 23. nyudyabow(a) xanow xayow(a) ngey,       do not touch the young ones!  
 24. nyudyabow(a) yagow nyongey(ya) ngey.   There are no young children!<sup>6</sup>

EA: She says, as if she won Paraska, she defeated her and took her son. She, Yakunyikha won Paraska, she was stronger.

JN: Well, what happened "concretely" to the sons?

EA: Well, Yakunyikha had two sons and she says that she is guarding them day and night, so that Paraska could not, so to say, "shoot her evil arrows to them".

This is also a song I just heard sung, these things happened before my time, before my appearing to the earth... This was very long ago. At that time, people were altogether dark... Who just could do something special... that's how they were, then... There was no consensus among them. The rich reindeer-herders communicated with each other, like a separate power and the poor communicated with the other poor...

Eventually, this song is sung in the form of an individual song. The metrical basic form is typically trimetric (hexasyllabic) although it is realized in rhythmical form (see the line-medial supplementary syllables (ngeya) in parentheses), which some times remind of the octosyllabic line. However, as there are no initial/medial exclamatory code lines (consisting only of supplementary, non-lexical syllables) and an emphasized caesura in the middle of the line, this realization of the trimetric "secular" form is very typical among the European Nenetses (west of Pechora).

## Epilogue

Thus, the trip described here could be considered as an expected disappointment regarding the evidence of the survival of the shamanistic traditions among the Kanin Nenetses. They seem to be present only in literature (Castrén 1967, 135–136, 139–140; Evsyugin 1979, 25–34; Vasil'ev 1977, 80–82). However, considered as a probe to the existence of the utmost rare documents of the songs of the Kanin Nenetses in general, the total corpus of all songs recorded during this trip was some 1300 lines of sung oral tradition, documented in performance, which gives some consolation to the most pessimistic views of the survival of song tradition among the Kanin Nenetses.

<sup>6</sup> She tries to keep them safe from the other shamaness also by denying their existence.



I shall conclude this report with an event at the beginning of our trip. It seems that although perhaps obsolete or unseen, we were surrounded from many sides with traces of the animistic practices. As, Evsyugin reminds us, with the words of a Nenets man from the Warandey tundra:

"On the land of the Kanin, the Koz'ma's Wood (Koz'min perelesok), near the village of Syomzha, was considered as a sacred place. The wood was about 10 versts<sup>7</sup> long and half a verst wide. It consisted of small spruce and birch. In the wood there were one hundred wooden idols of different sizes. Of them, 20 were big ones, with rounded heads, reminding human heads. The trees were decorated with colourful cloths and pendants.

Many Nenetses, who were passing through Koz'ma's Wood, cut a small spruce and took it with them to carry it in their sacred sledge all the time, together with their domestic idols. There were legends about the wood. According to one of them, a group of Russian fishermen, headed by Koz'ma, drove to a lake through that sacred place. They laughed at the idols and decorations that hung from the trees. All of a sudden, their horses refused to proceed any further and they stood at their places, until the fishermen made an oath to respect this sacrificial place of the Nenetses. Koz'ma was the first to hang his coloured belt as a symbol of requesting reconciliation. After that, the Nenetses started to call the place as Koz'ma's Wood. Originally it was called Xarw Pod ('[The path into the] Larch Thicket')." (Evsyugin 1979, 24)

To our surprise, Koz'ma's Wood was still there. Driving four persons with one motor sledge with an extra sledge for some 100 kilometers along the Mezen' tundra, we had to make frequent stops. Fortunately, our timing was right: the last rays of full sunshine lighted the frosty trees of Koz'ma's Wood as we stopped there. No idols were seen anymore, but the birches near the sledge path were abundantly decorated by travellers. There were colourful cloths, umbrellas, cigarettes, coffee pots, children's dolls, plastic bags, coins, reindeer antlers attached to the trees – various things that passing travellers had with them to sacrifice. We made our sacrifice there, too. Curiously enough, it happened to be our driver, a Russian hunter, and an experienced master of the territory, who seemed to take the stop very seriously. No wonder, since Koz'ma's Wood was believed to be a very powerful place not only by the Nenetses, but also by Russians (see: Vasil'ev 1977, 83). However, the path to the snowy, frosty and darkening tundra seemed to be wide open after our sacrifices. As we drove on, the wonderfully coloured sunset

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<sup>7</sup> The traditional Russian measure of length, 1066,8 m.

provided us yet a view to the Viena Coast and the Syomzha Bay, until the darkness of the night surrounded us, however, to be lit by the colourful play of the northern lights.

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