

# Introduction: On the Definition, Theory, and Practice of Gender Shift in the North of Russia

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## Abstract

The authors of the paper write about the history of this special issue, explain why they have chosen the Russian North as their focus and render their understanding of changing gender relations through the definition of gender shift. Further, they describe multiple interrelated processes of gender shift, or gender shifts, unfolding in demographic, socio-economic, symbolic and cultural, administrative and political spheres. This description is illustrated with references to the diverse contributions to this issue, which represent a wide range of topics and approaches and provide rich empirical material originating from northern indigenous and multiethnic, nomadic, rural and urban communities. Discussions on and interpretations of gender shift are followed by anthropological case studies presented by the three authors on the basis of their research conducted in Zabaikal'skii Territory, Komi Republic, and Chukotka.

**Keywords:** Gender Shift, Russian North, Demography, Socio-Economic Aspects, Gendered Spaces, Sexuality, Social Institutions, Political Power, Family Split, Social Engineering, Religious Practices

In May 2008 the editors of this volume organized in Cesvaine, a small town in Latvia, a workshop entitled “Gender Shift in Northern Communities of Russia,” supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Out of the papers presented during this workshop and the intensive discussions that followed each of the presentations grew this special issue. Setting the frame for the articles to come, we would like to explain why we decided to invite a number of specialists to reflect on gender relations in this part of the world (the Russian North<sup>1</sup>), how we define this notion of “gender shift,” and how each of us individually relates to this notion in our respective research.

## **Why Study Gender in the Russian North?**

“Man the Hunter” was the title of a famous anthropological symposium in 1966—a time when it was politically correct to use the word “man” for all human beings or men only. The ambiguity of this wording resulted from a widespread indifference or ignorance toward women’s roles in hunting societies.<sup>2</sup> Anthropologists working among the indigenous peoples of Siberia, however, have often been puzzled by the fact that the tundra and taiga—the treeless spaces and the boreal forests of northern Eurasia—are *indeed* a mostly male domain. Many hunters of Siberia nowadays live, for much of the year, without their wives, mothers, and daughters; many of them are in fact bachelors. The situation with reindeer herders is very similar.

This phenomenon is reflected in public discourse: Indigenous women and men often express their concern about an imbalanced gender relation. The increasing absence of women in the taiga and tundra is considered one of the principal reasons for the crisis in hunting and reindeer economies (e.g. Schindler 1997; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). In addition, indigenous men, particularly in reindeer encampments, complain about the loneliness of the single life and the lack of women to share household duties.

Clearly, the picture was very different in earlier centuries. Perhaps hunting and reindeer herding were always pursued *mostly* by men, but nonetheless in those days women did live together in one tent with their husbands, fathers, and sons. The emigration of women from the tundra and taiga is a fairly recent phenomenon; it took place from the 1930s to 1980s and was a consequence of the Soviet modernization project. Articles presented in this issue (Rethmann, Vitebsky, Ziker, and our own insights further below in this introduction) evince various versions of the story of “where have all the women gone,” analyze how the manifold intended and unintended consequences of this separation play out today, and also provide evidence that this process has not happened evenly across the whole large territory of the Russian North (as emphasized particularly fervently by Liarskaya (this issue).

## **The Forest and the City**

The tundra and taiga that we describe in the beginning however, are just one piece in a larger mosaic. When in early 2007 we designed the workshop, we soon realized that the “gender

shift,” as we called it by shorthand, occurs not only among the indigenous peoples of Siberia. The settlements that have emerged in connection with oil and gas extraction in the Far North of Russia also show signs of gender separation, with women inhabiting the more central places and men commuting to remote outposts for a number of days or weeks. Obviously, the spatial separation of the two sexes is entangled with more general issues such as education and occupation, institutionalized and familial childcare, migration and demographic patterns, viable gender arrangements, and gender stereotypes. Of course, the question of “living together” is informed by the ways in which life projects and love stories frame personal decisions, as well as by predominating public discourse.

Apprehending the diversity of the shift and trying to overcome a feeling of parochialism among anthropologists working in the Circumpolar North (cf. Habeck et al. 2010), we deemed it useful and necessary to widen our remit by inviting sociologists and gender-studies experts from Russian and Nordic universities and research centers (namely, Tatiana Barchunova, Meri Kulmala, Natalia Pushkareva, and Elena Zdravomyslova). They had an immensely important role in introducing diverse theoretical approaches to the issue of gender shift and providing feminist interpretations of the other participants’ ethnographies of groups involved in hunting and herding. These authors also brought in their own case studies, from urban Siberia but also St. Petersburg, which itself is called the *severnaia stolitsa* or “Northern Capital” of Russia. While at first glance it may seem odd to combine ethnographic studies from the Autonomous Regions<sup>3</sup> along the Arctic Sea Coast with those from among Baltic-Sea urbanites or the EU-border communities, we do think that they have important things in common: they expose changes in gender arrangements from complementary viewpoints. For instance, “hunting” for a proficient nanny in St Petersburg and “herding” children in the Northern boarding school both point to the fact that childcare has undergone long-term and short-term modifications and thus remains a matter of public debate. Similar trends can be identified in domestic labor in the taiga and tundra. Models and practices of parenting and household management have substantially changed, and so have gender roles—a process by which women seem more affected and aware than men. Several of our authors (Pushkareva, Vinokurova) contend that men in Russia have more difficulties with finding their “new place” than women do (cf. Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2002).

## **Gender Shift as a Notion and a Phenomenon**

We tentatively call “gender shift” the change that has affected urban and rural, indigenous and multiethnic communities of the Russian North and which resulted in a bundle of demographic and socio-economic processes. During Soviet and post-Soviet times, scopes of action, patterns of behavior, ideas about the roles of women and men as well as their interrelations have been changing in a way which we assume is specific for Northern Russia. The issues of gender, marriage and family have become problematic and widely discussed in the time of critical post-Soviet transformations and ongoing social change and growing industrialization and globalization. Although the underlying characteristics, magnitude, and dynamics of gender shift vary in different regions and communities, it is clear that we can speak about it as an established phenomenon.

Gender shift is a newly employed term;<sup>4</sup> however, it refers to some historical and presently existing concepts of gender and kinship. Ethnographies of the early Soviet period (1920-1930s) focused on “liberation” of women from discrimination in the patriarchal family in the Soviet class-based society in general and in the Soviet North in particular (Nikul’shin 1939). Such policy resulted in the actual rise of the educational level, political mobilization and involvement of women in social and cultural construction (*kul’turnoe stroitel’sтво*) as well as in the appropriation of the rhetoric of “liberation” by local community leaders (Grant 1995). However, the Soviet policy also set a double-standard “contract of the working mother” imposing social responsibility on Soviet women both as a working and reproductive force and increasing men’s “family escapism” (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2003).

In the 1950-80s ethnographic research carried out in the Soviet North was impacted by the ideology of that period. Within its evolutionist frameworks, the family was considered to be the basic social institution (*iacheika obshchestva*) corresponding to a certain social formation. In the studies of the Northern, particularly, indigenous communities, gender roles and family patterns were described mostly through the prism of the “traditional family,” the unit which presumably existed in the pre-Soviet period. Thus, the attention of Soviet ethnographers was drawn to such topics as archaic and “traditional” patriarchal forms of marriage and family structures, family and life cycle rites and norms of socialization.

New research topics and approaches started appearing since the late 1990s when the theoretical focus and interests of researchers studying communities of the Russian North have been gradually shifting to ethnodemography of the family (Pivneva 2000; Sokolova 2004), interethnic marriages (Goncharova 1997; Markhinin and Udalova 2001), changing social identities of women in the North (Vinokurova et al. 2004), etc. Recent research on gender and family indicates that socio-economic challenges of *perestroika* with their negative impacts on household economies and living conditions raised the value of the family as “an island of stability” and strengthened familial and kinship networks (Lakhova 1997; Rimashevskaja 1997). In many indigenous communities of Northern Russia, social and institutional transformations stimulated re-evaluation of family and gender relations and elaboration of new gender-specific marriage strategies and residence patterns drawing on changing social and economic roles and diverging spatial and occupational orientations of men and women (Povoroznyuk 2005).

Thus, our initial approach to gender shift in indigenous communities included a focus on growing spatial and labor division between the sexes, with the majority of women leading a settled life and occupying relatively stable positions in villages and towns, and men living in the tundra/taiga and working out in the “wilderness” (Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001). Yet soon we realized that our approach has to be wider. While many anthropologists seek to analyze gender shift in predominantly indigenous communities (e.g., Rethmann 2001; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003), the same processes occur in communities dependent upon fossil fuel extraction with a predominantly non-indigenous population, and in mixed communities including both rural and urban metropolitan areas.

The previous special issue of *Anthropology of East Europe Review* (Vol. 28, No. 1) has the title, “Gender in Postsocialist Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union.” When we saw the first announcement of that issue, we decided to approach the editor-in-chief, Sarah Phillips, with our own, “Northern,” collection of papers. The contributions to this issue can be seen as a spatial extension of the previous issue’s ambit. In this introduction we will point to the most salient parallels between the papers of this issue and those of the last one. The processes that we are talking about affect societies in East Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia in similar ways as they do in Russia and, more specifically, in Siberia.

Having said that, we do believe that our collection also deserves to be read in its own light. The majority of our authors have done fieldwork in so-called peripheral places; many have

studied how changes in gender relations play out in indigenous communities. They did research among peoples that have one thing in common: while differing from each other in countless ways, they are subsumed under the politico-administrative category “Numerically Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East” (*malochislennye narody Severa, Sibiri i Dal’nego Vostoka*). In the Soviet era, they were considered by official authorities to be the least developed on the conventional evolutionary scale of nationalities in the Soviet Union, and this assumption has remained to date in many people’s perception. This tenet of “backwardness” and the ensuing developmental policies have set in motion the diverse processes of gender shift. We deem these processes characteristic for the North of Russia, even though they work out very differently in different regions.

### **Shift as a Bundle of Processes**

The concept of gender shift should be interpreted as a process or, rather, as a number of interrelated and interdependent processes which have been developing in rural and urban communities of the Russian North in Soviet and, especially, post-Soviet periods. This bundle of processes can be “unpacked” to form several distinct types of phenomena registered by social scientists in Northern communities of Russia as they are displayed in demographic, socio-economic, spatial, sexual, administrative, political, and other areas.

### ***Gender, Ethnicity and Demography***

In the demographic sphere, characteristic manifestations of the gender shift include progressing nuclearization of the family with disintegrating multi-generational family patterns, decreasing birth rate, and a diminishing number of children and family members in indigenous (Pivneva 1994; Popov 1993) and multi-ethnic communities. In contemporary Russia, men appear to fail to perform roles of the breadwinner and defender ascribed to them by the patriarchal gender contract. In villages, men often cannot find any paid job. In some cases, the vacancies available in the village or neighboring communities (these are usually unskilled jobs) do not satisfy demands of male candidates, who prefer to wait for another opportunity. Unemployment, either preferred or forced, damages men’s public image and often results in alcoholism and

multiple physical and psychological stresses experienced by contemporary men. All these factors lead to higher mortality and suicide rates and a lower life-expectancy level for the male (in comparison with female) population (e.g. Vinokurova, this issue).

Women's reactions in this situation vary. They often continue carrying the double burden of the primary (or sole) provider of family income and the primary (or sole) provider of childcare and domestic work, like in the case of transnational Ukrainian mothers described in the previous issue of *AEER* (Tolstokorova 2010). Yet, today women of Northern Russia tend to marry out of the community even if they end up with temporary relationships or a short-term civil marriage, often with migrants representing diverse ethnic groups, cultures and lifestyles. For example, researchers of indigenous Northern communities emphasize the dramatically increased percentage of ethnically mixed marriages (Sokolova 2004; Markhinin and Udalova 2001) registered mostly between indigenous women and non-indigenous men coming from distant parts of the former Soviet Union.

Instability of such partnerships, especially in the areas of industrial exploration characterized by high migration levels of the non-indigenous population, stimulates the spread of the family models "single mother with children" and "single mother with children plus grandparent(s)" (Boiko, Eremin, and Beloshapkina 1979). Notably, children born in ethnically mixed marriages resulting from the "gender shift" constitute an intermediate generation of individuals with flexible double or even triple ethnic identity and complex cultural affiliation.

### ***Socio-Economic Aspects of Gender Shift***

Socio-economic aspects of gender shift are expressed in transformations of the traditional gender contract and new socio-economic roles of men and women in the family and the community contexts. In contrast to urban areas, the patriarchal gender contract in rural families has not changed in a way that would be mutually beneficial for both spouses. While many men in villages are unemployed, they are not willing to contribute to domestic work either. Thus, women have to adopt the role of the sole income provider and care-taker in the family (Povoroznyuk 2005).

On the community level, one can observe that in rural areas of the Russian North, since the Soviet period many occupations have become increasingly gender-specific, and spouses work

in separate fields. Already during the *kolkhoz* period (in the 1930s-1970s) reindeer herding turned into a primarily male profession while women were almost completely displaced from “traditional” activities and taiga/tundra altogether. In contrast, women started prevailing in cultural and educational institutions and administrations in villages and towns, which turned into a primarily female space. Disintegration of state farms (*sovkhoz*) and establishment of clan-based enterprises (*obshchina*)<sup>5</sup> as an attempt to revive reindeer herding and reunite indigenous families undertaken in the post-Soviet period could not repair the damage caused by the ill-conceived Soviet policies. Presently, there are only few “islands” of family reindeer herding left in Northern Russia. Nenets of the Yamal Peninsula involved in large-scale reindeer herding represent the classical example of nomadic families where spouses with small children live and work together in the tundra, whereas children of school age are sent to boarding schools (Liarskaya, this issue).

In industrialized and urban settings, such gender-specific occupations are less pronounced while the changes of the gender contract may be more evident. For instance, the notorious double burden of the working mother is alleviated thanks to opportunities for using paid childcare appearing among the middle-class<sup>6</sup> female population of metropolitan areas. Such opportunities allow women to develop professionally and involve themselves more actively in production, breadwinning and career building (see Zdravomyslova, this issue; Dimova 2010 (previous *AEER* issue)). This process may be interpreted as a sign that alterations in the gender contract have so far resulted rather in new female roles offering more economic independence and social freedom than in true gender equality in everyday family life.

### ***Gendered Spaces***

Perceptions and interpretations of different spaces in terms of “culture,” “civilization,” comfort and appropriateness as a place for living for representatives of both genders are part of the cultural and symbolic dimensions of gender shift. In Northern indigenous communities, educational and cultural institutions are associated with sedentary life in villages and towns and ascribed to women, as we will explain below. In contrast, hunters and herders’ camps connected with nomadic life are described as masculine, “uncultured,” “uncivilized” and uncomfortable for women and children (see for example, Habeck 2006).



While in the 1930-80s several Soviet social scientists usually saw nomadism as a developmental problem and often referred to the harsh environmental conditions of the North,<sup>7</sup> nowadays some scholars emphasize the high symbolic value of traditional forms of land use and the uniqueness of the nomadic lifestyle of reindeer herders (e.g., Golovnev 1995; King 2002; Vitebsky 2005). We claim that both these discourses have been, at least, to some extent, appropriated by indigenous leaders and activists and formed the images of tundra and taiga as places which are spiritually important but at the same time inappropriate or inconvenient for living, especially for women and children (for a more detailed interpretation, see Rethmann, Liarskaya this issue). At the same time, indigenous individuals' views and perceptions of the tundra/taiga are very diverse and depend on the cultural and social context of a conversation and discussants' personal background, occupation and lifestyle. It should be noted that in many cases, it is difficult to discriminate between etic and emic concepts of taiga and judge if this or that discourse is "authentic" or appropriated.

### ***Gender and Sexuality***

The most illustrative and intricate expressions of gender shift, though, can be found in the sexual sphere. The case study of female-to-female intimate relationships in the Siberian metropolitan areas of Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk demonstrates the shift in sexual practices and new forms and forums of sexual self-expression and self-exploration spreading out among young urban women in Northern Russia (Barchunova, this issue).<sup>8</sup> Contemporary urban men also find novel methods of self-presentation and non-standard expressions of sexuality (e.g., Ostroukh 2006). With the generally growing visibility and viability of alternative gender roles and sexualities in Russia, the stereotypical "traditional" roles of women and men and perceptions of their bodies seem to lose some of their normative power—especially in metropolitan areas and communities that can be labeled as post-industrial.

The gender shift in sexual relations and practices appears to be less pronounced in rural areas. Ventsel (this issue) argues that indigenous youth use "empty physical and social spaces" to practice hidden sex and, yet, simultaneously live by the patriarchal norms and traditions of their communities where kinship and family relations are among the primary values. This bears some similarity to the account that Sántha (2009) gives about young people's intimacy in an Evenk

village. There, too, premarital sex happens in marginal or empty spaces. Yet, as we learn from Safonova and Sántha (this issue), some taiga dwellers—not unlike urbanites—ostentatiously defy conventional gender distinctions, whereas certain types of gender markers are instantiated only in the presence of “strangers.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Gender, Social Institutions, and Political Power***

The role of the family and marriage as central social institutions is challenged in the context of gender shift. In today’s family units men appear to act as *genitor* rather than as *pater*. Often they appear to be unable to adapt to new realities and gender orders emerging in the context of rapid socio-economic changes (Vinokurova, this issue) and even come to represent marginalized groups of the population affected by social “maladies.” The spreading perception of men failing or unwilling to perform the roles ascribed to them by the patriarchal gender contract (Dimova 2010) is underlying the concepts of the crisis of masculinity (c.f. Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2003).

The institutional aspect of gender shift, in a literal sense, also reveals itself in the social, professional and educational statuses of women in public institutions. In Northern rural communities women tend to work in more prestigious and well-paid jobs than men. For example, in many indigenous communities women generally enjoy higher social positions and respect, while men appear to be subjected to negative social phenomena described above leading to their marginalization. The situation in urban, especially, metropolitan areas may slightly differ, however, in general, women seem to adapt to socio-economic and political changes in more diverse, pragmatic and viable ways than men.

The institutional aspect of gender shift translates into the political dimension. In the North, and in northwestern Russia probably more than elsewhere, women are gradually entering the echelons of political power and decision-making. This process is especially evident at the local level where women assume the roles of activists and community organizers (Kulmala, this issue).<sup>10</sup> While such roles have historically been characteristic for women of this region, they are becoming more and more relevant for the current efforts to protect women’s political rights, increase their participation in decision-making and political life, and, thus, implement the principles of gender equality in public sphere (Pushkareva, this issue).

The processes described above interact and feed into each other, thus, appearing to be aspects of one and the same multifaceted phenomenon: gender shift. The essence of this phenomenon could and should be comprehended only through the consideration and analysis of these processes in a bundle. Here we need to stress once again that the magnitude and variables of gender shift vary across the vast territory of the Russian North. Consequently, different configurations of gender shift can be found. We do not see this shift as a uni-directional movement, nor is it a movement that affects all social strata evenly. To illustrate this point, some workshop participants with a strong gender-studies background (Barchunova, Zdravomyslova) described the Soviet modernization project as a rejection of previous—mostly patriarchal—gender regimes, and the post-Soviet debate of gender arrangements as a “retro discourse,” which is based on a selective appropriation of neo-traditionalist thoughts and practices.

### **Editors’ Individual Motivations**

The idea of the workshop and this ensuing special issue occurred when the three organizers met at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle in January 2006. One interesting aspect of this collaboration was that we all come from different countries (Russia, Germany, France) and different academic milieus, having respectively defended our theses in social anthropology/ethnology in Moscow, Cambridge, and Paris.

Since our academic backgrounds have influenced our approaches to research on gender, we find it apposite to outline our interest in gender relations and explain to readers our motivations for compiling this special issue on gender shift in the Russian North. While doing so, we will draw upon our individual case studies based on field research conducted in three areas: the northern parts of Zabaikal’skii Territory, Komi Republic, and Chukotka.

### ***Gender Shift and Family Split in Evenk Communities (Olga Povoroznyuk)***

My interest in gender relations stems from long-term anthropological field research conducted among Evenks of former Chitinskaia Province (Zabaikal’skii Territory since 2008). The ethnological and anthropological data collected among these northern indigenous communities in 1998-2007 illustrate how Soviet agriculturalist and sedentarization policies and,

later, post-Soviet socio-economic crisis have been translated into gender-marked survival strategies, occupation and residence patterns, and new gender roles and family relations.

What struck me most during my fieldwork was the spreading phenomenon of spatial and social separation of indigenous families. In many cases, indigenous women live with children in villages and enjoy comparatively stable jobs. At the same time, their husbands were involved in currently less prestigious and less paid jobs as herders and hunters leading nomadic life in the taiga. This situation has become typical for many Evenk families of Northern Zabaikal'skii Territory. My more recent field study conducted in Nenets Autonomous Region in 2010 proved that a similar situation, although to a lesser degree, is characteristic for indigenous Nenets communities involved in large-scale shift reindeer herding<sup>11</sup> in the tundra. In order to describe and analyze a bundle of interconnected demographic, socio-economic and cultural processes underlying the transformation of "traditional" family models and roles of indigenous women and men, I introduced the notion of "gender shift" in my research and proposed it as a key term for the workshop organized in 2008 and the present special issue.

The processes of gender shift clearly reveal themselves in the demographics of family life. The disintegration of the "traditional indigenous family" (Popov 1993), a family based on extended kinship networks and patriarchal gender contract, has been characterized by gradual disappearance of the extended-family model and spread of one-parent families and interethnic marriages. As my field data show, nuclearization and disintegration of three-generational families have been progressing among Evenks, along with sedentarization and introduction of the *kolkhoz* system, since the Soviet period. In the 1990s the average number of family members also was diminishing due to a dramatic decline in the birth rate and increased mortality in indigenous communities, trends which reflect the general situation in the country (Povoroznyuk 2005). Looking at the statistics, one might be especially struck by the male "ultramortality" registered in indigenous communities of the Russian North (Vinokurova, this volume).

Another illustration of gender shift is a rapidly growing number of interethnic partnerships of indigenous women with non-indigenous men. At present, many indigenous men are often rejected and ignored by women of the same ethnicity due to their generally lower social status and lack of education and career prospects, as will be shown below. To compensate for the unequal socio-economic status, indigenous women have worked out new strategies of finding a marriage partner. Like in other indigenous and multiethnic communities of the North, the

prevailing strategy employed by women is oriented towards finding a partner with equal or higher socio-professional status who, most likely, belongs to a non-indigenous ethnic group (Burykin 2002).

Such strategies result in a significantly increased percentage of ethnically mixed marriages (Sokolova 2004; Markhinin and Udalova 2001) between indigenous women and non-indigenous men coming, primarily, from former Soviet republics. For example, many Evenk women in Zabaikal'skii Territory prefer to marry men of other ethnic groups. Those can be either Russian "old settlers" or "newcomers" of diverse ethnic backgrounds who migrated to the region from former Soviet republics to build the Baikal-Amur Railroad (BAM) in the 1980s or to carry on business in the 1990s. Yet, such marriages are rarely stable or long-lasting. In fact, men who once came to the BAM industrial area and established relationships with local indigenous women tend to leave for home when their work contracts expire. In many such cases, the woman does not move with her partner to his home region. As a result, a high migration level of the non-indigenous male population tends to stimulate the spread of the family models "single mother with children" and "single mother with children plus grandparent(s)" (Boiko, Eremin, and Beloshapkina 1979).

Children born in ethnically mixed marriages resulting from gender shift constitute an intermediate generation of individuals with flexible double or even triple ethnic identity and complex cultural affiliation. For example, children born in Evenk-Russian, Evenk-Buriat, Evenk-Korean and other ethnically mixed families usually identify themselves as Evenks when speaking about "traditions" (referring to reindeer herding, hunting, Evenk holidays and shamanism), but as Russians/Buriats/Koreans, etc. in other cultural and social contexts (for instance, when discussing their career prospects in local industry, talking about modern music, fashion and art or sharing their plans of moving to the city).

Gender shift also informs the socio-economic life of indigenous communities. In the North of Zabaikal'skii Territory it results in new statuses and changed division of labor between men and women within and beyond the family. On the household level, women tend to play the role of the only caretaker and provider of the household's income. They not only manage the household, bring up children, take care of elderly people and their husbands, but often turn out to be the only breadwinners in the family. With the collapse of the planned economy and *kolkhoz* system, the majority of men who lost their jobs in the state sector were not able to adapt to new

economic conditions or find adequate employment. Later on some of them joined reindeer herding and hunting enterprises (*obshchinas*), thus, finding a way to provide for their families, while the rest of Evenk men remaining in villages continued to live at their wives' and other family members' expense. This circumstance, nevertheless, has not significantly changed the normative principles of the patriarchal gender contract predominating in indigenous Evenk communities: the whole domestic sphere (cooking, children's upbringing, etc.) remained women's responsibility. Thus, in post-Soviet times, in many rural Evenk families the "double burden" of worker-mothers (Ashwin 2000) turned into a "triple burden" due to an unemployed and often drinking husband. In contrast, indigenous families where the husband works in "traditional" activities or, more rarely, in the public sector in the village, and abstains from alcohol are considered to be the happiest and most successful families by their communities.

On the community level, socio-economic aspects of gender shift are even more pronounced. One can observe that many occupations have become increasingly gender-specific, and that spouses of the families work in separate fields. Many men are engaged in so-called traditional economic activities (reindeer herding and hunting), leading a non-sedentary way of life and commuting between taiga encampments and villages (Povoroznyuk 2007). On the contrary, women work mostly in educational and cultural institutions and local administrations, with the result that they stay in villages or towns. The situation wherein women with children predominate in villages while reindeer herders' settlements in the taiga are places of exclusively male habitation is quite typical.

The cultural and symbolic aspects of the gender shift or "gender split" recorded among indigenous ethnic groups of the Russian North (Kwon 1997) are associated both with the spatial division of labor and gender-marked residence patterns. This divide between men and women in local communities is rooted in Soviet collectivization and sedentarization policies and the transformation of reindeer herding technologies, as described by our authors (cf. Vitebsky, this issue). In Zabaikal'skii Territory, despite a gradually decreasing number of women in the taiga, family-based reindeer herding (*bytovoe kochevanie*) has survived through the whole Soviet period. At that time, the majority of Evenk women involved in "traditional" industries were occupied as tent workers (*chumrabortnitsa*). In exceptional cases, they could work as herders or even brigadiers of reindeer herding brigades, which can be seen as an immediate consequence of the Soviet policies of women's "liberation" (Grant 1995). But later, with the disintegration of

state farms (*sovkhoz*) and dramatic decrease of reindeer during the 1990s, only men could find paid work as reindeer herders and hunters in the taiga within newly established clan-based enterprises (*obshchina*). The presently existing enterprises usually do not have any vacancies reserved for tent workers (*chumrabortnitsa*). Nor do contemporary women have the necessary skills, desire or ideological pressure for working as herders. Thus, Evenk women have lost material and financial incentives, which currently play a crucial role under the difficult economic conditions of living in the taiga. Now only a few women accompany or visit their husbands and relatives in the taiga, usually spending their holidays with them (Povoroznyuk 2003).

In contrast to the taiga, villages and towns have turned into female spaces. Most of the cultural institutions such as houses of culture (*dom kul'tury*), kindergartens, schools and libraries in Evenk communities are predominated by women. They also constitute the majority in the local intelligentsia and administrations, acting as community leaders or “elders,” similarly to female community organizers described by Kulmala (this issue). This socio-cultural aspect of the gender shift leads to the situation wherein Evenk women find themselves in more prestigious and economically stable positions than men of the same ethnic group and community. The social status which indigenous women occupy in villages and towns is incomparably higher than the role of an unpaid worker or a *chumrabortnitsa* accompanying her husband. It is also higher than the social status of Evenk men living in the village and even those working in the taiga. In this milieu, many indigenous men are unable to retain the leading positions prescribed to them by the patriarchal gender contract, which in most cases offers no viable alternatives. The normative power of the patriarchal gender contract cannot be “lived out” in practice.

Thus, Evenk men often have difficulties with finding a well-paid job, or any job at all, in a village due to insufficient education and professional training or unwillingness to live a sedentary life. Occupations they can succeed in as professionals and breadwinners are left behind in the “traditional sector” of reindeer herding and hunting. With the recent decline of these activities and gradual disappearance of nomadism in the north of Transbaikal Region<sup>12</sup> (Mangataeva 2000), many indigenous men feel abandoned. From a psychological and social point of view, they occupy more vulnerable positions, especially in the sedentary context of rural life. The failure to comply with socially recognized and, in many cases, the only legitimate roles of “the breadwinner,” “caretaker,” and “father of the family” results in social suffering experienced by men in other parts of the post-Soviet space as well (Tereškinas 2010). In order to

cope with or temporarily forget this suffering, indigenous men living in the village often resort to self-destructive strategies such as alcoholism and suicide, or deviant behavior such as violence against others and criminal acts. Such deeds are often negatively judged and, as a result, some men may be rejected by their own families and communities. Working men and, especially, women, often interpret male unemployment and social and economic passivity within the family and community realms through the notion of “lacking discipline,”<sup>13</sup> which once was an integral part of Soviet people’s lifestyle and ensured that everybody was occupied (Povoroznyuk 2005). In contrast to rural unemployment, men’s choice to “retreat” to the taiga/tundra is seen as a more positive response of men to gender shift and current socio-economic challenges. Involvement in hunting and herding activities brings men at least partial professional fulfillment and the feeling of being a “real man,” even at the expense of loneliness or temporary separation from the family.

At the regional scale, both indigenous men and women have limited access to strategic resources and their representation in politics, business, and top management is insignificant in comparison to the dominating ethnic groups. Nonetheless, indigenous men facing similar socio-economic challenges as women of the same ethnic group and communities have developed a narrower range of new gender roles which could compete with the publicly recognized primordial image of the man as “hunter” and breadwinner.

### ***Gender Shift and Social Engineering: Uneven Projects (Joachim Otto Habeck)***

As outlined above, the concept of “gender shift” describes a bundle of processes, and each of the three workshop organizers can relate to it in different and yet interconnected ways. The particular aspects that have caught my attention most strongly are: (i) the introduction of industrial modes of work in the Far North and their gender-specific ramifications; (ii) the discursive nexus between space, gender and vernacular notions of “culture” (*kul'tura*); (iii) contemporary representations and expressions of masculinity; (iv) and the question of the viability of “alternative” gender roles and contracts in contemporary Russia. My own observations on these four issues stem from short-term fieldwork in the former Evenk Autonomous Region (henceforward: Evenkiia) in the mid-1990s and extended fieldwork in the north of the Komi Republic in 1998-1999 with follow-up visits till 2005 (since then, I work in Novosibirsk and surroundings).



To address the first issue, let me start with the most important difference between Komi and Evenk reindeer herding, namely the history of these peoples' involvement in reindeer herding, and consequently the different dynamics in the familial distribution of labor (in other words, who does what where and when). The Evenks have for a long time been known as taiga hunters in vast parts of central and eastern Siberia. Evenk reindeer herding developed more than a thousand years ago. Its main purpose was transportation, but it was usually an activity auxiliary to hunting, and usually the reindeer herds were small. The Komi live mainly in the boreal zone of northeastern Europe, their mediaeval economic background is that of hunters, fishers, and agriculturalists. Komi reindeer husbandry is of comparatively recent development; it commenced some 300 years ago, after some Komi groups had migrated northward and got accustomed to the reindeer-herding practices of their Nenets neighbors in the forest tundra. While these Nenets initially kept reindeer for transportation and as emergency food, from its early stages the main purpose of Komi reindeer husbandry was market-oriented production of reindeer furs and meat. Herding thus quickly developed into a large-scale activity that required the people in charge of the animals to devote much time to the herd or, alternatively, to hire additional workforce. In most cases, only *some* members of the respective Komi family were involved in the reindeer business. Typically, this meant that the *paterfamilias* went to the tundra with some of his sons, his wife or one of his daughters, and additional male workers from among more or less distant relatives. The gender ratio in the Komi reindeer herders' tent was usually three or more men per one woman. Separated from the rest of their families in the village, these specialized workers migrated with the animals from April to New Year's Eve, from the forest zone into the tundra and back. The different modes of production (along with different rates of productive output) that distinguished Komi from Nenets reindeer herding gave rise to political debate and scientific investigation already 100 years ago (Kertselli 1911:109-116; cf. Habeck 2005:65; Kvashnin 2009:105).

My claim is that the recent changes in gender relations among the Evenks (and other peoples of Siberia) are, in part at least, rooted in the pre-revolutionary herding strategies of Komi families. The ratio of one woman per every six men of the reindeer herders' tent is inscribed in pre-Soviet economic practices of Komi reindeer herding, and the agricultural experts who in the 1920s and 1930s were in charge of developing "the Soviet mode" of reindeer husbandry used the Komi mode of large-scale reindeer herding as a basic model for the rest of the Soviet North

(Habeck 2005:207).<sup>14</sup> In other words, analyzing the case of Komi reindeer-herding families, we find the blue-print for the spatial and labor division that was imparted upon other peoples of the Soviet North in the 1930s to 1970s. Through the introduction of industrial work methods into reindeer breeding, the tundra has turned into a “giant open-air meat factory,” as Piers Vitebsky (this issue) puts it. This process affected the several regions of the Soviet North in different ways and to different degrees: as Liarskaya (this issue) argues, the Nenets of Yamal Peninsula are less subjected to the separation of sexes that we noticed in other parts of the North.

The case studies of Olga Povoroznyuk (above) and Gail Fondahl (1998) from among the Evenks in Zabaikal'skii Territory and my own research (Habeck 1998) on sedentarization in Evenkiia exemplify the shift in spatial patterns of residence and labor division between the genders very clearly. Evenks were among the recipients of the technology transfer. In Evenkiia, the shift was imposed from above since 1936, when regional officials attempted to conduct sedentarization for the first time in earnest. After the developmental “standstill” caused by World War II, sedentarization picked up speed in the late 1940s, when the establishment of fur-animal farms (*zveroferny*) was propagated in Evenkiia, leading to gradually increasing requirement of (mainly female) workforce in the villages (Habeck 1998, based on local newspapers and archival records).

However, as has been mentioned, the processes that we subsume under the heading of “gender shift” occur not only in indigenous communities but also in those that economically largely depend on fossil fuel extraction and are comprised of a predominantly non-indigenous population. Exemplary cases are the so-called workers' settlements (*vakhtovyi posëlok*), as I know them from the Komi Republic and adjacent parts of the Nenets Autonomous Region. In this part of the Russian North, the tundra is—almost exclusively—a workplace for men. Where women are involved, they usually work as cooks in canteens or dispatchers that support the main bulk of workers, the men who work “out there” (cf. Karjalainen and Habeck 2004).

The second trope that I have investigated in recent work is the discursive nexus between space, gender and vernacular notions of “culture” (*kul'tura*). There is an impressive imagery of the North as a harsh environment where men have to struggle against the elements to acquire mineral resources for the benefit of the motherland. In contrast to this harsh environment, the town with its “civilizational” achievements (paved roads, water from the tap, etc.) is considered a much more amenable setting for the “weaker sex” (*nezhnyi pol*). Apart from the connotation of

civilization, *kul'tura* stands for high-end culture with a distinct classic oeuvre of literature and musical productions, and for cultivated behavior (*kul'turnoe povedenie*). Schools and the houses of culture are the main dispensaries of *kul'tura*. Here we return to the symbolic aspect of gender shift: *kul'tura* is mapped out unevenly over the vast ranges of the North (Habeck 2006).

The discourse about the tundra as a harsh environment in general, and many young male herders' ostentatiously "uncultured" (*beskul'turnoe*) behavior in particular, triggered my further interest in gender role models available in the North, expressions of masculinity and the range of variations that these may take. How viable are "alternative" gender roles and contracts in remote communities in the Far North?

As the basic characteristics of the virile behavior of those young male reindeer herders I identified the ever-changing combination of solidarity and competition, demonstratively played out through practice in herding, a vast array of additional skills, and physical virtues (Habeck et al. 2005). What it takes to be a man in this setting is to be experienced, nimble and tough.<sup>15</sup> Rude language and other violations against the norms of *kul'tura* underscore the virility (non-femininity) of these men.

Other settings are connected with other role models that require other qualities. However, what I perceive as typical for rural communities in the North of Russia is the idea that adult men tap the resources that the land provides, spend considerable time outdoors, and derive much pride from their success in provisioning their household members, relatives and friends. To summarize the most common positive definition of masculinity in the North (and in Russia in general): a man must be able to provide and care for his family.

Alternative spheres of activity for men, no doubt, do exist—also in reindeer husbandry, as exemplified in some regions by the *chumrabortnik* (the male equivalent to the *chumrabortnitsa*). Yet in the male case, the status of this job is rather low. This job is either left to the youngest herdsman or to a male who is not good at herding and still prefers to live in the tundra. Turning to the village, we find that those men who work as rank-and-file farm hands, technicians or managers fulfill the conventional male role model to a good extent, either by employing their physical strength in routine activities or by decision-making in the entrepreneurial sector. Less conventional professions that men in the Northern village may take up are those in educational and cultural institutions. Teachers and cultural workers perform in a predominantly female work

sphere. (Many of the jobs in this sphere were created through the very process and policies of Soviet development in the North that we described above.)

On a more general level, it appears that during Soviet times, labor distribution in the public (i.e., who works in which paid job) has significantly changed, whereas labor distribution within rural households has not changed to the same extent. What remains even more unquestioned is the general incentive to have a family, and to be part of a family. In that sense, kinship has retained its prime importance in the structuring of social ties within the rural communities (and in the North of Russia probably at least as strongly as in the central parts of it).

A comparison between rural and large urban settlements in Russia would reveal similar differences in household composition, childcare and life projects observed in other postsocialist countries such as Poland (Pine 2002) and, more generally, in many European countries (Heady 2010). Hannerz (1980) has provided a theoretical perspective on social interaction in the city: the more pronounced separation of place of work and residence, employment and family results in a larger array of roles that the individual takes on in encounters with others; the more fleeting character of interaction also permits a wider scope for unconventional lifestyles.

Consequently, the presence of lifestyles and male gender roles that question the ideological primacy of the patriarchal family is much more visible in urban than in rural communities. Metrosexuals, as portrayed by Ostroukh (2006), live in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk and other big cities, but one finds them neither in the villages of Siberia nor in the mineral-resource extraction towns typical for the North of Russia. Men-only professional settings and male co-residence are widespread (in the army barracks, the reindeer-herding brigades, and the oil and gas drilling stations), but voluntary cohabitation of male couples is unthinkable, except in big cities. Single fathers live in many communities, but the majority of them try to keep a low profile, fearing that state agencies might withdraw the father's entitlement to childcare, since the absence of a mother is commonly perceived as problematic for the child's psychological development (Kay 2006). All these "absent voices" point to the pervasive power and validity of the conviction of people in Russia that ideally, an adult man should be father, husband *and* bread winner.

Gender shift, and the processes that we subsume under this term, work very differently in the communities that we study. To sum up my point: Soviet social engineering *de facto* required some people to change their roles and habits more profoundly than others. Women's roles,

responsibilities and spheres of activity have changed very markedly owing to the Soviet modernization project (one may dub this “successful gender shift”) whereas the political discourse of the 2000s puts strong emphasis on the family as the main site of social regeneration and enculturation (see above: “retro gender shift”). Simultaneously, the “crisis of masculinity” is due to the inconsistency between the conventional male role model—the man as father and bread winner—and *de-facto* familial arrangements. It seems that in the case of men, there is a “lack of gender shift,” as alternative gender roles have no legitimacy (women’s roles have changed whereas men’s roles have not, or not to the same degree). Finally, in the rural communities with so-called traditional forms of land use, the disproportion between shifting female vs. male roles is larger than in urban communities, with the consequence that many men, especially herders and hunters, have difficulties with finding a partner (I would describe this as “partial gender shift” or gender-specific shift).

***Gender Shift and Religious Practices in Northeastern Siberia (Virginie Vaté)<sup>16</sup>***

My interest in gender grew out of observations that I made in an urban context during my first fieldwork in Chukotka in the years 1994 and 1995.<sup>17</sup> Women, particularly indigenous women, were quite visible in public areas and during public events, and they seemed to figure predominantly in local life. It was clear that indigenous women often had positions requiring formal education. Some of these positions conferred high social status on the women in question, but these same women were often also single mothers. In contrast, indigenous men were largely absent from urban life. Seemingly, this state of affairs results from processes that we refer to in this issue with the term “gender shift.”

My first step in investigating these processes, however, was to remind myself that one may not simply assume that contemporary phenomena result from a “shift;” rather, one must determine the degree to which the position of women today results from recent changes or, alternatively, bears witness to continuity with the past. In the view of Soviet authorities, the customs of Siberian peoples served to keep women in a position of inferiority and submission. Gender relations were understood in terms of class struggle, and women were seen, as Slezkine (1994:231) notes, as the “true proletarians.” The Soviet revolution in Siberia was supposed to have entailed the “liberation” of women from male domination and to have promoted rapid

social development through fostering the active participation of indigenous women in political life at all levels (Forsyth 1992:286-287). In fact, the representatives of the Soviet system relied primarily on women to promote changes in the familial structure, and many observers of life in postsocialist Siberia have noticed that women often continue to play the public and political roles that they first took up during the Soviet period.

But is the current public prominence of Siberian women only the result of Soviet policies? Were Siberian women as limited to the domestic sphere as Soviet officials imagined? There is, in some cases, evidence to the contrary. For example, in a study set in Evenkiia, Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) has shown that Evenk women were actually much more involved in hunting and other outdoor activities than Soviet officials tended to acknowledge.

This special issue of *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* is also an opportunity to scrutinize the extent to which there has indeed been a gender shift in the spheres where we assume that a shift has occurred—and to question whether what we observe today is always and only the consequence of externally imposed policies. While the authors of this issue support the notion of gender shift, they also document a variety of forms and responses to it. For example, in her compelling case study, Liarskaya shows that looking closely at regional data makes it much more difficult to make sweeping generalizations about gender shift. And, according to Ziker, among indigenous people of the Taimyr Region, there was actually more flexibility in the division of labor between men and women before the Soviet period than there is today. Paradoxically, this might indicate that the range of Siberian women's tasks may have become more narrow in the Soviet era—for instance, women being *de facto* excluded from hunting activities in the taiga/tundra and more strictly limited to the domestic sphere as they started to be employed as professional *chumrabochnitsy* (tent workers).

In my own research in Chukotka, I planned to study male/female relations through a comparison of the situation in the tundra, in villages (in areas where the predominant activities are still linked either to reindeer herding or sea-mammal hunting), and in an urban context (specifically, in Anadyr'). In fact, without abandoning this comparative research design entirely, I came, in the course of my work, to devote most of my attention to herding life. I combined a focus on gender with a focus on the relation of humans to "nature." I understand relations to nature to include both material and symbolic interactions with the environment and non-human entities (including animals and different kinds of spirits). I studied how the gendered division of

labor operates in everyday life and in ritual activities (Vaté 2003, 2005). This enabled me to reveal an organization based on two different yet complementary kinds of roles, which I call “indirect” and “direct responsibility.”

Men, being in direct interaction with herds or game, are considered to be direct providers of meat. Through their activities, they have a direct responsibility for the herd or game, which they fulfill through employing their technical knowledge and skills. Women’s responsibility for the herd is indirect. Women elaborate their responsibility for the herd through their actions in ritual and by ensuring that prohibitions and duties in the domestic spheres are respected. Indeed, the nomadic housing (called *iarany* in Chukchi or *iaranga* in its Russian version) and its hearth form a microcosm that connects tundra dwellers symbolically with the herd and the land. Through representations linked to its hearth, the *iaranga*, where notions of prohibitions and prescriptions are permanently at stake, constitutes a moving landmark defining the herding community’s relation to the landscape (see also Vaté 2006, 2007, 2010). By dwelling, taking care of the housing and performing most of the rituals, women have an indirect but vital responsibility for the herd and the wider landscape. This makes them indirectly responsible for the men’s success: male technical knowledge and ability need to be validated by female ritual knowledge and symbolic action. In this way, my research allowed me to emphasize the importance of women in herding and hunting activities—a point that has often been neglected (with a few notable exceptions, such as Bodenhorn’s study of Alaskan Inupiat society, published in 1990). These conclusions have led me to argue as follows: While it is true that the position of indigenous women in contemporary urban contexts is largely the result of Soviet policies, this Soviet-era development did not always stand in a contradictory relation with the position that women occupied and the roles that they had long played in reindeer herding and hunting life, at least in Chukotka.

In a second phase of my fieldwork, however, I also looked at gender shift and religious practices from another perspective. Since the beginning of the 1990s, with the arrival of Protestant Evangelical movements in Chukotka<sup>18</sup> indigenous women have participated in changes in religious life, which are correlated with shifting gender relations. Despite the fact that women play (or used to play) an important role in ritual activities linked to reindeer herding, they are also the ones who have opted disproportionately for Evangelical forms of Protestantism, and they are most active in spreading the Gospel within their families and communities.

There is no simple explanation for the conversion of indigenous women to Evangelical Christianity.<sup>19</sup> As Hefner (1993:27) emphasizes with reference to Ikenga-Metuh (1987:25), “accounts of conversion must be ‘multi-causal rather than mono-causal.’” My research is still in progress, and, at this stage, I can offer only preliminary remarks. Clearly, however, the role of women as key agents of change is consistent with the role that they played during the Soviet period. It is, therefore, not really surprising that they are the ones who are introducing Protestantism into the homes of Chukotka.

One way to understand the interest of women in conversion—but by no means the only possible way—is to view it as an attempt of women to come to terms with gender shift or, more concretely, to compensate for their increasing absence in the tundra. Indeed, many authors have emphasized the problems that arise throughout Siberia because of the shortage of women in the taiga or in the tundra, i.e., wherever hunting and herding activities are currently practiced (e.g., Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001; Vitebsky in this issue). Though there are still some women living in the Chukotkan tundra, Chukchi herders complain about the absence of women, and Chukchi women do appear to be more likely to complete their education and opt for village or even city life. Clearly, the dearth of women in the tundra creates material problems—since women are necessary for the smooth management of activities in daily life—but it also raises questions concerning the proper organization of rituals. How can the herding of reindeer—which is economically important for all and which is thought to be perpetuated in part by the symbolic action of women—continue successfully if there are no women to perform the corresponding rituals? The adoption of Protestantism may provide an answer to this question, as it permits women to continue to play a symbolic role in herding activities while at the same time living in the villages. In point of fact, I have been able to determine that the well-being of the herd is still a central concern in the prayers of female converts. What is more, I have often observed how converted women communicate insistently to the herders whom they meet in the village that they, the herders, should also pray for the herd. From this perspective, it can be seen that Pentecostal Protestantism provides women with an alternative to a ritual system that is no longer appropriate for the life they wish to lead today. Conversion might, therefore, be understood as a solution to problems that arise with gender shift.

In its turn, conversion to Protestantism itself promotes changes in the gender contract by leading converts to adopt the rules of the Bible, as they are understood within Evangelical



movements. Reconciling these rules with everyday life is sometimes quite difficult, and women often discuss the ensuing paradoxes during religious services. For instance, in interpretations of the Bible that are current among the converted, women are supposed to follow their husbands and obey them; but, considering that most of the spouses of converted women are not believers and do not follow Christian precepts, how can the converted women comply, without denying their new faith?

A second paradox is equally refractory to simple solutions. In the Pentecostal and Charismatic groups present in Chukotka, women are not fully able to perform the function of a pastor; and, most notably, they are not allowed to baptize others. Yet there are a good number of village churches that are made up only of women. There is one Charismatic Church in Anadyr that solved this problem by allowing selected women to perform baptisms, but the Pentecostal Church arranges for male pastors to go to the “villages without men” for the special purpose of performing collective baptisms. In this way, even if they are largely the initiators of this movement of conversion, women are not really able to promote entry into the new faith through baptism. Their ability to act effectively is thus limited.

These two paradoxes reveal a change in the status of women. Although women are playing an active role in diffusing Protestantism, they are not, it seems, in a position to exercise fully a degree of responsibility that matches their level of commitment to this new religion. Through conversion, women have, perhaps, found a way to continue to exercise their ritual function over herding by other means; but, at the same time, they lose, or so it seems to me, the specific form of equality and recognition that they had in the Chukchi system. Their ritual activities are now subordinate to those of men (in particular to the pastor—be he indigenous or not), rather than being complementary.

To sum up, my research on changing gender relations, as I could observe them in the field, has led me to raise questions about both continuity and ruptures in the kinds of positions that Chukchi women have occupied in rural and urban contexts up to the present day. My strategy has been to attempt to define the grounds on which shifts in gender relations have occurred; but this has also led me to conclude that “gender shift,” as it is defined in the first section of this introduction, is itself part of a larger bundle of processes pertaining to changes in other spheres of social life, for example, religion.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, present-day gender relations in northern communities deserve a more locally oriented analysis reconsidering the existing concepts of gender and kinship (Collier and Yanagisako 1990) and leading beyond the widely spread stereotypes about male and female roles. Such analysis also requires the ability to discriminate between the effects of post-Soviet socio-economic crisis and the more recent trends and developments. The concept of gender shift may help us to work out an efficient approach to studying changing family and gender relations in Northern communities of Russia.

The workshop on the gender shift held in May 2008 and the resulting collection of papers has not only expanded the geographical and methodological frameworks of research on changes in gender roles and contracts, kinship, and family relations. It has also enhanced our understanding of gender shift with its underlying multiple and diverse processes unfolding in different spheres of life in Northern Russia, ranging from family, gender and sexual relations in taiga and rural settings, to finding a nanny or a sexual partner in a megalopolis, and through to general socio-political activism of women and present-day status of men.

Our discussions and field experiences of gender shift have demonstrated that both male and female residents of Northern communities share the common post-socialist realities affecting family and gender relations along with other vitally important spheres of their life. Considering this, the concept of gender shift cannot be understood if taken out of the context of people's everyday life practices impacted by recent socio-economic and political changes, and growing industrialization and globalization of the Russian North.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Russian North includes a vast territory stretching from the European part of Russia, to Siberia, and the Russian Far East. This territory, characterized by extreme geographical and climatic conditions, includes the Far North (*krainii sever*), which include mostly circumpolar areas, and areas with status equal to that of the Far North (*territorii, priavnennye k krainemu severu*). Together, these territories, which are indiscriminately referred to as “the North,” constitute the major part of the Russian Federation. All permanent residents of the Far North and the territories with the status equal to that of the Far North qualify for special social benefits and compensations. In practice, however, “the North” is not only an official administrative category but a space of distinct environmental, social, and political conditions and a symbolic realm with a high potential to evoke a particular imagery.

<sup>2</sup> The proceedings of the symposium “Man the Hunter” were published by Lee and DeVore (1968); see Slocum (1975) for a critical response on the conference’s central tenets and, more generally, the male bias in anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> To clarify the complex issues around transliteration and the use of geographical names: in this special issue, we generally use a simplified Library of Congress system (without diacriticals), as rendered on <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/russian.pdf>. Russian place names are given in conventional English form if widely used (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yakutsk), except in direct transliteration, i. a., bibliographical entries (Moskva, Sankt-Peterburg, Iakutsk). Different categories of administrative units are translated as follows: *raion*—district; *ulus*—district; *avtonomnyi okrug*—autonomous region; *oblast’*—province; *krai*—territory; *respublika*—republic.

<sup>4</sup> The Russian equivalent *gendernyi sdvig* was only once mentioned in an article by Burykin (2002).

<sup>5</sup> *Rodovaia obshchina* (literary “clan-based community”) is an economic unit of indigenous individuals of the Russian North. It is based on “traditional” activities (reindeer herding, hunting, fishing and gathering). Legislators who have designed the federal law on *obshchinas* hoped that these units would play the role of a self-governing body of indigenous clans and communities. However, in practice, since their establishment *obshchinas* have been playing the role economic enterprises employing not only relatives and kinsmen, but also friends and acquaintances.

<sup>6</sup> In the Russian context, in contrast to West European and North American countries, the affiliation to the middle class is defined on the basis of occupation rather than income.

<sup>7</sup> Here we limit our references to several Soviet scientists and officials who studied or worked in the North: Kantor (1934); Sergeev (1955:455-474); Lashov (1973); Lashov and Litovka (1982); Donskoi (1987).

<sup>8</sup> One of the aspects that Barchunova addresses in her article is media discourse on sexual variability and the “homosexual spice” employed in several magazine articles. Female same-sex

encounters are thus portrayed as something quaint. This discourse markedly differs from the one that can be discerned in Georgian print media, where lesbianism is usually described as “deviant behavior” and “threat to the nation” (Kharchilava and Yavakhishvili 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Finding Safonova and Sántha’s interpretation truly thought-provoking, we welcome more systematic evidence as to the social functions of alcohol consumption in this and other Evenk communities.

<sup>10</sup> Having said that, we must notice that (in the Russian North as in most parts of the world) the higher the political or entrepreneurial position, the higher the probability that it is occupied by a man. For an analysis of a similar situation in post-Soviet Mongolia, see Jarry-Omarova (2010). Kulmala’s article also provides an interesting parallel to Peshkova’s study on women leaders in the Ferghana valley (in the previous issue of this journal). In both settings, women strive to achieve moral transformation of their respective communities, but they do so in different spheres. While in Kulmala’s case, social activism is joined with political activism, in Peshkova’s case social activism goes hand in hand with the spiritual sphere—and circumvents the sphere of municipal or state politics.

<sup>11</sup> A contemporary type of reindeer herding, wide-spread in the Russian North, based on shift work of herding brigades. Herders live and work in the taiga for several weeks or even months and then have a period of rest in the village.

<sup>12</sup> A cultural and geographical area of Eastern Siberia located on the opposite (from the vantage point of Moscow) side of Lake Baikal and including two administrative units: the Republic of Buriatia and Zabaikal’skii Territory.

<sup>13</sup> According to Soviet ideology and understanding of labor, the lack of discipline could result in alcoholism and parasitism (*tuneiadstvo*) and, therefore, was to be suppressed.

<sup>14</sup> Among these experts was S.V. Kertselli, who in 1908 and 1909 traveled through the region inhabited by Komi and Nenets, wrote several publications about reindeer husbandry before and after the October Revolution, helped to set up the Institute of Reindeer Husbandry in Leningrad (probably in 1931), and propagated innovative methods in reindeer husbandry among the Committee of the North. Kertselli travelled across the North of the Soviet Union. In 1929, he participated in the organization of the first reindeer-herding state farm of Chukotka (Omruf’e 2000:79).

<sup>15</sup> Army service presupposes similar qualities as the ones quoted for young reindeer herders, but there is much stronger emphasis on discipline and punctuality.

<sup>16</sup> Some elements of this section of the introduction were presented at the Third Congress of the “Réseau Asie-IMASIE” in September 2007, for which video documentation is available (DVD “Femmes et pouvoirs en Asie, filmed by Momoko Seto, panel organized by A. Jarry-Omarova and V. Vaté, <http://www.reseau-asie.com/colloque/images-du-3eme-congres/videos-du-congres/>—see also Jarry-Omarova and Vaté 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Since I first arrived in Chukotka in 1994, I have spent approximately three years there, most recently during fieldwork in April 2006. My main field sites have included the reindeer herding village of Amguema and the surrounding tundra, the sea-mammal hunting villages of Vankarem and Nutepelmen, and Anadyr', the capital of Chukotka.

<sup>18</sup> Indigenous peoples of Chukotka did not show much interest in Russian Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century (Znamenski 1999a:30-31, 1999b). The Orthodox Church became more visible in Chukotka in the 2000s, but it is mostly restricted to urban contexts. In none of the villages where I did my fieldwork is there an Orthodox Church.

<sup>19</sup> For a number of reasons, it is not possible to quantify precisely the success of the Evangelical churches in Chukotka. Their impact is obvious, however, to fieldworkers. For more on conversion to Evangelical Christianity among the Chukchi, see Vaté 2009.

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