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Reinventions of an Old Tradition: Orthodox Processions and Pilgrimage in Contemporary Finland

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Introduction

Finland is geographically and culturally between East and West. When Christianity reached the area known today as Finland about a millennium ago, the Orthodox faith spread from the East and the Roman Catholic faith from the West. Like many other areas between competing superpowers, the borders of Finland have been constantly changing over the centuries and the region has formally belonged to both Sweden (until 1809) and Russia (1809–1917), while managing to maintain its distinct culture and language.

The Orthodox tradition has been present in the southeastern parts of today's Finland ever since it was first Christianized. A few years after Finland's independence in 1917, the Finnish Orthodox Church decided to change its jurisdictional position and became autonomous under the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1923. The Orthodox Church acquired the status of a national church alongside the Lutheran Church. Today, the Church has about 62 000 members, accounting for 1.1 percent of the population of Finland (Kupari 2016; Trostyanskiy 2011).

After the Second World War, Finland lost significant parts of its easternmost territories to the Soviet Union, including most of Karelia, where the majority of the Orthodox lived. Over 400 000 Finnish Karelians became internally displaced people who were evacuated and resettled in other parts of Finland. These included about 55 000 Orthodox Christians, two-thirds of the then Finnish Orthodox population. (Kupari 2016; Laitila 2006.) The evacuees from the ceded areas included about five hundred Skolt Saami¹ (*sä'mmlaž* in Skolt, *kolttasaamelaiset* in Finnish). (see Map 1.)

INSERT MAP 1. HERE

Orthodox Christianity thus has deep roots and a longstanding presence in Finland but many aspects of it remain invisible to the majority of Finns. One such aspect is Orthodox processions and pilgrimages, in which anybody can participate. In Finnish society, the Camino in Spain is probably more well-known than these local pilgrimages. In this article, I focus on two Orthodox pilgrimages in contemporary Finland: first, a long-distance procession of the cross in North Karelia and a related procession which crosses the Finnish-Russian border, and second, the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon

¹ Alternatively, Sámi or Sami.

of Pechenga, patron of the indigenous Skolt Saami, in northeastern Finnish Lapland. My case studies suggest that an overly rigid binary between the institutional and the lived may result in an inadequate understanding of how traditional and new forms of ritual are intertwined.

Annual processions of the cross (*ristisaatto* in Finnish) are held on August 6 in North Karelia, close to the southeastern border between Finland and Russia. The following day, a procession crosses the border to visit abandoned lands, houses, cemeteries, and churches, ceded to the Soviet Union, now situated in the border zone. The presence of the border is explicit both spatially and emotionally, since the villages that the processions visit were divided by the border after the Second World War. A procession of the cross, which can be short or long, is not identical with a pilgrimage. However, when the procession is long-distance, done by a variety of means (on foot or skis, by boat, car, or bicycle) it comes close to what is called a pilgrimage also in the Orthodox tradition.

These Karelian long-distance processions were introduced in the 1980s, when the Orthodox Church was refiguring its place in post-war Finland. Old vanishing traditions were recuperated and given new forms such as travelling by other means than only on foot. Of these, the procession which crosses the border is the only possible way of entering the area. Local Orthodox priests, especially Father Vesa Takala, came up with the idea of a religious procession being an “acceptable” and possible form of visiting deserted villages and cemeteries in what is today the uninhabited border zone. This procession attracts not only Orthodox people, but also Lutheran, secular, and non-religious people, who have roots in the ceded area.

The pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon of Pechenga, the patron saint of the indigenous Skolt Saami — who are Orthodox — in northeastern Finnish Lapland, crosses the border between Finland and Norway in order to visit the lost lands of the Skolts, who were evacuated to Finland after the Second World War. This event is a pilgrimage, but within it, shorter processions of the cross can be conducted. The pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon was initiated in the mid-1960s. In it, ethnicity and minority status are accentuated. Skolt Saami culture is intimately connected to the Orthodox faith. Their distinct Christian denomination set Skolts apart from other Scandinavian Saami groups, a difference that has historically been a source of discrimination within the wider Saami community, but also facilitated the maintenance of a distinctive Skolt identity. (Linkola 2002; Rantakeisu 2015; Vuola 2019b.)

Both the Karelian processions and the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon of Pechenga are standard Orthodox events. Although rather new, they include ritualized border crossing to memorize and mourn lost lands and ways of life. In both cases, ritual mourning and remembrance of the dead are

central, pointing to the crossing of the boundary between life and death. Both also provide concrete ways and means of addressing and enacting historical trauma and its repercussions in the present.

In this article, I focus on two aspects of my case studies. First, I assess the role of the physical border between nation states but also other boundaries, most notably those between human activity and non-human nature, and between life and death. In both pilgrimages, the Orthodox ritual *panikhida*, the service for the dead, functions as a means of remembrance and loss. The processions function not only as religious events and forms of mourning, but especially the long-distance processions create opportunities for embodied silence and meditation in beautiful natural surroundings. These events thus contain many simultaneous and intertwined elements.

Second, I present my cases as forms of reinvention of an old Orthodox tradition of procession and pilgrimage. The North Karelian processions have been creatively interpreted and reinvented to reflect a variety of non-religious meanings such as changes in historical borders and love of nature. The pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon has become a major event to remember and give recognition to the history and present of the Skolt Saami. In both cases, the result is a combination of priest-led institutional ritual and the active agency of the participants. The reinvention is done both through the institutional Church (e.g., new texts and new forms) and by laypeople.

My article is based on participant observation and documentation of the North Karelian processions and the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon on different occasions.² I will first present a short contextualization, then move on to some theoretical reflections relevant to my case studies, which I then address in more detail. In the end, I offer some conclusions.

Orthodox processions and pilgrimage in Finland

In order to link my case studies to the broader context of pilgrimage studies, I reflect on some aspects which help to illuminate how Orthodox processions and pilgrimage should be understood,

² Within the research project *Embodied Religion. Changing Meanings of Body and Gender in Contemporary Forms of Religious Identity in Finland*, funded by the Academy of Finland and directed by myself, the Orthodox tradition was one focus. In 2013–2014, I conducted semi-structured interviews with sixty-two Orthodox women in different parts of Finland, including North Karelia, and in northeastern Lapland among the Skolt Saami. Nineteen of the informants belonged to the Skolt Saami people, all cradle Orthodox. Since I focused on Orthodox women's views on and relationship with the Mother of God (see Vuola 2016, 2019a and 2019b), the interviews do not contain much reflection on pilgrimage. However, the Skolt informants spoke quite a lot about Saint Tryphon even if they did not refer to the pilgrimage. In fact, one of my conclusions is that the figure of the Mother of God is less accentuated in Skolt women's devotion than Saint Tryphon, who remains an important ethno-cultural symbol, also for women. I am not quoting the interviews directly here, but my participation in the pilgrimages were part of this larger project. The Karelian pilgrimages grew into a smaller research project of its own (see Hentinen & Vuola, eds. 2018).

also from a theological perspective. This is partly related to the somewhat different understandings of pilgrimage in Western and Eastern Christianity.

Gaps and emphases in pilgrimage studies

The genealogy of pilgrimage studies has been presented in various publications (e.g., Albera and Eade 2015; Coleman and Eade 2004:1–25; Hermkens, Jansen, and Notermans 2009:3–5; see also the introduction to this special issue). Three aspects in pilgrimage studies still need highlighting in order to contextualize my research.

First, globally, pilgrimage studies have tended to focus on the Anglophone world (Albera and Eade 2015:1). Second, this dominance of English has been accompanied by a strong focus on Christian and especially Catholic pilgrimage (ibid.:10). There has been less research on the Eastern Christian tradition, or it tends to remain a side subject or exception in much of pilgrimage studies. My third point is that there is surprisingly little explicit research on the theological aspects of pilgrimage in pilgrimage studies. There is a noticeable lack of a coherent theology of pilgrimage, and theological analyses are rare (Bartholomew and Llewelyn 2004:xiii-xiv; see also Post, Pieper, and van Uden 1998). Ethnographers do not necessarily consider it required or central even when their informants may emphasize theological ideas and thoughts. Theologians, traditionally, have shied away from doing ethnography, which is why their research on pilgrimage tends to be historical.

Yet, theological aspects are crucial to the understanding of phenomena like those described here. A procession or pilgrimage is at the heart of Orthodox understanding of the purpose of life and human beings, liturgy and spirituality, and these are inseparable even when the religious service is conducted on the move. Taking this overarching theological framework into account helps us to more fully perceive the interaction between institutional religion and lived, vernacular religion.

Some researchers try to fill this gap in pilgrimage studies. For Dee Dyas, the primary understanding of pilgrimage inherited by the medieval Church was not that of journeying to holy places but the Biblical concept of Christians as pilgrims, and life as a pilgrimage (Dyas 2004:94–95, 106). This kind of more theological analysis emphasizes the notion of Christian life as a purposeful journey. The “geographical pilgrimage” is rather the metaphor, a miniature version of that longer, more complex journey (ibid.:102, 106).

The latter thought is accentuated especially in the Karelian long-distance processions of the cross, initiated by a local Orthodox priest, Father Vesa Takala. This case study shows that the understanding of life as pilgrimage, which the physical, place-related pilgrimage reflects and is a part of, is explicitly present in the Orthodox context.

One possible result of avoiding theological aspects of Christian pilgrimage is research in which the difference between pilgrimage and tourism is blurred. For instance, Badone and Roseman (2004), see rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism as no longer tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel. My case studies affirm that this generalization may be too broad: for most participants, a pilgrimage is an act of faith, consciously distinguished from a more touristic trip. It is the Church that offers the practical possibility to do this, “as normal, customary practice of traditional religious life” (Post, Pieper and van Uden 1998:166–169). This does not exclude other aspects such as ethnic identity and visiting lost lands.

The populist, anarchical and anticlerical character of pilgrimage was emphasized early in pilgrimage studies by Edith and Victor Turner (Coleman and Eade 2004:2). Even though the paradigms have shifted, it may well be that these anticlerical and anti-institutional origins have been retained in much of pilgrimage studies. This view reflects the potential binary between the institutional and the lived, which is especially problematic in cases such as mine. Even though clerically led, there is invention or agency in the pilgrimages I studied, whether from the perspective of the institution or the participant. The Karelian long-distance processions are *de facto* largely reinventions of a single Orthodox priest who wanted to replace “one holy place” with the entire natural world and find a way to visit the lost villages on the other side of the border. The processions led by Father Vesa are simultaneously institutional and traditional, but also free and creative — and deeply meaningful — for the participants.

Badone and Roseman (2004:7) mention “roots tourism” as an example of the blurring distinction between tourism and pilgrimage. One of the Orthodox processions of the cross in North Karelia could be understood in this way: it crosses the Finnish-Russian border to the lost lands, and many participants (who are not all Orthodox) join in order to visit Korpiselkä village, where they have their roots.

In this analysis, I intend to at least partly fill these gaps in existing research by focusing on Orthodoxy (not Catholicism) outside the Anglophone cultural and linguistic context (Finland;

Finnish and Skolt languages), and by being sensitive to theological aspects of pilgrimage both as their *raison d'être* and as expressed by the participants.

Procession and pilgrimage

In Eastern Christianity, a procession of the cross is not identical with a pilgrimage. The main difference is that a procession is a religious service moving from one place to another. The cross, the church banners, the icons, the prayer, and the songs are brought out of the church — often just to go around it, but sometimes also to a graveyard, to a lake or river for the blessing of the water, or even further away to another church or chapel.

Theologically, there is one difference between a pilgrimage and a procession: a procession brings the sacred or the holy to a certain place, whereas a pilgrimage goes to a (holy) place. Obviously, walking in a procession can be a part of a pilgrimage, when the boundary between the two is not clear-cut.

A procession of the cross is an old but also variable tradition, which acquires new forms while its core remains the same. It thus contains elements of hiking in natural surroundings, unlike the festal processions in the vicinity of the church, which are the most common forms of Orthodox procession. In this sense, the long-distance processions come close to what usually is called a pilgrimage (see also Rock 2015:59).

Processions have always been an inseparable part of the faith and practice of the Orthodox tradition. The most well-known and common processions are those connected to the Easter liturgy and Theophany. A procession is also an essential part of baptism, marriage, and ordination. The blessing of the water as part of the Orthodox procession stresses the meaning of the natural world outside the church walls. The sanctification of nature is important for the Orthodox Church.

Another common occasion when Orthodox processions take place in Finland is at local temple feasts. Every Orthodox place of worship (usually called a “temple”) is dedicated to a patron saint or a specific feast day of the liturgical year. The Karelian long-distance processions, too, are mostly connected with these *praasniekka* feasts.³

³ The Karelian term *praasniekka* is derived from the Russian word meaning holiday, festival and pleasure. *Praasniekka* or temple feast is a religious feast held on the memorial day of the patron saint of a church or chapel. They have traditionally been important events in Orthodox Karelia. (Hentinen, Kupari, Leskinen, and Vuola 2018:28–29.)

In this article, I will not draw a firm distinction between pilgrimage and procession. The pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon of Pechenga is by definition a pilgrimage, but at least one procession is celebrated within it. In North Karelia, long-distance processions of the cross acquire the character of pilgrimage when visiting important places such as Korpiselkä, a village on the Russian side of the border.

Eastern and Western understandings

Despite the common Christian heritage, there are important differences between Eastern and Western pilgrimage traditions. The word for pilgrimage that is used in the Orthodox Church is *proskynēsis* (“reverence,” “worship,” “devotion”), which stems from the verb *proskyneó* (*proskinó*), “to kneel and worship.” In the Catholic and Protestant churches the term for pilgrimage stems from the Latin word *peregrinari* (“to be or live in a foreign land,” “to go abroad,” “to wander,” “to travel”) as do its derivations *peregrinus* (“a pilgrim”) and *peregrinatio* (“pilgrimage”). The Latin word emphasizes the aspect of traveling, the journey. The Western Christian models of pilgrimage tend to stress the state of transition and journeying, whereas Eastern Christian models emphasize veneration rather than movement (see, e.g., Gothóni 1993; Rahkala 2010; Rock 2015:47, 59). Both the Greek and the Latin terms are translated into English as pilgrimage and pilgrim, despite their partly different meanings.

Orthodox pilgrimage may be interpreted as an effort to be in the presence of the holy. Processions of the cross are public devotional acts, involving clergy who lead ritual and prayer (Rock 2015:48). Rock uses the terms “extended procession-as-pilgrimage” and “long-distance processions” (ibid.:48, 59), which is the term I prefer for the Finnish cases. She also speaks of “ritual walking,” which is marked by keeping silent, praying, or carrying icons. In her view, walking is an important ritual movement associated with Russian Orthodox pilgrimage sites. Research on long-distance processions could fruitfully test confessional paradigms of pilgrimage as veneration over movement (ibid.:59). Rock argues that processions of the cross challenge the notion of pilgrimage as an unstructured, extra-liturgical activity (ibid.:48). My case studies support Rock’s analysis, which points to the need to frame pilgrimage and processions somewhat differently in the case of the Eastern Christian tradition. One such difference is their institutional, priest-led character.

Finally, deification, *theosis*, is central to the Orthodox understanding of the human being. Life itself is a journey, a pilgrimage, in which the ultimate meaning and goal is deification. Through purification of the soul and the body, it is possible for a human being to reach toward his or her

original being as an image of God, although this is never fully achievable. This idea of life as a journey and a pilgrimage becomes concrete in a procession. Participants both follow their own unique life journeys and take part in something larger and older than themselves.

North Karelian long-distance processions of the cross

My interest in the North Karelian Orthodox processions of the cross has a long history: in the early 1980s, I participated in one of the very first long-distance processions organized by Father Vesa, after an ecumenical youth meeting held in Finland. I returned in 2015 and 2017 with some colleagues, including Hanna Hentinen, a photographer who has been documenting the North Karelian processions since 1989. We published a bilingual book (Finnish and English) with her pictures and four articles (Hentinen and Vuola, eds. 2018). In March 2017, I participated in the cross-country skiing procession and in August in the procession which crossed the border to Korpiselkä.

As mentioned, because of the post-war atmosphere of national homogeneity in Finland, Orthodox religion was often regarded with suspicion, as something Russian. For the Orthodox evacuees, the pressure to adjust to the majority was great. For example, the public practice of processions and blessings of the water diminished. It took a few decades of invisibility before Orthodox processions became public events again. When long-distance processions in North Karelia were reintroduced in the early 1980s, they were unfamiliar to many people, even those who were Orthodox. Slowly the old and renewed tradition was established.

Father Vesa Takala retired in 2013, after serving as a traveling priest in North Karelia for over thirty years. The Orthodox Church has traveling clergy in sparsely populated areas. These priests have no parish of their own, but serve parish members in a larger area. Father Vesa has been central to the reinvention and reintroduction of long-distance processions, not only in his home region of North Karelia, but as an inspiring example for similar events in other Orthodox parishes. Before he was ordained, he was a professional photographer. He has thus documented many processions over the years. He told: “I think it was in 1980 when the first procession between the monasteries of Valamo and Lintula was organized. It was about ten kilometers ... At some point, I walked next to Igumen Panteleimon, and he made a proposal about processions in the Ilomantsi region where there are sanctuaries at a suitable distance. I was enthusiastic about the idea — being the wilderness person who likes to hike that I am. The same summer we organized our first long-distance procession.” (Father Vesa 1995.)

He described the first processions: “Well, it was like ... we first felt a little awkward about being so exposed. People passing by in cars were wondering what was going on. They could turn around, pass us again, park by the roadside to take pictures. When we came closer, they packed their cameras and turned their backs to us. I think there was a feeling of shyness on both sides ... But we never got negative feedback, nobody criticized our processions. There was also the feeling of people experiencing something beautiful ... Nowadays the people in this region are used to processions. They might even wait for them. They may leave their cars on the roadside and walk a few kilometers with us.” (Father Vesa 1995, published in Hentinen, Kupari, Leskinen and Vuola 2018:13).

Long-distance processions are usually done walking from one monastery, church, or chapel to another, carrying icons and church banners, singing and praying. For nearly forty years, people have walked, skied, rowed, and ridden bicycles in processions in North Karelia. The processions have become important for many remote villages, which have lost a large proportion of their population as people have left in search of education and jobs. People who have their roots in the area, but do not live there, come from elsewhere to take part in the processions. Earlier, the processions were longer and may have lasted up to two weeks. Today, even the long-distance processions are done in one day, and the distances are not greater than ten kilometers.

Since a procession is a service, it starts and ends in a church. There is always a priest, a cantor, and a choir, even if small; with the people, they conduct the service. The procession stops and faces the priest when he reads from the Scriptures. When the procession moves, the priest often blesses homes and the people living in them, cattle and animals, and occasional passers-by. Theologically, the Orthodox understanding of life as a long procession is constantly reflected in each procession.

The icons and the presence of holiness conveyed by them bless the places along the route the procession takes. If the water has been blessed, it is sprinkled on the participants and the surroundings. Father Vesa’s sense of humor becomes clear when he says laughingly: “especially in the summertime, we splatter it quite briskly ... Luckily, you don’t have to worry so much about people’s clothes, but you can sprinkle the water so that it really splashes!” (Father Vesa 1995).

The Saarivaara procession and the rowing procession to Pörtsämö graveyard

Of the North Karelian long-distance processions, the most popular starts at the chapel in Saarivaara and ends in the church of Hoilola. It is held to celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration of Christ in early August. The temple feast day of each place of worship is depicted in its church icon, which has a certain place of honor in the temple. On the feast day, the church icon is taken outdoors in

procession and its respective hymns and prayers chanted. On long-distance processions, participants also bring liturgical objects from the temple, such as icons, censers, and holy water dispensers.

The route of the Saarivaara procession is about ten kilometers long, and at times, the Finnish-Russian border is only a few hundred meters away. The procession walks on an ordinary road and stops in beautiful places and local houses for rest and refreshments. (see illustration 1.) After a service in Hoilola village church and a meal, the procession continues by boat to the old graveyard at Pörsämö, which is by the lake in the shelter of the forest. The rowing procession is done in big church boats, each rowed by eight to ten people in pairs. These boats have traditionally been used to take people to church from more distant areas, a sort of predecessor for buses, when the shortest and fastest route in summer was by water.

INSERT ILLUSTRATION 1. HERE

A *panikhida* service is held for the people buried in the forest graveyard but anybody present can give the priest a name of a deceased person and these names are repeated several times during the service. Afterwards, according to the old Karelian custom, a meal is served for the participants — and for the closest grave, which is of a young blind woman, who was an active participant in the processions, a small glass of alcohol is ritually served. At night, when the (often) warm August night is already dark, the participants row back to Hoilola, where the event ends. (see illustration 2.)

Father Vesa (2012) clarified the meaning of a procession: “It could be called a pious demonstration, but above all it is an Orthodox service on the move. Liturgical items, such as the cross, icons, church banners and the gospel book, are taken along from the temple and carried to another place. A procession often takes place at a *praasniekka*, temple feast, when we also go to a nearby river or lake for the blessing of the water or to the graveyard for the service for the dead ... When moving, the time should be used for praying. It is important to understand that a procession is not some kind of hiking, but any time a procession is on the move, it is about worship. You don’t take a step without praying. Of course, during a break we can talk about other issues, too.” He stresses that a procession is not tourism or mere walking in a beautiful landscape: the inner meaning of the physical effort and journey is the important thing and reason for the procession. “To be able to concentrate, it is better not to have other sounds, such as motors, in the background,” he said.

Before we started rowing in the dusk, Father Vesa reminded us again that we were not just boating or going somewhere. We are participating in a religious service. People at their summer cottages by

the lake shore would hear us in the silent night where any sound moves long distances across the water — they should hear only the sung prayer service.

INSERT ILLUSTRATION 2. HERE

The skiing procession in the border zone

Not only has Father Vesa introduced processions of the cross on foot, by bike, or by boat, but also on skis. The cross-country skiing procession in the early spring, during Lent, moves on the ice of Lake Korpijärvi, which straddles both Finland and Russia. Father Vesa commented that the timing is based on the need for suitable skiing conditions: enough snow and thick enough ice on the lake, and a full moon because the procession is done at night without any artificial lights. These conditions coincide with Lent and, thus, the silent skiing procession is a way to prepare oneself in prayer for Easter (Father Vesa 2017).

We were skiing in the border area on the frozen lake, with the full moon as our only source of light. At some point, we faced the signposts of the border zone in the middle of the lake. The reality of the closed border made visible and concrete the violence of national borders being redrawn as result of conflict. Religious services were held and food and warm drinks served in Orthodox homes by the lake. Unlike when walking or rowing, the priest and the choir cannot sing while skiing. Thus, the skiing procession is completely silent: we can only hear the rustle of our skis and the very light jingling of small bells hanging from Father Vesa's "backpack cross." (see illustration 3.)

This special icon with a huge cross, carried at the front of the skiing procession, was made and given to Father Vesa for his fiftieth birthday. Because one needs both arms for skiing, the wooden cross is attached to a backpack carried by the priest or whoever is going first in the line of skiers. "We have to move ahead following the cross. The habit is not to pass the cross. If someone does so, he or she should then take and carry the 'backpack cross,'" wrote Father Vesa (personal email to Elina Vuola, March 15, 2017).

INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3. HERE

The reinvention of the old tradition of the procession of the cross comes from Father Vesa's own love of nature and hiking. The influence of this "outdoor priest" is especially clear when the procession is done skiing, rowing, or biking. Since people in Finland row and ski, why not do a procession rowing and skiing? Historically, these have been the primary means of transport in the

sparsely populated, forested and lake-filled country. Although it is no longer a necessity, most people in Finland know how to row and ski, and do so.

“You concentrate and quiet down in the church. Also moving is about silence, because it is about prayer. In a way, you get two things at the same time: physical exercise, sometimes even becoming more fit, if the route is long. But the most important thing is prayer ... Sometimes when a long-distance procession is done on a very narrow road or we are traveling by bike or on skis, you cannot sing and conduct a prayer service.” (Father Vesa 2012.) Before we set out on the skiing procession in 2017, Father Vesa reminded us that when skiing, the rhythm of one’s arms and legs is particularly suitable for silently repeating the Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

The procession of the cross crosses the border

The procession to Korpiselkä, the deserted village, church and cemeteries on the Russian side of the border, is in early August, the day after the Saarivaara procession on the Finnish side. Advance permission is required from the border authorities of both countries. The procession cannot cross to the Russian side of the border without the presence of Finnish and Russian border patrols.

Displaced Karelians can now visit the places where their families came from. After the fall of the Soviet Union, this kind of organized “roots tourism” became quite popular. Many villages and small towns were repopulated by Russian families after the war, so in many cases the houses are still there. However, Korpiselkä is not inhabited, and nature and neglect have dramatically altered the village. The Orthodox church is still there but in very bad condition: the roof has partly fallen down, trees grow inside, and the huge onion-shaped cupola lies in the grass next to the church. (see illustration 4.)

The procession is formally organized by the Korpiselkä society, which has been keeping the local traditions, memory, and family connections alive after the area was ceded. Father Vesa, who led this procession with another priest, told me that many active members of society were Orthodox, and he was their priest. At some point, he came up with the idea that a procession of the cross could be an accepted form of entry to the area where visitors are not otherwise allowed. The Russian authorities agreed: once a year, this formally religious event can be organized, but the participants have to register themselves and send copies of their passports beforehand, and border patrols accompany the group all the time. Thus, this literally border-crossing procession of the cross, was yet another creative reinvention by Father Vesa, who wanted to serve his people.

Celebrating *panikhida* in the presence of Russian border patrols in the wild forests of the deserted border zone — for many participants in the lands of their parents or grandparents — makes the violence and loss explicit without mentioning them once. The *panikhida* service follows the standard format. The ritual itself, in its texts, prayers, and music, do not make any allusion to the loss of land and roots or to the past wars, i.e., the political character of the event. The connection to the place itself where the service is held enables the participant to reach the spiritual, historical, and psychological meaning of the event, including the history of hatred and violence. At the same time, the Russian border guards — who were probably raised Orthodox or are at least familiar with the tradition — recognize the service even when it is conducted in Finnish. Some of them even take part, at least by making a sign of the cross.

INSERT ILLUSTRATION 4. HERE

Remarkably, the Finnish Orthodox priests also pray at the Lutheran side of the abandoned cemetery. The people who had to leave their lands behind were both Orthodox and Lutheran, as are the now deserted cemeteries. Some participants in the procession are Lutheran and probably others have no religious affiliation. This annual Orthodox procession is their only opportunity to visit the land where their families used to live and their relatives' graves.

Most people participate in the procession are motivated by a combination of religion, family history and ethnic (Karelian) identity. The group is only partially the same as in the procession on the Finnish side during the previous day. In 2017, an old woman from Western Finland was there with her middle-aged children. Her Lutheran family comes from Korpiselkä and was forced to leave when she was thirteen. One of the few standing gravestones was that of her grandparents, her aunt, and her sister who had died aged seventeen. They told me that they come every year if they can. They brought a bouquet of blue and white flowers (the colors of the Finnish flag) to the family grave. The Orthodox prayer service that Father Vesa and Father Marko Mäkinen also held at the Lutheran side of the graveyard was very important for them.

Another woman, middle-aged, was standing by the door of the ruined Orthodox church, looking inside. I was taking pictures and was about to ask her if I could take one with her in it. Then I noticed that her face was wet with tears. I talked to her afterwards while we were having a light meal in front of the church. She told me that it was her first and probably last time there. Her parents had been married in the church but they never came back to visit their former home village. The woman told me that she was not only sad but also angry. She said that she had never before

been as much in touch with the emotions — such as anger — that her family has carried throughout the decades because they had lost their home.

The Skolt Saami and the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon of Pechenga

The Saami are an indigenous people that have historically inhabited northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula. They are divided into several tribes of which the Skolt Saami is one. Their traditional home area includes Pechenga (Petsamo), situated in the northwestern Kola Peninsula. The Skolts are traditionally Orthodox by religion, Christianized in the sixteenth century by Russian monks. The Skolts are a small minority both within the Orthodox Church (linguistically and ethnically) and among the other Saami (linguistically and religiously). They are thus a minority within two minorities in contemporary Finland. It is estimated that there are about one thousand Skolts, of whom about 600 are in Finland and the rest in Russia and Norway. Today only just over half of the Finnish Skolts speak Skolt Saami as their mother tongue (on Skolt Saami history and culture see, e.g., Lehtola 2010:66–67; Linkola 2002; Linkola and Linkola 2002; Rantakeisu 2015).

Saint Tryphon of Pechenga (*Pää'ss Treeffan* in Skolt, 1495–1583) preached the Orthodox religion to the Skolt Saami in the sixteenth century. He is considered the patron saint of the Skolts. The Skolts' deep reverence for Saint Tryphon is evident in the presence of his icons in Skolt homes, churches, and chapels. Starting in 1965, a pilgrimage in honor of Saint Tryphon is organized every mid-August in northeastern Finnish and Norwegian Lapland. It is the single most important event that brings the Skolt Saami together annually (see also Kalkun, Kupari & Vuola 2018).

I spent several weeks in northeastern Lapland among the Skolt Saami in 2013. For that research, I participated in the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon twice (2013 and 2017). The pilgrimage lasts between two and three days. It is conducted mostly by car, because the three Skolt villages (Nellim, Keväjärvi, and Sevetijärvi) are situated almost two hundred kilometers apart on opposite sides of the vast Lake Inari. The pilgrimage visits all the villages, thus helping to nurture contacts between and feelings of togetherness among the Skolts. It extends to Neiden (Näätämö in Finnish) on the Norwegian side of the border, to the remnants of a historical Skolt village by the River Näätämö.

The pilgrimage includes several religious services. Similarly to the feasts in North Karelia, the pilgrims also visit graveyards. One of the emotional high points of the pilgrimage is in Neiden on Saturday afternoon, near a small chapel dedicated to Saint George. This site contains both an old Skolt graveyard and a new mass grave. In 1915, the skeletons of ninety-four Skolt Saami were exhumed from the Skolt graveyard for “scientific” purposes. They were stored in the anatomy

museum of the University of Oslo and returned only in 2011. At present, the bones rest in a mass grave close to the old graveyard, topped by an artificial mound and a *grobu* (a memorial hut placed on the grave) erected sometime between 2013 and 2017. In 2013, the mound was still bare. Thus, visitors who did not know its history could cross it without ever realizing where they were walking. Now, the site is clearly marked as a grave. As part of the pilgrimage, a *panikhida* is conducted on top of the mound. It is likely that many of the Skolt participants have ancestors buried in the grave, which adds further significance and intensity to the ritual.

The Orthodox Church is the only institution that provides rituals where grief and relief can be expressed, not just about the tragedies of the evacuation and the loss of ancestral homeland and way of life, but also related to the cumulative trauma due to the long history of institutional indifference and hostility toward the Skolt Saami. The mass grave is a concrete reminder of how the rights of the Skolts have been violated by the peoples and nation states that have claimed their lands as their own. The *panikhida* celebrated at this location therefore also has immense political and cultural significance, even though this is not necessarily explicitly articulated. Overall, the *panikhida* that collectively honors the stolen and newly recovered remains of deceased Skolts epitomizes the inherent potential that Orthodox rituals have to help the Skolt Saami mourn and cope with the losses that they have suffered.

The introduction of the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon in the 1960s is yet another example of the reinvigoration of the Finnish Orthodox Church after the difficult post-war period, not least through pilgrimage and processions. The pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon is important as it honors him not only as an Orthodox saint, but also as an ethno-cultural symbol for the Skolt Saami. Similarly to the processions in North Karelia, pilgrimage happens within the institutional church, is organized and supported but also reinvented by it — together with local active Orthodox clergy and laity.

INSERT ILLUSTRATION 5. HERE

Other reinventions have emerged within the pilgrimage. The ritual mourning and remembering of the dead at the mass grave is one example. In 2017, the local priest and cantor presented new liturgical chants, which explicitly linked Saint Tryphon and the Skolt people. Prayers for intercession and blessing on behalf of the Skolt Saami people thus gave institutional acknowledgment to their history and lived — often traumatic — experiences. The addition of the newly written *ektenia* (series of petitions) and *troparion* (hymn) intensified the commemorative aspects of the services for the Skolt participants. (see illustration 5.)

The pilgrimage ends with a liturgy at Saint Tryphon's Church in the village of Sevettijärvi. In 2017, the only Skolt Saami Orthodox deacon in the world, Erkki Lumisalmi, intoned the *ektenia* in Skolt. With some other Skolts, he has been central in translating texts, including liturgical ones, into Skolt, a severely endangered indigenous language. One of my Skolt informants, in her mid-thirties, commented on the role of the Orthodox Church: "You cannot blame the Church for not remembering our minority. It has done much more than the state."

Conclusions

In North Karelia, processions travel in the Russo-Finnish border area and even cross over into present-day Russia, thus symbolically uniting the region bisected by the border. Saint Tryphon's pilgrimage visits all three Skolt Saami villages in present-day Finland, consecrating the Skolt region in the process. Both feasts can be seen to constitute rituals of healing that allow participants to cherish the culture and commemorate the hardships of their forbears. In the Karelian case, the feast also provides access to an area which is otherwise very difficult to reach. The procession literally makes it possible for people to cross borders and visit their ancestral homelands (Kalkun, Kupari, and Vuola 2018).

Both feasts include visits to cemeteries located in the participants' ancestral home areas. These visits constitute emotional culmination points of the procession or pilgrimage. Ritual remembrance of the departed is important in Orthodox Christianity, which further intensifies the tragedy of having limited or no access to loved ones' graves. Moreover, Orthodox rituals of remembering, which treat the living and the dead as members of the same community of the faithful, provide a concrete way of reinforcing the connection between past and present generations. They evoke the history of the group or people in question, and highlight the difficulties — or even atrocities — they have experienced.

In sum, for Karelians and Skolts, the significance of Orthodox Christianity as a bearer of not only religious but also ethnic identity became accentuated after the evacuation. While the Orthodox Church was hit hard by the Second World War, it continued to function, relocating with displaced Orthodox Karelians and Skolts in their new home areas. In some ways, it was the only institution central to their everyday lives that survived the cessation of Karelia and Pechenga more or less intact. In the decades following the war, the Orthodox faith thus came to constitute a major link between the past and the present. Today, it is the only institution that ritualizes — and in the case of the Korpiselkä procession, enables — the collective mourning and remembering of historical losses and traumas. This mourning gets its deepest meaning in the Orthodox memorial service for the dead,

which in its unchanged form provides a space and setting for specific, historically traumatic experiences of loss.

The reinvented Orthodox processions and pilgrimages in Finland make clear that where confessional frames and boundaries meet vernacular or lived religious practices, they blur several distinctions while remaining part and parcel of the activities of the Orthodox Church, which considers them divine service outside the church building. In this sense, my case studies challenge an overly sharp distinction between the institutional and the individual, where the former is equated with a top-down activity and the latter with agency. I consider this view too rigid and binary: my case studies suggest that there is agency, creativity and change also within institutional structures (of power), and that the very presence of the institution, most notably in the person of the ordained priest, highlights a somewhat different understanding of pilgrimage to that theorized within the Western Christian context.

My case studies thus also challenge the argument made by William H. Swatos (2011;41, referring to Ian Reader and others) that the decline of the established churches is accompanied by a more autonomous, individualized, and personalized spirituality. Pilgrims today can be disconnected from established religious traditions and organized religion. This is probably true in many cases, and I do not question the validity of the argument itself. Rather, I have presented cases in which this is not (at least fully) true.

The question about the relationship between the institution and the pilgrim came up also in the discussion following the presentation I gave on which this article is based. In itself, this question is important and relevant, but it easily includes an explicit assumption about the institution (the Orthodox Church) as a “top-down” organization and the pilgrims as lacking initiative. I challenge this binary assumption, not the issues of institutional power or the presence of priestly (male) authority. The Skolt participants in the pilgrimage of Saint Tryphon valued and cherished the presence of the Metropolitan Elia of Oulu in their remote village as a sign of the institution’s recognition of and respect for their small ethnic minority. Moreover, the religious services conducted during the pilgrimage included new liturgical chants, written by the local (non-Skolt) priest and cantor, which explicitly refer to the Skolt Saami, their past sufferings, and the meaning of Saint Tryphon for them. The Skolt participants commented on these positively (Kalkun, Kupari, and Vuola 2018).

The reason for the somewhat binary and narrow (e.g., primarily negative) view of the “institution” may be related to the emphasis on Western Christianity in pilgrimage studies, mentioned above,

which does not apply as such to the Orthodox tradition. Or, it may be related to a scholarly limitation: pilgrimages led by clergy have received less scholarly interest than those that blur the distinction between religious and secular, pilgrimage and tourism, and tend to emphasize the agency of the individual in opposition to an institution perceived as monolithic and unchanging. Because of the theological understanding of the procession of the cross as divine service in the Orthodox tradition, the presence of the priest and the choir, is necessary. This does not imply by any means that all the agency is theirs or that the tradition (procession, pilgrimage) itself could not change, as I argue in this article.

My case studies suggest that an Orthodox event, organized and led by the church, can make it possible for people to celebrate their identity as belonging to an indigenous and religious minority, to visit lost lands and homes on the other side of the border, and for nature-lovers to meditate, pray, be silent — and ski, row, or walk — in beautiful, remote surroundings under the guidance a fun-loving priest. These processions incorporate both institution and individuals, deep religiosity and non-religious interests, ethno-cultural and historical aspects, continuity and change, repetition and agency.

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