

The Religio-Magical Domain as a Bilingual Mechanism of Culture: Ingrian Lutheranism in the (Post) Soviet Cultural Space

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The identification of ethnicity with religion is one of the most problematic aspects of cultural phenomena. Broadly speaking, this identification entails an imposed union between the culture's temporal and regional dimensions. This forced association is based on the ideology of monolingualism, whereby all negative symbols are spurned and regarded as part of the linguistic domain of the Other. Thus, the significance of the "past/future", i.e., the temporal vertical, is only interpreted either in terms of the ideology in question or the sanctioned symbols of a politicized religion; and local cultural dimensions take the form of particular territories which the bearers of ideology regard as exclusively their own, denying the existence of Others in the same territory. For those remaining within the boundaries of the structure, Otherness emerges as a negative linguistic domain. Nevertheless, beyond ideological oppositions and one-sided interpretations of history lies another - multilingual - reality. The religio-magical domain provides a way out of this closed sphere. In the climate of day-to-day multilingualism the opposition between different linguistic domains is also transformed into a mutual exchange which gives substance to and renews the contents of the cultures' antisystems. I am exploring this issue in terms of religio-ethnic tensions in so-called Ingria, in the St. Petersburg area.

Present-day Ingrian Lutheranism is bilingual, and church services are held in both Finnish and Russian. During recent years, the Finnish Lutheran Church and countless Finnish volunteers have been instrumental in the work of repairing Ingrian churches, building new ones, and organizing congregational activities. Outside influences cannot fully explain the astonishing ease of the bilingual communication taking place in today's church, however, especially regarding some of the prevailing attitudes to Russian culture in Finland.

When Sweden and Russia signed the Treaty of Stolbova in 1617, Ingria was ceded to the Swedish Crown and Lutheran Ingrians from Savo and Southern Karelia were relocated to Ingria from the Kingdom of Sweden. Their descendants make up the present population of Ingrian Finns. To ensure its dominion over the area, the Swedish Crown saw fit to recast the population's religious life. Thus, the Lutheran Church began converting Orthodox Ingrians, Votes and Slavs to the "true religion". The catechism was translated into Russian and Orthodox priests were forced to impart the teachings of Luther to their congregations. Because doing so was punishable by death,

those who dared to convert from Lutheranism to Russian Orthodox Christianity were risking their lives. In 1630 the Ingrian population was still largely Russian Orthodox. At that time, there were only eight Lutheran churches and six ministers, whereas there were 48 Russian Orthodox churches and 17 priests. Twenty-five years later, however, there was a total of 58 Lutheran churches; and by 1693 there were 31 rather large parishes plus five chapels. During this period, the majority of the local Russian Orthodox population fled to the Russian side of the border. Thereafter, the population was predominantly Ingrian (Haltsonen 1965, 29-34). When Ingria was ceded back to the Russian Empire, the workload of the Lutheran Church was lessened considerably, thus enabling the church to tend its own Lutheran flock. As for the Orthodox Christians, they had already experienced “the end of their world”. For centuries, the divide between the two churches informed peasant thinking (Sihvo 1992, 346):

“When children were learning to read, their elders would say, ‘If you don’t learn to read, the Russian priest will throw you into a tub and baptize you as a Russian.’ I myself was also frightened in this way: ‘There’s your spelling book. If you don’t learn to read this winter, then we’ll take you to the Russian priest to get you baptized. He’ll toss you into a tub!’” (The writers field materials. The narrator’s account is from the 1910s. Orthodox baptism, unlike the Lutheran one, involved complete immersion.)

“The school I went to was Finnish and instruction was in Finnish. All the subjects were taught in Finnish. Russian was like a foreign language to us. I didn’t know how to speak Russian, it was very hard for me. Many times I found myself hoping that I would never have to use this language. I often cried because I simply couldn’t understand Russian. Otherwise, my studies progressed little by little. My only burden was the combination of hunger and the Russian language.” (The narrator’s account is from the early 1930s. She was a Finnish woman later renowned as a ritual specialist. She also developed an excellent command of Russian prayers and incantations.)

After the October Revolution in 1917, the Ingrian Lutherans also witnessed “the end of their world”. Even within the Soviet reality, Ingrian Lutheranism was identified as Finnish and regarded as a “departure to belief”. On the one hand, it was true: peasants were growing increasingly religious. On the other hand, this religiousness really meant a “departure” from official atheism and other prevailing ideologies. I prefer to draw a distinction between “atheism” and “official atheism”. Why? Because the sweeping generalizations engendered by terms such as “Soviet”, “totalitarian”, and the like, merely help to build hollow explanatory models. At least the attribute “official” questions, if only obliquely, the relevance of “atheism” in everyday life. Cultural studies, are, in the end, to borrow from Bakhtin, “words about words” and “texts about texts” (Bakhtin 1986a, 473). So, there is good reason to do away with the vague categories which merely flatten reality into two solitudes. Therefore, it is precisely the many-voicedness of the field - here I am referring to both literal multilingualism and the interpretive richness of a single “text” - that emerges as the contextual background for cultural phenomena.

Speaking of the relationships between cultural phenomena, Z.G. Minc distinguishes between actual and potential cultural symbols: *“Now and again, cultures cast off certain symbols along with their associated meanings. During the course of history, however, one sees that formerly abandoned symbols were not wholly rejected after all, but instead conveyed from a current symbol set to a potential symbol set”* (Minc 1987, 96). In other words, cultural texts and their interpretations, “texts about texts”, are often denied and forgotten, but rarely do they disappear for good. Thus, apparently rejected cultural texts may reappear with renewed vigor and cultural import. From the standpoint of Minc, the bilingualism of Ingrian Lutheranism, then, could be regarded as a current cultural phenomenon whose roots go back to a once abandoned religiousness

and ethnicity. Nowadays, thanks to the high number of mixed marriages, many churchgoers consider Russian to be their own language. Nonetheless, we must not forget the main reason why Lutheranism thrived during the Soviet era: the realm of belief was confined to speakers of Finnish.

Early this century, there were 1124 Lutheran congregations. One-third of them were multi-ethnic; and one-sixth of the villages made up an even mix of Finnish and Russian speakers (See Entisen Inkerin...). Hence, the circumstances fostered the shift to bilingualism. Besides day-to-day communication, the realm of magic, which incorporated Russian incantations and prayers, was also significant. Moreover, religious and magical notions - including those about sorcery - appeared as ways for Finnish speakers to codify their contradictory attitudes to another linguistic domain. Not only did these notions mirror daily conflicts, they also reflected ideologies inherent in the two linguistic domains.

During the 19th century and early 20th century, folklore collectors went to Ingria in search of Kalevala meter poetry and other Finnish antiquities. Later published in nine volumes of *The Old Poems of the Finnish People* (SKVR), this material makes up nearly one quarter of the entire series. As their imaginations were only captivated by traditions they deemed old, the folklore collectors tended to overlook those they considered new. Furthermore, if they detected a Russian influence, they discarded the given tradition as false and inauthentic. Epitomized here in ethnologist Samuli Paulaharju's well-known "Pictures from here and there across Greater Finland", Ingria, with its abundance of songs, was then viewed as the "true" and "holy" Finnish periphery:

"Ingria! The grand and 'holy' region enveloping Petersburg, inhabited by our kindred people. Even the very name makes the heart of every Finnish enthusiast of ethnology and folklore swell with joy. Ingria, like Russian Karelia, has yielded us our greatest folkloric treasures. Since the days of Lönnrot and Europaeus, we have made an infinite number of collecting and research trips there. Even today, more and more hope-filled excursions are in the making. And no one need fear returning with dashed hopes." (Paulaharju 1919, 79).

According to Bakhtin, each culture is continually developing and updating a model of ultimate wholeness. Popular folk culture reflects the open, imperfect and mutable nature of human experience, whereby "all live, all speak". The symbols of official culture serve in the name of pragmatism and utilitarianism; and these symbols evoke only "the experience of a specific part of humanity". Small models, as Bakhtin defined the structure of official cultures, tend towards secretiveness, lies, illusions of redemption (Bakhtin 1981, 77). Likewise, to the 19th and early 20th century folklore collectors, Ingria was viewed as fine raw material for one of their small models. This model was wasting away somewhere along the frontier, the place where the idealized past and the dreary present meet. The model could accommodate neither the future nor the enigmatic strangers conveyed in its wake. A prime example of this kind of ethnographic censorship is the so-called "Ingrian folklore villages map" (See Itä- ja Pohjois-Inkerin runot...). If the map were redrawn to include all the villages that the collectors omitted for one reason or another, the "folklore villages" scattered "here and there across Ingria" would hardly be noticed.

That same period of folklore collection also saw a flurry of debate by the Finnish elite on "Finnishness", "Swedishness" and "Russianness". Although these words are usually left uncapitalized in Finnish, they then were capitalized. From the standpoint of today, these deliberations often appear more like a mythic battle peopled by folkloric figures than an actual historical period. With this in mind, it follows that a mythologized "Russianness", its identification with all things "Soviet",

and the subsequent replacement of “Russian belief” with “atheism” worked to fashion the tribal creed of faith:

“At first I did my best to explain how all the folks in Finland are doing their part to pursue the Finnish language and all things to do with the Finnish people, because now we are being crowded in by oppressive Russianness on the one side and Swedishness on the other. However much I tried, I soon saw that no matter how much I explained, they (the peasants) still could not understand, so I simply gave up trying to get them to understand, except, of course, when I found someone who appeared especially understanding” (from F.A. Saxbäck’s folklore collecting trip to Ingria in 1859; Saxbäck 1904, 352-353).

“Death to the Russians, whatever the color. For the sake of the blood shed by our forefathers, death to those who ravaged our homes; death to those who killed and raped the Fatherland! Death to those who divided the Kaleva tribe and defiled the Finnish people. In the name of Finland’s lost honor and future greatness: Death to the Russians! In the name of the soaring greatness of the Fatherland and our nation’s awakening on this Kalevala Day, let us proclaim our sacred love and fury across the beloved homeland of the Kullervo tribe” (from a Kalevala celebration speech prepared by a former seminary student in 1923; Simojoki 1923, 68).

The above exemplifies the myth production of the Greater Finland ideologies. This conception of the Kalevala and Kullervo tribes as Finno-Ugric “nations” revealed their expansionist plans. The IMPERIUM FENNICUM would extend all the way to the Ural Mountains. The Finnish nationalists were speaking in the name of all Finno-Ugric peoples. We can imagine just how Soviet officials viewed these “nations”. During the years 1936-1937, the inhabitants of Northern Ingria, near the Finnish border, were driven away and Ingrian autonomy was brought to an end. The 1931 publication “Soviet Ingria” was one significant (counter-) propagandistic contribution to Greater Finland’s myth industry. Today, this kind of research takes a more latent form in the ever-fashionable studies of linguistic blood ties, ethno-genetic reconstructions, publications and translations of the Kalevala, etc.:

“Leningrad is situated near the national border. At present, this also means that the city virtually stands at the border of the world’s two opposing economic systems. Ingria, then, just like any other frontier region, has piqued the interest of the capitalist beasts. The Finnish interest in Ingria - and the slanderous stories they spread - is easy enough to grasp: the shared linguistic background and Ingria’s proximity to the Finnish border incite the Finnish bourgeoisie to fascist activity. The above-mentioned circumstances fuel their bourgeois desire to conquer. During recent decades and particularly in the post-war years of the capitalist crisis, Finland’s pan-finnic circles have been ranting and raving about the ‘Greater Finland’. They base their claims on the brotherly ties established between the Ingrians and the Finns during the era of Swedish rule. When speaking of other Baltic Finno-Ugric peoples, however, they appeal to the racial and linguistic ties going back for thousands of years. In fact, the ‘Ingrian problem’ merely serves as a cover-up for their goal to take over Karelia for its forest and natural resources, because Ingria’s forests are too limited to provide raw material for the Finnish forest industry. Forestry is the cornerstone of the Finnish economy. Like other industries, Finnish forestry now faces a severe crisis, which is both the result of the crisis worldwide and that which is facing the domestic economy” (Lemetti 1931, 50-51).

After the October Revolution, the social division based on religion was no longer meaningful to the peasant population. The stranger to one’s “own” was no longer a representative of another belief system, but instead the “antisystem” which denied religion altogether. Although the

“antisystem” was ostensibly maintained through the Russian language, it has had, particularly in the light of the history of the Soviet Union, an ethnically diverse background. This would be yet another intriguing research topic.

On the one hand, Ingria was the “true” Finnish periphery. On the other hand, Ingria was also the region which surrounded the city of the revolution. Put simply, Ingria’s significance depended entirely on the eyes of its beholder. The “red” Finns sought to build a “Soviet Ingria”, whereas expansionist-minded Finns dreamed of annexing Ingria to the “Greater Finland”. To the average peasant, however, both the Soviet Union and the Greater Finland were utterly alien ideas. In an atmosphere characterized by “choice but no choice”, the “departure to belief” no doubt became a common cultural tendency. Among the peasants, the sight of churches being closed down clearly signalled “the end of the world”:

“...the most frightening thing about Bolshevism was that it equalled the spread of atheism. It was said that the denial of God and the closing down of churches meant the end of life. The mere idea was both horrifying and absurd” (Mesiäinen 1990, 26-27).

During the Great Patriotic War in the winter of 1941-42 the Finns in the unoccupied environs of Leningrad were evacuated. At the same time, German officials sought to relocate the Finnish population of the occupied Ingrian villages. The Finnish authorities agreed to this after one year when there was a shortage of cheap labor force. The “humanitarian operations” on both sides of the battlefield one could see a clear relationship of cause and effect. The ideological antagonists acted once again according to action/reaction model. However, most of these people returned to the Soviet Union after Finland lost the war. Of the 63 000 Ingrian Finns only 5000 remained in Finland or moved to another country. Those who never returned had a good reason: kinship ties. They either had no relatives on the battlefield or, if they did, these kin were fighting on the enemy side. These kinship ties were even potentially dangerous. Although the greater part of the Ingrian Finns who fought in the war fought in the Soviet Army against the fascists, from the standpoint of Soviet ideology, the returnees were seen as potential supporters of Finland’s tribalism and as representatives of the enemy; thus Soviet officials defaulted on promises to return Ingrians to their home villages and instead sent them to other areas within the Soviet Union. Ingria’s Finns once again were forced to inhabit a vast region, thus fulfilling their tribal brothers’ dreams of extending Finnishness to the East. During the 1950s, after these forced relocations, many Ingrian Finns moved to Karelia, Estonia, and even back to Ingria. During the decade after the war, some Ingrian families moved house up to thirty times.

The policy of official atheism and countless relocations had an undeniable impact on the Ingrian Finns: They became a people with a profound sense of “ethnic placelessness”. In this kind of political climate, identifying ethnicity with religion turned into an effective survival strategy. The relationship of cause and effect became reversed. As religious Ingrians were rejected by the system, they in turn rejected the system that refused to accommodate them. As a result, Ingrians began to conceptualize their “own” world as independent of the non-Finnish one beyond, a world that they identified with atheism and the linguistic majority. Because the devout understood the limits of their power in official Soviet culture, they transformed this lack of worldly status into a “heavenly” status. Visions of the “end of the world” further fueled their hunger for such heavenly status. (The lyrics to a song often sung in those days said, “this land is not our own, Heaven is my home, the place where I aim to go”. The author’s field materials.)

By the time all the relocations had ceased, piety had become the unifying language among Lutherans living in various areas. In 1977, after a forty-year period, the first Finnish church was

opened in the city of Pushkin. Prior to this, religious meetings led by lay preachers were the major avenues for imparting religious views. Family rituals also had an instrumental role to play in nourishing religious sentiments. In fact, funerals often functioned much like the religious meetings. Thus, the following incident attains allegorical force. A group of women believers were on their way to a meeting being held in a frontier village. Requesting a permit for such a visit was out of the question. Nonetheless, the women managed to persuade the border control guards by saying that they were going to bury Old Adam, i.e. original sin (the author's field materials).

Thanks to the dynamic interaction between ethnicity and the realm of belief taking place in Soviet reality, the creation of a closed religious and linguistic circle was impossible. Otherwise, they would have been compelled to reject the local Other. Those rejected would have included one's "own": neighbors, acquaintances and even relatives. Instead, contacts with believers from other denominations - Finnish and Russian Baptists and Pentecostals and Russian Orthodox Christians - led to the making of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic domain of belief. Relationships with those from the world beyond one's "own" brought about renewal and changes in thinking, a key example of this being the younger generation's tendency to "marry out". Hence, the understandings of one's "own" social boundaries were transformed.

This tendency can also be seen in the realm of magic practiced by speakers of Finnish. No longer meaningful, many traditional magical notions pertaining to the origins of diseases were replaced by more general explanatory models. For example, this is reflected in names for certain rites, such as "against all illnesses". Sorcery, too, became a universal model, useful for solving all kinds of contradictions. When it came to everyday life, notions about ethnicity and religion were largely confined to the domestic sphere. Yet, the growing number of mixed marriages did pose a threat to the older generation's "own" most cherished values, that is, language and religion. The climate of suspicion was most apparent within the local milieu of ritual healers. Although many of the sons and daughters-in-law of one ritual specialist were non-Finns, from time to time, these "strangers" and their families were suspected of all manner of evil. Another family tried to cope with a troublesome son-in-law by alluding to his ties to demons: "His mother bought him three demons - one hundred rubles apiece" (the author's field materials).

Since the patients of ritual healers were often non-Finns, sorcery emerged as yet another element from the outside world. On the other hand, the high number of non-Finnish patients also indicates that the attempt to ritualize day-to-day problems is also characteristic of the non-Finnish world. Often, the Otherness regarded as the origin of sorcery was shifting and situational. In other words, those who perpetrated harm using sorcery could have just as well been linguistic others within the victim's own social sphere; they may have spoken the same language but belonged to another social sphere, or they may have been members of another religious group and vice-versa, etc. The shifting contents of Otherness stemmed from actual circumstances: how diverse peoples' experience turned out to be; in other words, which languages - in the larger sense of the word - were considered one's "own" and which were considered problematic. Magical notions had both codified relationships to an outside reality and were also a product of such contact.

In order for ritual healing to work, the patient had to be baptized. His / her religious denomination made no difference. After all, within the climate of official atheism, religious differences were meaningless. Since all illnesses were not overcome using the rhetorics of medicine or other ideologies, many an atheist was baptized during the Soviet era. On the whole, believers have had mixed feelings about ritual healing. Although many condemned the practice as sinful, ritual specialists claimed the contrary: "I do not heal, God does." In fact, there was even the odd

religious leader who saw no harm in the practice. An Estonian lay preacher, who was also known as a clairvoyant, was once holding a meeting in Ingria. He suddenly turned to one woman and said: “You have clean hands. You heal the ears of children.” Later on, when his Estonian colleagues heard about the incident, they berated him for unwittingly inciting people to continue this “sinful activity”.

Healing rites often involved the use of the patient’s “own land”. This required that the patient bring some dirt from his/her cellar (for city dwellers even the soil from a flowerpot would suffice). During this ritual use of dirt, the following words, “own land helps”, were often recited in either Finnish or Russian. Thus the notion of “shared” land was conveyed to speakers of both languages. Nevertheless, the land could only be one’s “own” and “helpful” if the patient was able to regard even the smallest portion as sacred. To the Ingrians, profoundly aware of their own “placelessness” and “landlessness”, the words, “own land helps”, were laden with informative richness.

According to J.M. Lotman, the boundary of a semiotic space is a bilingual mechanism which “translates” unfamiliar information into the language belonging to the semiotic sphere and vice-versa. In this way, contact with other semiotic spaces is made possible. In fact, the periphery, because of its dynamic processual reserves, is the most congenial place for producing new information (Lotman 1984, 8-12). Finnish and Russian incantations and Lutheran and Orthodox prayers, because they are organically related through healing rites in the religio-magical domain, function as key bilingual mechanisms in Ingrian culture. Day-to-day multilingual communication has been thus an important bilingual domain. Here, the culture’s bilingual mechanism has been one of daily interaction through which the parties involved articulate their own “rejected” meanings. Consider the following conversation recorded in the late 1980s in Ingria. Even this small fragment evokes the many-voicedness of ethnographic reality. The speakers are an old woman (A.P.), her sister’s daughter (L.O.) and the writer of this article (A.S.). All the bold words and sentences were uttered in Russian:

A.P.: When Stalin died, well ... But she (= *Liita as a young girl, L.O.*) runs about, runs about ... (*indoors while the adults are talking*)

A.S.: How old was she?

L.O.: Well, five, **probably**, ... Six years ... our late grandmother cries...

A.P.: Everybody there was crying...

L.O.: Everybody was so sad. And I looked (= *I thought, how should I behave in this situation*)...

A.P.: Uncle Junni Penkkinen cries, my late grandmother cries, Aunt Tilta cries...

L.O.: I was skipping here and there...

A.P.: But she skips, skips, skips, skips... You don’t remember it yourself. Skips, skips, skips, skips. But Aunt Tilta says: “Liita, **what are you skipping for** - what are you skipping for?” But she (*Liita*) says: “But what should I do?”

L.O.: (*Aunt Tilta*) “Cry!”

A.P.: Aha... (*Aunt Tilta:*) “Stalin died!” (*Liita the child:*) “**So what? It wasn’t my father who died!**”

A.S.: She said this in Russian or Finnish?

L.O.: Russian.

A.P.: Russian. (*Liita the child:*) “**So what? It wasn’t my father who died!**” (*Aunt Tilta:*) “**Even so, you have to ... died ... have to cry,**” she says.

A.S.: No matter what, it’s necessary to cry...

A.P.: Ah... And then (*Liita*) playfully went and crouched ... on the floor ... crouched all the way to the floor (*in a high voice as in a lament*): “**Staa-alin, why did you dii-ie? Now our bree-aad is fin-iished!**”

A.S.: How, in Russian?

L.O.: Russian.

A.P.: (*like a lament, but in a slightly lower voice*): “**Staa-alin, why did you dii-ie? Now our bree-aad is fin-iished!**” **And then...** (*A.P. begins to play the part of Liita, jumping up, stamping her feet and dances sings a swinging song briskly and rhythmically*): “**How can I cry, if the tears won’t come!**”

A.S.: She started dancing ...

A.P.: Then she jumped up and started dancing ... then she jumped up and started dancing. Then, she wailed, wailed ... she said ... went and skipped... “**How can I cry, if the tears won’t come!**”

L.O. (*pensively*): **Yes, the tears didn’t come ...**

A.P.: **The tears just wouldn’t come. Everybody cried, but I didn’t cry at all.**

The child turns her ambivalence about how to behave into a game. Her attitude to her own behavior and the almost ritualistic inappropriate laughter recall ritual anti-behavior and the grotesque characteristic (see Lotman 1979, 88-90; Propp 1976, 188-192; Uspenskij 1994; Bakhtin 1986b, 341). Here, the adults do their utmost to conform to the traditional approach to death. Thanks to the child who is free of preconceived notions, their mourning, which is based on ideological self-censorship, turns comical. The duality of the question, “So what..?”, forces the adults to recognize their own folly, and thus they cannot provide the child with a logical answer: “In any case, have to ... died... have to cry.”

As the key phrases are uttered in Russian, the coding of the situation takes place by a recourse to the “foreign” language, a language problematic to the older generation. Moreover, the problematic and sinful past is alluded to by recalling a dance tune from the “more devout” elders’ youth. The key heroine’s clearly idiosyncratic (anti)behavior clearly stems from her childhood spontaneity. Everything else derives from the domains of both one’s “own” and the “foreign”. L.O.’s mother was a Finn and her father a Mordovian, making Russian, in addition to Finnish, a natural way to communicate with members of both the immediate and wider family. Transcending the boundaries

of one's "own" language and reappropriating once rejected meanings allows the individual to withdraw from the "official" and established views which are ultimately losing their currency. The despair of laments, the buoyancy of swinging songs, different languages, experiences, and generations together form a polyphonic whole. The meeting of formerly opposed linguistic domains brings about an entirely new interpretation of reality, which, in turn, spawns the potential for even more interpretations, thus L.O.'s attitude to the past: the domain of ideologized notions is declared meaningless, non-semiotic. Ultimately, what is most important about the above example is not its exposure of dissidents, but the attitude to the change caused by death. An entire historical era is falling away. Overwhelmed and frightened by the prospect of change, the people foresee what lies ahead, "laughing through their tears". The past both departs and arrives, creating a way out of ideologized abstractions.

A key trait of a cultural text is the multilingualism of its contents. Not only do linguistic peripheries enable communication across established and timeworn language boundaries, they emerge as the potential force behind the multilingualism of a cultural space. Day-to-day multilingualism, and the ritual activity which also undermines monolingualism, primarily emerges as a recharging zone for potential symbols from the cultural periphery, as well as a mode of symbolically renewing the periphery itself. Ritual activity, such as the use of one's "own land", illustrates how day-to-day discord is translated into the language of ritual, forcing one to see what is one's "own" in the "foreign" and what is "foreign" in one's "own". The "collective" land belonging to "no-one" becomes one's "own", which, in turn means that the land is now "foreign" to somebody else. Thus, allegorically, the diverse meanings intrinsic to contacts between different linguistic domains are made manifest.

One of the leading slogans of Soviet reality was Karl Marx's oft-quoted expression: "Religion is the opium of the masses". "Soviet nature", "atheism" and other similar terms had functioned as actual symbols for a number of decades. In the same context, however, Marx had characterized religion as the "heart in a heartless world".

"In 1923, there was an educational function held at Tuutari Church. Many people had gathered there, most of them women - mothers. A table was placed in front of the altar. And at the table appeared a educational worker, Master Kohonen, who thus began his presentation: 'Children should not be taught about religion and there must be no talk of God to them.' The master unbuttoned his coat and vest and continued: 'When I was young, my mother taught me about religion. She put God inside me. (The Master opened his vest and pointed to his heart.) - Now I can't get Him out of me, no matter how hard I try to rip him out. My mother's teachings always come to mind.'"

"Then the listeners began to squirm. One of the women in the audience raised her voice: 'Why, good man, have you come here to lie to us. You've just openly admitted that you cannot take God out of your heart, and yet you still want to teach us to live without God. You are a liar, a traitor!'" (Kuortti 1963, 61-62).

Soviet rule produced two opposing realities: the system itself and that which the system forbade. Nevertheless, the system itself paved the way for an unmediated encounter between these different "linguistic domains". Paradoxically, the value of Soviet othering lies in day-to-day communication, understanding and grappling with both one's own cultural texts and those of Others. The tension between "own" and "other" gave rise to new interpretations. These conveyed a move beyond ideological oppositions whereby the dissent of ordinary people departed in principle from dissident nihilism. The "departure to belief" was not merely an example of peoples' resistance to atheism,

if in fact it was at all, but it did indicate a steady growth away from the timeworn interpretations of ethnicity and religion.

“The war was terrible. And it is impossible to imagine without having lived through those hard times. The horror, the hunger, the homelessness... The proverb says, At home even the walls can help us. When a human being turns wanderer the road of life becomes a hard battle. The human being does not know what tomorrow will bring. Under these circumstances, the human being has to keep his wits about him. If he lets his mind rest for even a moment, he is in danger of stumbling and losing his way. He who has not deeply pondered his own life can easily find himself on either side of the road” (Finnish female ritual specialist; author’s field materials).

“The end of the world” experienced by the devout ultimately signified the end of “words” and “texts” about The Wor(l)d. Therefore, at least superficially, the atheistic and non-ethnic Soviet system did bring the notion of the “human being” to the fore. Religio-ethnic characteristics, which are limiting aspects of humanity, were replaced with the attribute “Soviet” and were thus transformed through various interpretations, that is, symbols of the mind and heart, into a dialogue-conflict.

(Translated by Leila Virtanen)

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