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Supernatural Belief Narratives

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Cover: *A crossroad in the Estonian forest close to Pangodi.* Photo by Margaret Lyngdoh, November 2021

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President's Address

The highlight of the time since the last Newsletter has been the XVIIIth Congress of the ISFNR, held online from September 5–8, 2021. The Congress was scheduled to be held in 2020 in Zagreb, Croatia, and had to be first postponed to 2021 and then transferred to an online platform. The local organizing committee had to thus prepare for the Congress twice, but their management of the online conference won the praise of all. It was also a very successful conference academically, as ISFNR members from across the world presented their research and shared their thoughts with each other. We missed meeting each other as we have done before, but we were still able to reach out to many people and communicate with each other.

The General Assembly held during the Congress was also attended by a large number of members. The president was elected for a second term. Five executive committee members resigned and new members were elected. The names of all the current EC members are on our website. The General Assembly also decided that, in future, members who do not respond in any manner to the Society's reminders about fees, mails, and conferences for five years will be taken off of the members' list. If one wishes to rejoin the Society, the request will be accepted by the EC without the formal process of applying for membership. The Society will also endeavor to have more online presence and activities. Ideas and suggestions from all members are welcome. The next interim conference of the Society will be held in London in July 2022, and the next Congress will be in Riga in June 2024. Let us hope that the pandemic situation will have changed and we will meet in real time and space.

I look forward to many new programs in the next term of the ISFNR and hope that all members will enrich the planning with suggestions and ideas.

Sadhana Naithani

Editors' Foreword

The density of meaning attributed to crossroads as sites of supernatural activity and liminality inspired the theme of this issue. Crossroads are places of power where one may summon demons, and places of liminality that have enchanted the imaginations of people the world over; they are thus expressed best in folklore. The cover photo of this issue is an attempt to communicate this sense of the supernatural and of the uncanny.

This issue of the ISFNR Newsletter has the focus of "supernatural" belief narratives. When thinking about orienting the focus of this issue, we had reached a saturation point with all things connected with the pandemic, and, thus, the best way to approach the liminality of the times we are living in is to take a step back, for now, into the familiar territory of research on supernatural narratives.

Therefore, we present some insightful articles on legend, belief narrative research, and teaching approaches to education that utilise theatre and storytelling and encompass multiple aspects of issues relevant today. The lead article for this issue is written by Merili Metsvahi on the topic of the consequences of the historical desecration of a sacred river in Southern Estonia and the sixteenth-century inclusive worldview of Estonians that Christian theologians of the time were unable to comprehend. Véronique Campion-Vincent writes about the proliferation of the QAnon conspiracy narrative clusters and brings out their connection with "pedosatanic" links to child disappearances. Elias Kwaku Asiama describes a novel pedagogical tool he calls "eco-education," in which he illustrates how narrating the myths of the Beum people of Ghana can contribute to other kinds of teaching methods among indigenous communities.

The special interview feature this time highlights Terry Gunnell in conversation with University of Tartu PhD student Maria Momzikova. We have a special section on conference and talk-series reports, the highlight of which is the report on the ISFNR Congress held in the beginning of September this year. Organised on a fully online platform, the Congress saw the re-election of Sadhana Naithani as the president of the ISFNR, the induction of new executive members, and the announcement of the interim conference of the ISFNR next year in London.

The folk artist in focus this year is special, and if you click on the QR code you will see the video we made for ISFNR members to help connect with narrative songs from perspectives that are uncommon. This issue also has three brief narratives of supernatural encounters collected from fieldwork. We sincerely hope you enjoy reading the newsletter. Many grateful thanks to all of you who have contributed.

Margaret Lyngdoh
Alina Oprelianska

QAnon
and the "Conspiracy of the Pedosatanist Elite"

By Véronique Campion-Vincent

The QAnon cluster of narratives aggregates other conspiracy theories. The QAnon nebula is part of a general climate of mistrust linked to the exponential growth of conspiracy theories since the 1970s. An important factor in this climate has been the revelations of pedophilia cases that occurred in institutions whose reflexive move was to ignore the victims and to protect their members. Linked with this recognition was the accusation of essential complicity that connected pedophiles with the political and social elites, thereby developing and feeding conspiracy theories. Through an analysis of QAnon productions, we will discuss the importance of this accusation.

QAnon is a movement built around the premise of former President Donald Trump's fight against the cabal of the "deep state" composed of Satanic pedophiles who would find a climax in the "Great Storm," followed by the "Great Awakening." QAnon first made an appearance in October 2017 (in the wake of the other viral conspiracy theory known as "Pizzagate"), and its proponents are thriving, despite the earthquake of November 2020 that saw the defeat of its hero, Donald Trump.

The Evils of Child Sexual Exploitation, the Central Theme of QAnon

Exposing the harms of child sexual exploitation is at the heart of the QAnon movement. The first example is taken from the QAnon France website:

> "*But their most profitable activity is by far the most sordid / Human being trafficking, and mainly child sex trafficking.*"
>
> "*Human trafficking is an industry that generates $32 billion.*"
>
> "*More than eight million children disappear each year in the world. For example, in France, the number of children who disappear and are not found the following year is 11,000 each year.*"

The QAnon review article in *The New York Times* outlines this key role:

> *QAnon is the umbrella term for a sprawling set of internet conspiracy theories that allege, falsely, that the world is run by a cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles who are plotting against Mr. Trump while operating a global child sex-trafficking ring. (Roose 2020b)*

Mole Children

The pandemic seemed to fuel the movement and beliefs regarding the sexual predation of children. The installation of tents in New York's Central Park in the spring of 2020 was interpreted to be a rescue operation for "mole children" —victims of the "deep state" who have escaped and have been hiding underground are thus saved. The tents and the health reasons are decoys: "COVID-19 does not exist!" "These rescue activities were organized by POTUS."

Timothy Holmseth, who seems to live largely in an imaginary realm, posts a question on his website on April 1, 2020: "Is there a child rescue operation in New York right now?" He also asserts: "A recent U.S. military operation rescued

35,000 'malnourished caged and tortured' children from tunnels beneath New York City's Central Park and other unnamed U.S. cities."

Reuters, in a fact-checking article published June 15, concluded Holmseth was the only source, and no other evidence had emerged. The journalists stressed that this lack of evidence only strengthened the believers in their certainties:

> *Reuters was unable to find any reliable reports pertaining to the post's central claim that 35,000 children had been found and rescued from "secret tunnels" in the U.S.'s largest city.*
>
> *Users on social media appear to take this as a sign of the media's complicity in obscuring the relevance of this story, an argument often used in conspiracy theories. One comment on the lack of reporting states: "They want this to be hidden." (Reuters 2020)*

QAnon and the #savethechildren Movement

After actions on Facebook and Twitter against QAnon pages, a mobilization campaign around the #savethechildren hashtag led to considerable developments for the movement. A *New York Times* article quoted Marc-André Argentino from Concordia University at Montreal, who studies QAnon. Argentino:

> *identified 114 groups that bill themselves as anti-trafficking concerns, but are actually dominated by QAnon content; and indicated that, between July and the end of September "these groups have increased their membership by more than 3,000 percent—yes, 3,000 percent—with a corresponding surge in activity. 'It's bringing down the average age of a QAnon follower,' Mr. Argentino said. 'In 2019, this was mainly a boomer movement. Now we're seeing millennials and Gen Z getting on board.'" (Roose 2020a)*

This activity entailed the appearance of videos in which "parents sound the alarm about pedophiles brainwashing and preying on children" (Roose 2020a). And amidst the organization of parades and demonstrations throughout the United States that would take place during the summer of 2020, 200 demonstrations were planned for Saturday, August 22nd (Zadrozny and Collins 2020).

Why are the Extreme Allegations about Child Sex Abuse so Convincing?

The QAnon conspiracy clusters circulate extreme figures about child sex trafficking:

> *In the United States, QAnon commonly cites the figure of 800,000 annual disappearances of children. These extravagant claims result in significant levels of approval. Thus in a survey conducted from December 21 to 25, 2020 in the United States, the Ipsos Institute asked to identify as true or false the statement: "A group of Satan-worshipping elites who organize a sexual network of child exchanges are trying to control our politics and our media". Only 47% answered "it's not true"; 37% did not know if the statement was false or true and 17% thought it was true. (Newall 2020)*

The analysis of these appalling figures shows that conflicting definitions of child sex trafficking exist. The very broad American legal definition classifies as child sex trafficking a paid meeting with an underage prostitute, even if it lasts only one hour. This distressing social fact is far from the worst-case scenarios that still feed blockbuster films. Many of the figures circulating are based on poor-quality studies. They are also wrongly interpreted. The 800,000 "disappearances" assumed to occur annually in the United States correspond in fact to a figure half as high at 424,606 reports of disappearance, of which most (99%) cases are resolved by the return of the child. The unresolved cases, mostly parental abductions or runaways, are indicators of dysfunctional situations. Hence, the persistence of fantasy narratives, which attribute the ills to external and all-powerful sources (Hobbes 2020).

The QAnon accusations have led all commentators to refer to the 1980s in the United States when the very real problem of child sex abuse was already mixed with the imaginary problem of satanic pedocriminality.

The 1980s in the United States: (a) Missing Children

The missing children movement was the first to mobilize public opinion. The dramatic abduction and murder of two six-year old children played a major role in the construction of this movement. The creation in 1984 of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), a federally funded center dedicated to combating child disappearances and exploitation, marked the adoption of more reactive public policies.

Joël Best stressed the pivotal role of figures:

> *The debate over stranger abduction reveals the importance of statistics in the discussion of social problems. Three principles seem clear: big numbers are better than little numbers; official numbers are better than unofficial numbers; and big, official numbers are best of all.* (Best 1988, 90)

Thirty-three years later, the recipe remains the same except for the preference for official figures that have fallen victim to the considerable progress of the rejection of institutions.

"The dramatic abduction and murder of two six-year-old children played a major role in the construction of this movement."

The 1980s in the United States: (b) Satanic Panic

At the same time, the Americans of the 1980s were alarmed by the existence of a satanic cult with more than a million followers and some 60,000 babies being sacrificed every year. Ignored by the serious press, these allegations were centrally present on television programs and radio. They inspired documentaries and fictional media. Therapists helped "survivors" recover—often under hypnosis—from memories of the abuse they had suffered, and these survivors successfully sued their abusive parents in civil court.

For sociologists studying the phenomenon, the contrast with the missing children's movement was striking because there was no evidence of the allegations' reality (Best 2001).

I have discussed this collective fear, which had spread to the United Kingdom but had spared France, proposing an interpretation of it:

> *Contemporary legends . . . make ambiguous and stressful situations controllable and interpretable. . . . Though a legend may be unbelievable, it embodies very real fear and anguish. When the eighteenth-century Parisian hostess Mme du Deffand was asked, "Do you believe in ghosts?" she answered, "No, but I am afraid of them." The same thing might be said about the extravagant allegations that are made today in the United States about the extraordinary evil-doings of satanic sects or cults.* (Campion-Vincent 1993, 238)

The craze for the idea of a bloody satanic cult was short-lived when some survivors sued—always in civil courts—their hypnotherapists for implantation of false memories.

Evolution 1980–2021

Forty years later, it is striking that we find the two themes associated; however, with important differences: traumatic amnesia following sexual abuse, long questioned because of the excesses of suggestive hypnotic therapies, is quite widely recognized although debates remain among professionals. If the term "satanist" is still used, it is as a dreadful trait that is part of the elites' evil essence, but not always being descriptive of organized activities. The accusations of murders of young children, always present, are technicised since they aim to obtain a rejuvenating substance, adrenochrome.

Concern about child sex abuse is an evolving issue. After the centering of reassurance upon the "stranger danger," one arrives at the recognition of the ubiquity of aggressors who are our close ones, our kin, like us. The elites' complicity in multiple sexual cases of abuse, targeting children but also women, is strongly denounced since the appearance of the #Metoo movement in 2017. The success of the accusations in the QAnon galaxy can be explained by the merging of these two issues.

In France

Two recent books have questioned the complicity and the selfishness of the elites: *Le Consentement* (2020) and *La Familia Grande* (2021). Over a long period, marked by what is commonly referred to as the "May '68 attitude" (i.e., an unlimited sexual liberation, normalizing of homosexuality, and sometimes describing children as "desirous" and accomplices), public opinion in France seemed to accept the legitimacy of adults' sexual relations with children and adolescents.

Significant criminal cases play a major role in the recognition of abuse. The Dutroux (1996, Belgium), Alègre (2003, Toulouse, France), and Outreau (2001-2005, Boulogne, Northern France) criminal cases overcame these complacent attitudes. However:

> *One of the negative consequences of the recognition of child sex abuse has been the adherence to the theses of a pedophile conspiracy of the powerful.* (Campion-Vincent 2008, 53)

The existence of merchant sexual networks cannot be denied, and the growth of the internet, which has created a lucrative market for child sex abuse images, has increased their number (Dance and Keller, 2019–2020). But the existence of merchant sexual networks run by the elites continues to be a matter of debate. This hypothesis is so

firmly rejected by the French judicial institution, scalded by the mistakes committed during the Outreau case, that the institution sometimes is over-cautious even when complicities are obvious. Thus it was only 18 months after Jeffrey Epstein's suicide on August 18, 2019, that Jean-Luc Brunel, head of a model agency very close to Epstein, was indicted and jailed in France (Autran 2020).

The numbers of missing minors in France are high. We find the same distinction as in the United States as not always being easy to explain, between reports of "disappearances" (51,287 in 2019) and "disturbing disappearances" (918 in the same year, supplemented by 524 parental abductions, often by a parent living outside France). These disappearances sometimes correspond to murders, and when the murderers are repeat offenders, politicians join grieving families in attacking the judicial institution.

To Conclude

The kidnapping of children by a network of powerful corrupt people acting on a very large scale is a phantasm, a delusion, but a recurring one, exploited by a whole sector of these scary fictions that we all consume. The phantasm is also indirectly used by activists who want to change a public opinion they consider indifferent and to present their causes by matching their demands for redefinition with appalling (but fortunately rare) examples that are likely to stir up the public. Thus, the demand for a more active fight against child sex abuse is introduced by atrocity tales intended to persuade. These are quite legitimate rhetorical arguments, but these atrocity tales remain and play a central role.

The advent of the Internet has led to a development that everyone agrees is extreme in the trade of images of child sex abuse. Raping children can be very lucrative, and it is tempting to choose those children readily available, to rape your own children.

Activists, journalists, and police forces agree on one point: this exponential growth is beyond their control.

> *The distinction between the intra and extra-familial has become tenuous at a time of cyber-criminality, live streaming. . . . The rape of a kid, at home, by a relative may be shared in several countries via a webcam.* (Garde, Sellier, and Zéro 2020, 27)
>
> *Historically, you would never have gone to a black market shop and asked, "I want real hard-core with three-year-olds," said Yolanda Lippert, a prosecutor in Illinois who leads a team investigating online child abuse. "But now you can sit seemingly secure on your device searching for this stuff, trading for it."* (Dance and Keller, 2020)

In France the police task-force PHAROS fights online child abuse; however, its resources are not up to the task, as explained in a recent legislative proposal:

> *Thirteen investigators are in charge of online child abuse. . . . This group is overwhelmed by the cases and has to prioritize certain files. Meanwhile, the scourge of child pornography spreads.* (Proposition 3627, 2020)

To reject the delusional phantasm of a world-domineering pedosatanist elite does not mean being blind towards the seductions and harsh realities of evil.

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The Haunted House in Lai Maw, Shillong

In 2010, searching for contemporary legends in Shillong city, I came across a beautiful abandoned house in the locality of Lai Maw (lit., three stones). In a town where real estate prices were soaring, the house stood abandoned. In the winter of 2017, I went around to ask the neighbours who lived near the house. They told me that in the year 2009, when the house was under construction but nearing completion, two local thieves took shelter in this house after being chased by the neighbourhood watch. Surrounded on all sides, these two thieves committed suicide inside the house. When the new owners came to live in the house, the haunting activity made the house un-liveable. To this day it remains abandoned.

Contributed by Justin Kharkongor and Margaret Lyngdoh

Picture 1

Ding Ksuid
Fire Orbs among the Khasi

By Christine Zenith Mylliemngap

Legends of ghosts and supernatural encounters are common among the Khasi community who inhabit the Khasi Hills.[1] Traditionally, supernatural tales involving ghosts and other-than-human persons are told and narrated around the family hearth or during the funerary vigil period. The narrations of ghost stories are also an integral part of the Khasi funerary customs. When someone dies in the community, a vigil period known as *peit miet*[2] is observed for five days and nights. During this period, the body of the deceased is kept at home for relatives, neighbors, and friends to come and pay their final respects. During this vigil period, relatives and friends—particularly the youth—treat themselves to indoor games, jokes, and ghost stories in order to stay awake and pass the time. There is a great variety and diversity of supernatural narratives and beliefs in the Khasi hills. In this write-up, I focus on such stories collected from Laitlyngkot village during my fieldwork. Fire orbs exist in other areas of the Khasi hills, but here I concentrate solely in this localized area.

Stories of the *Ding Ksuid*, or the Fire Orbs

Fire orbs,[3] or *ding ksuid*, are other-than-human entities that are widely-known and recounted among the Khasi. Unlike folktales of the Khynriam Khasi community that are well-documented, contemporary supernatural narratives such as ghost stories are not well-known because they are emergent. Stories about the fire orbs, *ding ksuid*, of the village of Laitlyngkot-Umthli comprise one such contemporary folkloric expression of belief.

The villages of Laitlyngkot-Umthli[4] and its adjoining areas are famous for sightings of the fire orbs, *ding ksuid*, and their legends. It is believed that traders and travellers from these villages who travelled mostly on foot on their return journeys from the local marketplace[5] were carriers of these stories. In a conversation with local women traders, Duh Shim (65 years old in the winter of 2003) and Thoi Mylliem (99 years old in the winter of 2006), the following narrative was collected. I present a paraphrased version here:

> *On a certain frosty night some traders returning from the market saw before them a sea of shimmering lights glowing in the eerie dark night. The lights passed solemnly, vanishing and reappearing at times.* As soon as they reached home, one of [the traders] *fell sick, and a diviner had to be called.*

The belief was that these fire orbs were carried by malevolent entities on the darkest nights in certain chosen spots (see Picture 1), oftentimes in the foggy, misty weather. It is also believed that an individual who is particularly susceptible to malicious entities (as a result of having a weak *rngiew*[6]) may fall sick if he or she crosses paths with such fire orbs. Today, while some urban legends such as the "vanishing hitchhiker of Shillong" (Kharmawphlang 2017, 87–98; Lyngdoh 2012, 207–224) are still commonly recounted during the *peit miet*, stories about encounters with *ding ksuid* of the villages of Laitlyngkot-Umthli are fast disappearing from the repertoire comprising easily transmissible narratives. The connections between stories and the physical landscape are intertwined with the beliefs and traditions of the Khasi. With the onslaught and forces of modern material progress, the natural landscape of Laitlyngkot-Umthli is today scarred and destroyed because of lucrative quarrying and mining[7] that have now replaced the traditional livestock and farming economy of the villages. The quarried stones are exported to Bangladesh; the beautiful natural surroundings of these villages are destroyed, and, simultaneously with the environmental destruction, the sightings and encounters with ghostly fires have also disappeared from the oral narratives of the people.

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Internet Resource:
Speak your Roots Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/p/CTLuKZgFMC4/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Endnotes:

1. A small tribal community from the Northeastern region of India. It is generally held that they were one of the first tribal groups to have migrated into the present hills. The Khasis were largely confined to their hills, where, over many centuries of habitation, the Khasi ethos took shape.

2. *Peit miet* is literally translated as "night wake." As part of the customary funeral practices of the Khasis, five nights are observed as "wake" in the event of a person's demise. During these five nights, people gather at the house of bereavement and pass their time playing indoor games and engaging in storytelling. Often ghost stories are recounted, along with other kinds of tales, jokes, and riddles.

3. The sightings of such ghostly fires is not a phenomenon common only to the Khasi but are believed to be of common occurrence in different parts of the world (Walhouse 1894, 293; Fielberg 1895, 288). The tales of the ghostly fires are also known in European lore as the "Will o' the wisp" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/will-o%27-the-wisp) or "Jack O' Lantern". In scientific diagnosis, the "will o' the wisp" is a flame-like phosphorescence caused by gases from decaying plants in marshy areas. The phenomenon is generally believed to be due to the process of oxidation reduction reaction.

4. Laitlyngkot-Umthli villages are two villages falling under the Mylliem block in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya.

5. Lad Smit and Pynursla are local markets adjacent to Laitlyngkot and Umthli village. Traders in the 1960s and 1970s on their return journeys would walk on foot, crossing the river Umiew. The distance between Lad Smit to Laitlyngkot is 20 kilometres and from Laitlyngkot to Pynursla is 22 kilometres. This is as per available kilometre stone at site.

6. According to a perspective from Dr. Margaret Lyngdoh published on a social media page: "In the Christian world view, a person is made of the body, mind and soul. In the traditional Khasi perspective, a person is made up of *met*, *mynsiem*, and *rngiew*. While *met* is the body, *mynsiem* is breath. *Rngiew* is what invests a body with personhood, and it stays with a person through life. It is the quality that allows a person to remain impervious to the evil eye or *ka sabuit*." The post on *Ka Rngiew* on 5 August 2021 on the social media page "Speak Your Roots" garnered a lot of attention and also counter-reactions that have proved fruitful in our understanding of this unique Khasi concept. The expression and discussion of different points of view is something that is important for indigenous culture to engage in. See https://www.instagram.com/p/CTLuKZgFMC4/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

7. The quarried stones that are mined from the village are exported to Bangladesh. For detailed information on this, refer to the report *Expansion of North East India's Trade and Investment with Bangladesh and Myanmar: An Assessment of the Opportunities and Constraints by Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region*, North Eastern Council 2011.

University of Tartu, Estonia

Young Folklorists' Conference

Michele Tita

19th to 21st May, 2021

On May 19th, 20th, and 21st, 2021, students and researchers of academic institutions around Europe and worldwide participated in the 10th International Conference of Young Folklorists, which was hosted on the online Zoom platform. The Conference was organized by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore of the University of Tartu (Estonia) and Tartu NEFA group, in partnership with the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (Vilnius, Lithuania) and the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art (University of Latvia, Riga). The organizers include Anastasiya Fiadotava, Junior Research Fellow at the Estonian National Museum in Tartu, along with the following scholars currently affiliated with the University of Tartu: Anastasiya Astapova (Associate Professor), Kristel Kivari (Research Fellow), Alina Oprelianska (PhD student), Danila Rygovskiy (PhD student), Pihla Maria Siim (Junior Research Fellow), and Ülo Valk (Professor).

As is usual for the conferences of Young Folklorists, the primary aim of the event was to improve the cooperation among folklore scholars in the Baltics. This year, due to the online nature of the conference, it was easy to involve presenters from universities in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine—plus the keynote speakers from Slovenia and the USA—besides the Baltic states.

The online arrangement of the conference was a new and unexpected challenge for the organisers and was necessary due to the travel restrictions and limitations that resulted from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For this very same reason, the conference was postponed twice, in the vain attempt to keep the originally planned face-to-face meeting formula: from September 2020 to December 2020 and finally to May 2021. However, despite the unpredicted and difficult situation, the conference ran smoothly online and was an enjoyable event for the attendees.

The title of the conference was ***"Lore Makers, Law Breakers: Tradition, Change, and People."*** As these words suggest, the event revolved around the ways in which people worldwide carry on and break traditions in these contemporary times, in a period of historical and political challenges. Most presentations connected with this wide topic, including the two keynote lectures. The first keynote lecture was given by Mirjam Mencej, Professor of Folkloristics at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and former Head of the Belief Narrative Network of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. The lecture, named ***"Social Uses of Belief Narratives,"*** was based on Mencej's ethnographic research in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and illustrated the conscious and unconscious usage and manipulation of local belief narratives for the narrators' purposes.

The second keynote lecture was delivered by Elliot Oring, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at California State University, Los Angeles (USA), Visiting Research Scholar in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, Bloomington (USA), and who is additionally affiliated with different fellowships worldwide. Oring's lecture, named ***"To Explain Tradition,"*** was centered on the definition of the word "tradition" and the theoretical challenges and ambiguities that this term carries in folklore studies.

The conference lasted for three days and plenty of presenters gave their contributions through the virtual environment of Zoom. All of them showed interesting perspectives on the ways folklore is transforming, in a continuous tension between the limits of the existing traditions and the need for change and adaptation in our times. The vibrant and enriching discussions that have emerged, allowed by a smooth and efficient organisation, made this conference a valid standpoint for future meetings of (young) folklorists, both online and offline. We all still hope to return to safe face-to-face academic events, but, in the meantime, it is nice to attend online conferences like this and feel enriched and inspired by each other's work.

The title of the conference was

"Lore Makers, Law Breakers:
Tradition, Change, and People"

A Report on the 18th ISFNR Congress on

Encountering Emotions in Folk Narrative and Folklife

Organized Fully Online in Virtual Zagreb

Kikee D. Bhutia

5th to 8th September, 2021

The 18th ISFNR Congress that took place in Zagreb on September 5th to 8th of 2021 was organized online because of the pandemic. The meeting was hosted by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia, with the theme "Encountering Emotions in Folk Narratives and Folklife." The Congress scheduled was approximately between 3–4 p.m. to 9 p.m. (Zagreb Time, CEST), from Sunday to Wednesday (5–8 September), arranged on the Zoom platform and technically supported by the Croatian IT company Penta.

Originally planned as a face-to-face meeting to be held in Zagreb, when the world changed and had to "stay at home" due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was shifted to a fully online format.

The introduction of the conference comprised a virtual tour of the vibrant city of Zagreb, where the hosts shared myths and legends about the tourist spots located within the city through short videos that were available on the conference platform. I think many of my colleagues would agree with me in unison when I write that attending conferences are not merely restricted to listening to inspiring talks that fuel our creativity or familiarizing ourselves with the latest academic trends in the diverse fields of study. Conferences are also about experiential dimensions, the smelling and feeling of the place where the event is organized; walking the streets, scuttling down paved roads while panel hopping; eating and relishing exotic local cuisines; and sipping wine late into the evening while discussing the undisclosed aspects of the myriad papers presented. Conferences are about meeting old friends and filling each other in about our recent personal and professional exploits, sharing stories, making memories, developing valuable affiliations, and fostering strong friendships. It is quite simply a "confer-cation," if I may create a portmanteau of "conference" and "vacation." The conference experience is also about taking heritage walks around the city intersperced with mentorship by our academic celebrities and unforgettable, unplanned coffee table banter.

One of my best friends was made during a conference during an awkward coffee, politely striving to claim the last piece of cake, which we ultimately ended up sharing. The last ISFNR Interim Congress in Guwahati was all about hanging out in the guest rooms, drinking beer on the balconies, and discussing different topics with distinguished academics including Terry Gunnell, Sadhana Naithani, and Ülo Valk. These small vignettes of personal interaction add depth to our conference experiences, and to see our bibliography list live in front of us is incomparable for us nascent scholars. Therefore, for me, the online conference was painful—I could listen to their talks but was denied the discussion over a cup of coffee or that stolen wine.

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Panels and Sessions

All the panels, as well as the keynote lectures, were recorded and were made available for all registered participants to view on the ISFNR website for three months after the Congress. The opening ceremony began with wishes for a stable internet connection and a welcome address by the hosts expressing hope for a successful discussion and deliberation in the coming days. The event overall entailed two BNN committee meetings, a general assembly, a closing round table along with four esteemed keynote lectures, and five to six parallel sessions which included about 152 speakers. On **Sunday (5th September)**, I attended the panel titled "Research Practices and Emotions" as well as "Fear of the Supernatural" (BNN 1), in which Zsuzsa Bálint's talk on "Multi-ethnic Cohabitation Conflict in Gypsy Folk Narratives" was an eye-opener to a scarcely explored area of the Roma (gypsy) narrative. Her presentation proposed the study of oral literature as a source for socio-ethnographic narratives. In her talk, Bálint contextualized the folktale of the "Horse Herdman" and the Roma as comparative to the ethnographic research conducted among the Carpathian Basin, primarily from the Roma-speaking communities; she emphasized how the ethnic cohabitation and confrontation between the traveler/settled-down Romany groups and the surrounding majority society triggers different emotions. Her findings reflected upon the process of storytelling, the manifestations of emotions, and the differences and tensions between these communities in everyday life as seen reflected in the Roma folktale.

Another interesting paper in the next panel titled "Fear of the Supernatural" was presented by Terry Gunnell. In it,

I especially liked Luka Šešo's paper in which he focused on the demonological legends about supernatural beings and conception of "the other" . . .

he discussed some of the important types of Nordic legend associated with the "Wild Ride," noting the difference between the southerly types of telling featuring a single rider chasing a supernatural woman in contrast to the more northern legends in which the ride, made up of a mixture of troll-like beings and the dead, is commonly led by a female figure. The lecture elucidated that these often-frightening accounts were not merely legends but were based on ancient active beliefs about groups of supernatural riders who would take over farms at Yuletide, killing or stealing anyone who got in their way. Equally important to remember is that these beliefs were manifested in the widespread Nordic traditions of groups of disguised men who went round farms at the same time, demanding food and drinks. A final concluding remark made by Gunnell was the seemingly seasonal association in which the summer marked the more masculine activities and the wild ride that was led by a woman during the winter months was more in tune with nature, thereby lending itself to more woman-centric activities in the farmhouse, especially performed during the winter season. Thus, the legend gave character to the tradition, and the tradition gave credence to the legend.

On **Monday (6th September)**, the second day of the conference was kickstarted with six parallel panels in one session. I was spoiled for choice but also faced with the inability to attend many. So, I chose to continue to attend the panel on "Fear of the Supernatural and Other" (BNN 2), convened by Mirjam Mencej. Margaret Lyngdoh, Bela Mosia, Luka Šešo, Eva Pórdís Ebenezerdóttir, and Julian Goodare presented their fantastic and intriguing papers focused on the emotion of fear surrounding the supernatural, the dead, and demons. I especially liked Luka Šešo's paper, in which he focused on the demonological legends about supernatural beings and conception of "the other" in which these supernatural entities are part and parcel of the society. It examined how belief and legends about such beings have the purpose of determining relationships and somewhat "out-casting" a group from the majority or known. Within a community, he explored how the idea of manifesting the attributes of the supernatural beings and negative connotations of these beings into the "other" living within the community somewhat emphasizes the importance of the community member who remains marginal in the wider community setup of the society. After the keynote lecture by Ülo Valk, the last session included another six parallel sessions where topics such as "Horror and Intentions"; "Minor Genres and Emotions"; "Animal Emotions"; "Memory, History and Emotional Narratives"; "Narratives, Places, and Emotions II" and "The Fear of the Dead" (BNN 4) were in place. During this session, I was determined to sample a bit from every panel because the topics were much too enticing to restrain myself. So, I did what any seasoned conference attendee would do: I attended one speaker per panel. Thanks to the virtual platform, I "zoomed" between rooms with the click of a mouse without the huffing and puffing that might have ensued had I adventured to do this in the real mode. I think part of the charm of a virtual conference is that when one wants to change panels and attend another speaker, all one needs to do is to shift the key and enter another "room" to become a part of a completely different topic.

Tuesday (7th September), the third day of the conference, was a lot easier. There was only one panel with five parallel sessions and a closing keynote lecture by Jan Plamper. After that, there was a General Assembly during which the future of ISFNR meetings, inclusion of new research groups, and prospects for future ISFNR conferences and their outcomes were discussed. In addition to this, office responsibilities were distributed in shifts with the terms and conditions relating to membership presented and discussed democratically.

The session on **Wednesday (8th September)** was the final day of the conference. One of the papers that caught my attention was by Felicity Wood, who presented on "Fear, Fascination, and Desire: Oral Narratives Concerning the Mamlambo, a South African Wealth-giving Spirit." She examined the ways in which the figure of the Mamlambo has changed during the recent decades, examining what this reveals about contemporary South African society, and the needs and desires of many people who live in the society. This time during the ISFNR, we had an eclectic mix of ethnicities and representations from different parts of the world, and the various panels initiated us into the cultural subjectivities of diverse communities, but at the same time the universality of emotion revealed a point of congruence of experiences despite the apparent geographical and linguistic differences.

Reflections on the Keynote Lectures with Nimeshika Venkatesan

The four-day sensational virtual ISFNR conference remains crucial as it is one of the ways through which we keep ourselves up-to-date with the changing times. But, more than that, it was a conference attended in the spectrum of emotions and uncertainties that surrounded it. The pandemic has been an emotional upheaval for many of us, and the various panels brought us a little bit closer to understanding the ramifications of emotional expression and how they influence the way we see the world. Although the pandemic has significantly changed our social behavior and destabilized the conference traditions of coffee tables and academic

chit-chat, it was wonderful to have an academic partner, to orchestrate our conference plans within our homes, just to add some spice to our "home-conference" and create some semblance of the ambiance that we so dearly miss.

During the conference Nimeshika and I, therefore, attended and contributed to one another in terms of sharing different ideas that were spread across the different paper presentations as well as the most intriguing keynotes.

The first keynote lecture was presented by ***Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb, Croatia, and titled "To Touch, to Hear, to Feel: Can Ethnography Dissolve the Narrations of Fear?"***

What I really liked in her narration of fear in the Banovina region of Croatia was how in her ethnographic account about a villager cohabiting with nature, the informant fears the experience of the disaster, but at the same time also learns to support and overcome it together with others by making sense of the disaster. While sharing her observation, Nimeshika was taken by the speaker's point that "the double catastrophe of the pandemic and the earthquake in Zagreb opened a whole new window to understanding empathy and how such narratives lead to the formation of stories; more importantly, her talk highlighted the significance of storytelling as a way of creating tropes based on emotions and emotionality." In my point of view, Renata explores the narrations of fear as the intimate, political, and global tune of our age, deeply embodied in personal and local experiences. Nimeshika and I agreed when Renata quoted Daniel Pavlic in her presentation: "Story doesn't become a story unless someone listens to it or reads it."

The second keynote lecture was presented by ***Ülo Valk, from the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia; Visiting Professor, UC Berkley, USA, and titled "Belief Narrative, Liminality and Emotions."***

Nimeshika and I discussed how in Valk's talk he brought in the perspectives of belief narratives and the role of the supernatural agencies in the process of storytelling. It particularly unpacks the relationship between the liminality, spatiality, and temporality through the in-depth examination of the relationship between the dead and the living. His particular choice of the focus group of the drug addicts revealed much about their preoccupation with death and ways of communicating with the dead. Emotions that are shared in the process of sharing stories constructs a shared reality. The paper consisted of empirical data collected from Estonia and narratives about supernatural experiences with discussion on the epistemological role of belief narratives in building up vernacular knowledge.

The third keynote by ***Jan Plamper, from Goldsmiths, University of London, and titled "Learning from the History of Emotions? Genealogy, Trends, Concepts"*** began with the introduction of the history of emotions in folkloristic study. Personally, I found it to be a very interesting trajectory as the topic of emotion is dealt with everyday but seldom focused on in my personal field. It presented four trends in the history of emotions: history of emotions as history of science; legal history of emotions; history of emotions norms; and conceptual history of emotions. It provided a holistic analytical language that overcomes dichotomies of emotional discourse versus experience, "real" emotion inside the body versus expression at the body periphery, and ultimately nature/biology versus nurture/culture.

The final keynote by ***Sadhana Naithani, from the Centre of German Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, and titled "Absent Emotion, Extreme Action and Ultimate Justice"*** introduced emotions and their presences and absences in literary mediums, specifically folktales. Her talk delved deep into contextualizing emotion theory and feeling theory in examining the presences and absences of emotions in such narratives. The main takeaway from this lecture was the elusive nature of emotions; they may not be actively present in tales, however, even the absence of emotions leads to action in the tale, and this holds true while we consider our lives and worldviews.

Collectively, the keynotes addressed the less-explored dimensions of emotive expressions and their make-up in influencing our perceptions about the way of the world. Naithani, in her talk, presented how she challenges the notion that folk narrative "lacks" the expression of emotion, and argued for folk narrative as being an emotional narrative. It employs a sophisticated language of emotion that includes the listener/reader and is deeply connected with notions of justice and injustice. An exploration of the emotion(s) in folk narrative with reference to the theories of emotion in the discipline of philosophy will offer new insights into the art and craft of storytelling.

Some Remarks

The 18th ISFNR 2021 Congress in Zagreb brought out the less explored aspects of the interdependence of emotion and narration; emotions and other (un)palatable embodied experiences offer a platform for exploring the meaning and power of narratives in various parts and parcels of folklife. In addition to this, collectively, the conference attendees felt that fear as an emotion dominated various panels in their thematic explorations. The unprecedented times

Although virtual conferences have their limitations, it also has been a blessing to make international congregations accessible to people across the world. . . .

of COVID have evoked a sense of fear and dread of the inevitable. Along with it comes the realization that sitting comfortably in my library and following the news happening all around the world—I feel the emotion of "being privileged" disassociates me from the grim realities. This being said, I felt that this Congress on emotions provided us with a safe space for understanding people and served as an intellectual community wherein we can freely share our fears, insecurities, concerns, and expectations. It increased accessibilities and provided opportunities for the people who sometimes are not physically able to travel to such places yet could enjoy the conference from home without worrying about the consequences and challenges of travel. During the closing ceremony, many experts commented upon the importance of the theme of the conference during the period that we all are in. It is being discussed that there might be a change in future conference organization in which many more people will choose to make "hybrid" conferences instead of going back to one form of conference organization. Nimeshika personally shares that "the conference on emotions has been a self-reflexive experience on the whole. The process of conducting fieldwork amidst the pandemic, the uncertainties, and the ambiguities of the covid-unprecedented times have shaped the ways we tell the stories of our informants and our own."

Although virtual conferences have their limitations, it also has been a blessing to make international congregations accessible to people across the world barring financial constraints; all you need is a mildly stable internet connection. Speaking of which, some speakers didn't show up, due, perhaps, to the time difference—as well as possibly due to unstable internet connections. Many times buffering made it impossible to hear speakers. Some speakers were unable to access the "share screen" mode, due to which they resorted to presenting without PowerPoints even though they had prepared them. However, it cannot be comparable to a face-to-face conference, which I realize now, is no less than an academic pilgrimage! I paraphrase Sadhana Naithani by saying that with online forums, new possibilities have opened; people are coming together from different parts of the world and sitting in different time zones, yet reconnecting and sharing the fruits of these events.

Every year scholars devoted to their field of study converse, discuss, and practice their research beliefs, partake in the panel-hopping and coffee-break rituals, forge new bonds, find affiliations, and explore the culture of the country. Lacking in touch and feel, emotions were denied us by the online and virtual platforms. But the positive remains: the fact that all talks were recorded. I conclude this report by quoting Jonathan Roper, who added during the closing ceremony that "In a large conference, there is an inevitable clash. Well, if the permission forms are filled in then it will be possible to watch the panels that we have missed retrospectively. This is one of the big pluses of this format, which in other ways would have been dissatisfying."

Folklore Fellows' Summer School 2021

Folklore and Violence

Pertti Anttonen

7th to 18th June, 2021

The internationally established Folklore Fellows' Summer School (FFSS), which has operated under the auspices of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, was organized for the tenth time on June 7–18, 2021, at the School of Humanities in the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) in Joensuu, Finland.

The event marked the Summer School's 30th anniversary, as it was held for the first time in 1991 at the University of Turku. During the first twenty years, the FFSS activities were led by Academy Professor Lauri Honko (1932–2002) and Professor Anna-Leena Siikala (1943–2016, appointed as Academician of Science in 2009).

The original plan was to have the Summer School in Joensuu in August 2020, but due to the global pandemic it had to be postponed and was eventually turned into an online event. The theme of the Summer School was "The Violence of Traditions and the Traditions of Violence." A description of the theme can be found on the Summer School's public website at https://www.folklorefellows.fi/summer-school-2021/.

63 students from 29 different countries applied. Of these, 28 were accepted and ten were placed on the reserve. Through a planned partnership with the UEF Summer School, two UEF graduate students joined in. However, not all those who confirmed their participation were able to participate after the event was postponed. Eventually, the Summer School had 26 participants from 16 different countries, with two participants canceling their participation at the last minute. Of the participants, 21 were women and five were men.

The teachers were internationally renowned professors and other researchers from eight different countries: Finland, Germany, USA, Iceland, Norway, Great Britain, Armenia, and India. Almost all the keynote speakers also acted as workshop leaders. Their names, pictures, and presentation titles can be found on the above-mentioned website.

In addition to the Zoom video communications service, the Summer School technical infrastructure consisted of two digital learning platforms on the Digicampus.fi Moodle. This featured the course requirements, the scientific program, lists of all participants (teachers, students, and staff), names and logos of the funding organizations, list of members of the national and local organizing committees, and Zoom links to the keynote presentations and their recordings, workshop meetings, and extracurricular online activities. Workshop literature was also provided here.

In practice the Summer School started in April and May 2021, when participants got together online for discussing workshop literature as well as literature recommended for all. During the first week (June 7–11), there were ten 50-minute presentations, nine of which were webinar keynote presentations. In addition to the Summer School participants, the webinars were also available for others to follow, through links shared on the basis of pre-registration. A total of 160 people registered as listeners.

The program for the second week (June 14–17) consisted of four daily workshop groups as well as a joint workshop group meeting on the last day, June 18. The workshops met daily for at least two hours. On the last day, all workshops met in a joint session, in which representatives of each group gave a 15-minute report on their work and their main contribution to the theme of the Summer School.

In addition to active participation, the students' task was to write in advance a draft paper for workshop and/or a draft article for the forthcoming Summer School publication, and to give an oral presentation in their workshop group. In order to receive ten credit points, students also had to write a ten–15 page learning diary. They received a written certificate of their participation on the last day of the Summer School and a written certificate of their credit points later.

In addition to the discussions in conjunction with the keynote presentations and within the workshop groups, the teachers and student participants also had the opportunity to communicate in a virtual coffee room that was open most of the day for two weeks. The Summer School provided an excellent opportunity for international networking and the development of research cooperation between participating

The Summer School provided an excellent opportunity for international networking . . .

postgraduate students, as well as between postgraduate students and teachers. The closing event brought together teachers and participants from around the world from the Folklore Fellows' Summer School during its 30-year history.

Regarding the main topic of the Summer School, the traditionalization of violence, much attention was given to violence as a content element in narratives, as well as ethnic violence and asymmetrical power relations in colonial and post-colonial settings and encounters, including the act of documentation and archiving of folklore. Questions of performance took center stage as violence was understood as a subjective and contextual category, calling for the researchers' reflections on their own positionality. Judging from the final discussion, everyone was enthusiastic about their participation at the 2021 FF Summer School.

Report on the Online Literature and Folklore (LAF) Talk Lecture Series 2021

Unravelling Tales: Exploring Intersections Between Folkloristics and Literature

Nimeshika Venkatesan

8th July to 26th August, 2021

During my period as a visiting scholar, I spent approximately ten months (two semesters) abroad at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu. It remains the most illuminating time of my academic journey, during which I not only took advantage of enrolling in some of the amazing courses taught at the department, but I was also presented with opportunities to travel to other European countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Galicia, and many more, to participate in conferences. It was during countless hours spent at the department library post-midnight that I slowly forged a durable friendship with a colleague who was a research scholar at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore. The study abroad culminated in being accepted as a part of the ISFNR family with a few publications and a formidable shift in the theoretical framework of my thesis. After the end of my term, I returned home inspired to take on the mammoth task of completing my doctoral thesis armed with wholesome personal and professional affiliations with like-minded colleagues including Asta, Dario, Liisi, Camille, Rose, and my close accomplice and fellow folklorist, Kikee.

In 2020, when the world was hit by the global pandemic, people turned indoors to the safety of their homes and the comfort of online forums. Social interactions underwent drastic changes and the way people hang out, have dinners and dates, and attend conferences and lectures has been completely reinvented to fit the virtual universe. One day while conversing with Kikee over Zoom, we conceived the idea of an online lecture series. Soon the ungodly hours of brainstorming came to life, sustained by regular discussions and planning energized by the support of our well-wishers, who lent our crazy plans a direction. Thus was born the summer lecture series that we proudly called LAF Talk 2021. In retrospect, it is a perfect confluence of what Kikee and I both have explored as research interests in our respective lives; it is the amalgamation of both of our professional trajectories, including literary studies and folkloristics.

The weekly lecture series was a collaborative effort between the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia, and the Department of English Stella Maris College, Chennai, India. The lecture series premiered on the virtual Zoom platform at 6:30 PM IST and 4:00 PM EET and ran from 8th July to 26th August, during which eight invited speakers, hailing from diverse academic domains, delivered 40-minute lectures duly followed by 20-minute Q-and-A sessions with the attendees. The result of the lecture series could be determined partly by the number of total registered participants, which was over 700 attendees. Each lecture series saw a surge of no less than 100 participants, and active participation and the discussions initiated by eminent and distinguished professors such as Brenda Beck, Dorothy Noyes, and John Eade added value to the lectures and opened up windows for furthering future research.

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Her talk demonstrated ways to integrate folklore methods to study literary texts, which was in congruence with one of the important themes of this talk series.

The opening ceremony for the launch of the lecture series was initiated by Ülo Valk, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, who emphasized the need for interdisciplinary engagements to expand what we understand as "genres" and "narratives" as analytical concepts. This coincidentally set the tone for the upcoming talks. The first speaker was Padma Mckertich from Stella Maris College, Chennai, whose talk entitled "Different Tunes, Same Songs—*Bhakti* Tropes in Popular Hindi Film Music" explored how folk musical forms of mystical origins attain a new form within the digital medium of films. The second talk on 15th July 2021 featured Nazneen D. Marshall, also from Stella Maris College, Chennai. In her presentation "The twist in the Tale: The Portrayal of Folktales in Indian Picturebooks for Children," she probed into the art of storytelling and influences of orality infused within the kaleidoscopic world of children's picturebooks. The third talk on 22nd July 2021 by Alina Oprelianska from the University of Tartu was entitled "Make Ukraine Great Again: Gogol's *Vij*, St. Cassian, and Ukrainian Beliefs" dealt with the intersections of popular culture, folklore, and Ukrainian demonological beliefs. She presented a fascinating case detailing the similarities between *Vij* in the Ukrainian writer Mykola Gogol's novella and the witch lore and beliefs about St. Cassian. The fourth lecture in the series on 29th July 2021 was delivered by Sadhana Naithani from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. She provided a refreshing outlook on viewing folk tales in her paper titled "Justice in an Unjust World: Herman Hesse's Fairy Tales." She presented examples of literary fairy tales from Herman Hesse to examine how the fairy tale as a genre of folk narrative is continuously adapted, interpreted, and reinvented through time. Her talk demonstrated ways to integrate folklore methods to study literary texts, which was in congruence with one of the important themes of this talk series. The fifth talk on 5th August 2021 was delivered by P. Mary Vidya Porselvi from Loyola College, Chennai. She introduced the *Sangam* aesthetics in ancient Tamil literature in her talk "Earth as *Akam*: An Ecofemiotic Study of Folk-Lit Contours," wherein she examined the notion of *Akam* through a combination of reading frameworks—namely ecofeminism, semiotics, and folklore—in her examination of select folktales. She particularly emphasized the relationship between the natural environment and the women protagonists of these tales. The sixth lecture on 12th August 2021 featured Merili Metsvahi from University of Tartu, Estonia. Her talk continued on with the idea of nature and its relationship with human beings by presenting ethnographic data and insights collected from the Estonian archives. She explored the contrasting views of the dynamics between man and the natural environment in Christianity with peasant beliefs; while the former indicated an anthropocentric equation, the latter denoted an organic interconnectedness. She posited alternative ways of examining human-nature relationships, particularly through the lens of neo-animism, in her paper called "Pre-modern Estonian Peasant's Relationship with the Lakes and Rivers." The penultimate lecture on 19th August 2021 was delivered by distinguished Professor Mark Bender from the Ohio State University, Columbus, USA. His talk "Translating the *Nuosu Book of Origins*: A Cosmographic Approach" introduced the creation myths in the epic songs of the Yi community from Southwestern China. His talk discussed narratives from the *Nuosu Book of Origins*, and he brought special insights on translation and the challenges about the process of textualization of the epic. The lecture series concluded with an interactive talk with Frank Korom from Boston University on 26th August 2021. His talk, "Medieval Bengali Literature and the Study of Folklore," discussed the medieval poetic form of the *Mangalkabyas*. Through a conversational exchange, Korom presented instances from the Bengali poetic form and explored the intersections of oral and textual interfaces in the wider context of production of folklore in the modern world.

In the concluding ceremony, Ajie George, Head of the Department of English, Stella Maris College, Chennai, expressed her thoughts and appreciation for the working teams from both institutes who made the event possible. She also expressed her optimism about developing a stronger institutional affiliation for propelling future collaborations with the University of Tartu. The LAF Talk Lecture series coming to fruition would not have been possible without the important people who unconditionally helped and tirelessly supported the venture. To name some: Tenzin Passang, Nikitha Chawla, and Veena Mani for the online poster designs and eye-catching creatives; Ishleen Ahuja for editing content and proofreading; Aasha John and Stephy Monisha Peter for designing the certificates given to the speakers as tokens of appreciation; last but not least, we thank Ülo Valk, Sr. Rosie Joseph, and Ajie George for their unstinting support, constructive criticism, and advice, which made this lecture series possible.

The Pühajõgi River. Photo by Merli Metsvahi, Spring 2021

THE RIVER'S **REVENGE**

A Case from Seventeenth-Century Livonia

Merili Metsvahi

As a summary of his "**Essay on the customs and character of nations and on the principal facts of history from Charlemagne to Louis XIII,**" composed in the 1740s, the French philosopher Voltaire stated:

> **Three things exercise a constant influence over the minds of men: climate, government, and religion.**
> (Parker 2014, 1)

In this essay, I am going to indicate how the climate, government, and [folk] religion determined the mindset and actions taken by Estonian peasants living on the shores of Pühajõgi in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Peasants' Revolt of 1642

The merchant and alderman of Tallinn, Hans Ohm, had received two manor houses as a present from the king of Sweden, Gustav II Adolf. In 1631, he and his family settled down in one of them—the manor of Sõmerpalu in Livonia. Soon after their arrival, Ohm ordered a mill to be built next to the village Osula. The foundation of the mill was not strong enough, and the builder of the mill soon died. Thus, the mill could not start working. Next, Ohm invited Adam

Dörffer from Arndstadt, Germany. Dörffer, who was a master of mill-building, chose another place next to the river Pühajõgi as the location of the new mill. The dam was built on the waterside meadow, and the river was dammed up. In the autumn of 1640, the new corn- and sawmill started to work (Gutslaff 1644, 31–32; Põldvee 2008, 178–179). In the year 1641, the weather in Livonia was extremely poor and the harvest was destroyed. The spring of 1642 was again so cold that a normal harvest was not expected. Among the peasantry a strong belief set in that bad weather conditions were the revenge of Pühajõgi, who had been offended because of the dam and the mill built on it. The peasants were convinced that the weather would not improve unless the river Pühajõgi was cleaned. On the first of May, 60 armed peasants appeared near the mill from manor areas on the upper course of the river. The peasants broke into the mill and wanted to burn it down. H. Ohm's wife, together with an alderman from Tartu who was visiting the manor in those days, succeeded in stopping the men. However, the peasants threatened to come again in eight days if the weather did not improve. On the twentieth of May, the men who had taken part in the revolt were invited into the court, but only three of them appeared. As these three persons could not be accused of anything, they were released (Gutslaff 1644, 33–35; Põldvee 2008, 179–180; Valk 2014, 44).

The peasants were convinced that the weather would not improve unless the river Pühajõgi was cleaned. . . .

Author, Merili Metsvahi

Since the weather didn't change—cold wind continued to blow and the heavy rains did not stop—80 men gathered on the eighth of June. They were from the lower course of the river, including from present-day Setomaa. The men from the most distant places took all the iron items and corn from the mill and set the mill on fire. Early in the morning other peasants came and destroyed the dam and the walls of the mill and purified the river. However, the weather didn't improve. In August the rainfalls still did not permit any harvesting or scything of the hay. The peasants were of the opinion that the reason for the poor weather conditions was the misbehavior of Ohm's wife—according to them, she or her peasants had polluted the river by throwing carrion there (Gutslaff 1644, 35–37; Põldvee 2008, 181; Valk 2014, 15).

After Ohm complained to the governor-general, the latter wrote to the land justice Gotthard Wilhelm Budberg and the peasants were invited into the court in Sõmerpalu on the twentieth of July. The landlords and tenants were threatened with a penalty themselves in case they did not send their peasants to Sõmerpalu. Quite a lot of peasants —among them the ones who had done the greatest damage—still managed to escape, and the tenants of the estates where these peasants belonged were penalized. The peasants who did appear were punished with ten or five lashes. They were also ordered to rebuild the mill (Gutslaff 1644, 39–40; Põldvee 2008, 181). In the following days after attending the court, the peasants were truly outraged, both because of their conviction that the weather worsened again right after the twentieth of July and because of the unreasonable command that they build a new mill (Põldvee 2008, 181; Gutslaff 1644, 41).

Johann Gutslaff's Book

After the described events, Ohm felt that his and his family's lives were under threat (Gutslaff 1644, Preface/*Vorrede*). For this reason, he ordered a book from the local pastor Johann Gutslaff (who died in 1657) and financed its printing (see also Kõiv 2003, 398). The book *Kurtzer Bericht und Unterricht Von der Falsch-heilig genandten Bäche in Liefland Wöhhanda* (*Short Report and Lesson on the Võhandu River, Wrongly Regarded as Holy in Livonia*, 1644) is 439 pages long (407 without the Preface/*Vorrede*) and constitutes the best source of Estonian peasants' folk belief in the seventeenth century. Gutslaff's dedication to persuading the readers that the bad weather had nothing to do with the mill built on Pühajõgi was indeed remarkable. Although most of the book is based on Christian teachings, the parts that describe peasants' beliefs and customs are unprecedented and impressive. Besides, it includes the first complete piece of Estonian folklore in its original language ever written down that has been preserved—the incantation that was recited while offering an ox for the deity Pikne into the river Pühajõgi. At the time of writing the book, the custom of offering an ox with the purpose of achieving good weather was still a regular practice (Valk 2014, 17; Gutslaff 1644, 212). In the first part of the eighteenth century, Gutslaff's book was quite well-known. The incantation for Pikne, which has been called the "prayer of Pikne" in the research, was translated into German and reprinted in Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (*German Mythology*, 1844 [first published in 1835], 160) and from there it was included in different works. In 1878, Fr. Warnke wrote in his *Pflanzen in Sitte, Sage und Geschichte* (*Plants in Customs, Legend, and History*), published in Leipzig, that according to the German's forefathers and -mothers, the oak tree was dedicated to the thunder god, and, in the case of sickness, the Pagans went to the oak tree in order to recite the "prayer of Pikne" there. Warnke has included the German translation of the incantation in his book (Warnke 1878, 29–30). Warnke did not pay attention to the fact that the "prayer of Pikne" had not originated from the German-speaking population but rather from the Estonian peasants. The ignorance in differentiating between the traditions of diverse ethnicities has given rise to misinterpretations. The Estonian author Jaan Ruus has presented the incantation as an Estonian borrowing of a German charm (Ruus 1914, 18–19).

Government, Religion, and Climate

Since the peasants' rebellious actions in 1642 were induced by the coexistence of political, religious, and climatological factors, the background of this event can be explained through the three keywords expressed by Voltaire at the beginning of the article.

Livonia and Estonia belonged to the regions of Eastern Europe where the serfdom-related dependency had developed the most; serfdom and personal dependency were expressed in an extreme manner (Kello 2003, 4). The Livonian peasant was a serf who lived on lands that belonged to the manor and "was personally submitted to the manor via his body" (Seppel 2014, 389). The peasants lived on farms that belonged to the manor and could be used by them in return for tribute and corvée, the scope of which was decided by the manor (Siimets-Gross and Kello 2017, 258). During the seventeenth century, the opposition between the manor employees and peasants was strong, and quite a few conflicts occurred resulting in the death of one of the parties involved. The men of the manor who came to the village to collect taxes or to compel the peasants to do corvée were usually armed with guns, halberds, or swords, and although the peasants were not allowed to own firearms, they were quite often armed as well (Kahk 1983, 1108).

The tensions were not only social and economic, but also religious, and the peasants dared to express their anger at Lutheranism. In the course of the thorough church visitation in Livonia in 1667, it was found that there were many "witches," "God deniers," and "despisers of the Holy Sacraments" among the people. Thus, a woman from Rannu angrily told the pastor: "May the Devil take God as well as you" (Kahk 1983, 1123); and in 1695 a man (also from South Estonia) did not allow his children to go to church to take the communion, calling it "the devil's wedding" (Kahk 1983, 1124). Besides the peasants who were possibly pining for the past Catholic era during which the activities of the healers and syncretic activities were much more accepted, other peasants were characterized by simple ignorance about the Christian beliefs because they did not understand the language of the pastors. According to Gutslaff, most of the peasants from

his congregation were not able to pray the Lord's Prayer and couldn't answer the question, "how many Gods are there?" (Gutlaff 1644, 165). The peasants didn't know anything about God, let alone about Christ (Gutslaff 1644, 150).

Thus, there was a huge difference between the peasants' and the state officials' religious stances. The state tried to do its best to bring the peasants closer to the Church and to discipline them with the help of religion, but this was an arduous task because the peasants' views of the world and spheres of value generally remained remote from those of the upper classes. From this angle, it is remarkable that the Estonian peasants' ways of understanding the world influenced the German-speaking population, and even did so for the higher strata among the Germans, including the Lutheran pastors themselves. Gutslaff notes in his book that some pastors even held the view that the bad weather was the consequence of polluting the river (Gutslaff 1644, 17–18, 287). Adoption of such an erroneous conception by Gutslaff's colleagues was an indication that the need for a book that represented the opposite view was urgent.

The impetus that made these social and religious tensions unequivocally evident in the year 1642 was the climate of this period. According to the climatic evidence, the year 1641 was the coldest winter ever recorded in Scandinavia (Parker 2013, 5), and the same was most probably valid regarding South Estonia (at that time Livonia) as well. The summer of 1642 was the twenty-eighth coldest recorded in the northern hemisphere, and that of 1643 the tenth coldest over the past six centuries (Parker 2013, Preface xx). The extraordinarily cold climate was not only a regional feature but the circumstance that characterized the entire globe:

> **Abnormal climatic conditions lasted from the 1640s until the 1690s—the longest as well as the most severe episode of global cooling recorded in the entire Holocene Era—leading climatologists to dub this period "The Little Ice Age."**
>
> (Parker 2013, Preface xx)

Since the lives of peasants were tightly interconnected with the environment, the increase of social tensions between different social groups aided by the poor weather conditions was self-evident. Another important impetus behind the acute social clash was the confrontation between the animistic attitude towards the world and the Lutheran refusal to accept such an attitude.

How Can a River take Revenge?

To write an exhaustive book, Gutslaff had spoken with local peasants, among others with those who were most knowledgeable about the beliefs and customs connected with the river Pühajõgi—Vihtla Jürgen, who was called Piksepapp ("pope of Thunder"), a very old man from whom he wrote down the "prayer of Pikne," and Lettuiske Michel who was responsible for the Pühaläte (lit., "sacred spring") next to Pühajõgi. Gutslaff had heard from the peasants that there had been at least five former attempts to build mills next to Pühajõgi near the Sõmerpalu manor, but all the attempts had failed because of the aggressive resistance of peasants (Valk 2014, 18). At the same time, the peasants held the belief that the mill that is built next to the sacred river will give more grain than an average mill (Valk 2014, 17; Gutslaff 1644, 13). The beliefs written down from the peasants do not seem unanimous. Some peasants are recorded to have said that the thunder deity Pikne was residing in the river Pühajõgi and his exit from the river had been blocked by the dam of the mill. That was why he didn't allow for the improvement of the weather (Gutslaff 1644, 378). In several other places in the book, Gutslaff stated that, according to the peasants, the river itself was punishing people because of pollution (e.g., Gutslaff 1644, 117–118; see also Valk 2014, 19). Gutslaff also related the story about the former times (Gutslaff 1644, 28): when two armies met in the war, a small boy came out of the river Pühajõgi, with a blue stocking on one leg and a yellow one on the other; after this appearance, the armies started to fight with each other (Valk 2014, 17).

It would be hard to determine how the peasants perceived the river Pühajõgi if we would only look at the Pühajõgi as a "mental representation." The river's ability to influence people's lives is more easily understandable while considering that to get to know about the world through mental representations is a modernist perspective and seventeenth-century peasants had a different way of seeing the world. There was no division between the "nature" and "culture" or between the "human" and "non-human" (see Descola 2014, 69–72, 75, 81; Bird-David 1999, 71). Pühajõgi-in-the-world was in a relational concept that helped to engage with the environment. According to Nurit Bird-David,

> **Animism (as I conceptualize it) involves responsively engaging with beings/things, then perceiving them as persons.**
>
> (Bird-David 1999, 89)

The category of "person" used here is borrowed from Irving Hallowell:

> **Hallowell observed that the Ojibwa sense of personhood, which they attribute to some natural entities, animals, winds, stones, etc., is fundamentally different from the modernist one. The latter takes the axiomatic split between "human" and "nonhuman" as essential, with "person" being a subcategory of "human." The Ojibwa conceives of "person" as an overarching category within which "human person," "animal person," "wind person," etc., are subcategories.**
>
> (Bird-David 1999, 71)

Instead of assuming an essence in humans or non-humans, the peasants based their understanding of the world on the relational ways of knowing (see Bird-David 1999, 88). In this framework the question of what something represents—i.e., did peasants have to deal with the deity or river itself—does not prove to be relevant. The relational and reciprocal ways of knowing to which the pre-modern peasants adhered hinged rather on what they did, how they behaved, and how the super-persons (river) reacted to it. According to Viveiros de Castro, this pre-modern way of relating with the world around us is not so easy to understand for contemporary Westerners:

> **. . . actual beings—beings when they appear to be nothing else but themselves, but their identities—are as apparently unreal and difficult to think within the Amerindian situation as differential/relational beings (multiplicities) are for us.**
>
> (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 27)

The perception of the reality by Estonian peasants does not depend on our comprehension of it. In this article, I addressed the peasants' way of understanding the world in South Estonia in the middle of the seventeenth century. I explained why the Lutheran worldview failed to assert an authority among most of the people living in Estonia through this case study. Astonishingly, even some German-speaking pastors had adopted pieces of the Estonian peasants' animistic worldview.

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"Pühajõgi-in-the-world was in a relational concept that helped to engage with the environment."

The monument next to the site of the old mill near Pühajõgi River.

Theatre and Storytelling For Development and Eco-Education

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Theatre is the ability to create plays, sketches, and skits for the purposes of entertainment, classroom work, community development, or other uses including conscientization, critical analysis of situations, and stretching one's imagination. Jumai Ewu (2000) states that, the words "Theatre" and "Drama" are often interchanged (Ewu 2000, 1–50). For those of us who work in the fields of the performing arts, we best translate these two words through "action." Promoting learning and teaching through theatre/drama makes teaching and learning more engaging. By presenting what nature offers on stage to an audience, by enhancing the action through the use of external body, and by mirroring and imitating life, theatre and drama unfold simultaneously. Nature is the source of life, just as it offers ingredients for the creation of theatre. Peter Van Geit, Berijam Eco-Education Centre (2008), believes that,

> *Eco-education is the harnessing, appropriation and management of (indigenous) resources for the benefit and the promotion of self-development of an individual, a community or a nation. It entails the selective choice of tangible and intangible resources found in a given ecological setting that contributes to the positive promotion of the standard of living of a people. For instance, the realization of abundance of certain raw materials found at a particular place and the ability of creative individuals who manage to convert such materials into "commodities, goods, or products." Eco-education therefore is the creative handling of one's imagination in the transmission of knowledge, skills, aptitudes, attitudes and qualities that enhance the human person to give of his/her optimal capabilities as service to humanity.*

In Photo 1, one finds three round huts. These are derived from termites who were invading a site called Akrofo at Jasikan in the Volta Region. The ant hills were broken to capture the queens that produced the termites. The clay was then treated and used to construct the buildings seen in the picture. This space was created for educating the youth on the importance of the ecology. The conversion of the ant hill soil or clay into concrete buildings demonstrates how ordinary things can be turned into economic products. The building is the theatre itself, where the youth are given space to improvise and try out new ideas.

Photo 1: The Akrofo Jungle Theatre for performing indigenous theatre

Photo 2: Agbogbloshie local authority Junior High School on climate change education through theatre

In Photo 2, we see children from Agbogbloshie Junior High School enacting a play about climate change. Here the kids were asked to be creative in bringing up ideas which would help in the development of the final sketch. In this way, children are made to think critically, which helps them in the long run.

How to promote teaching and learning for maximum outcome and benefit is the principal objective of this paper. Some basic questions being asked are: What is education? What forms of education do the rural dwellers need most? What type of education that utilises theatre as a learning tool has Ghana aquired, and how relevant has this been to the people's development?

This paper will therefore attempt to sum up the various types of education generally and argue that education should be made to constitute a greater percentage of practice than what has been used in previous decades that is rooted more in theory and abstracts, unrelated concepts in teaching and learning.

History in rural communities is embedded in the ritual practices of a people in a given ethnographic area. The environment offers raw material needed for such rituals. In Photo 3, one sees a calabash full of corn flour drink. The oldest man, who was asked to pour a libation, narrates the genealogy and the ecological wealth of the area through oral texts during the ceremony. This is a type of informal education that uses theatre, since the old man pouring libation employs actions and words to tell people about the ancestors of the land and the wonderful things they have done.

For the purposes of investigating eco-education and its related issues, I have chosen two communities where I have established research sites: (i) Akrofo Environmental and Human Resource Centre in Jasikan; and (ii) Kwame Ntifro Centre in the Central Region of Ghana (Lansdown 1988, 34–56). (Kwame Ntifo is a small community with about 200 inhabitants in the Central region. This community is mainly a cocoa-farming community with subsistent farming as a source of livelihood.) These two sites were established to carry out observations, experiments, demonstrations, and research on theatre processes among rural dwellers to help learn how "man" appropriates what can be found in a given locality to improve upon one's life and lot.

Photo 3: Emili Badze
Oral history retrieval processes through eco-education

Photo 4: Bishop Girls' Primary School
Eco-education and climate change in schools

Forms of Education

As Richard Lansdown argues, education in developing cultures is often informal; children learn from their environments and activities, and the adults around them act as teachers. Learners learn by observing masters in particular fields like sculpture, pottery, goldsmithing, salt-winning, traditional medicine, drumming and dancing, carving, and leather works. It is normally passed on through apprenticeship and mentorship. Informal education is pre-colonial.

In Photo 5, we can see people drumming, skills that were learnt through apprenticeship to the older generations; these people will, in turn, teach the younger generations. This kind of informal education helps the propagation of indigenous traditions.

In Photo 6, we can see an old man. This old man is dancing to the rhythm of the drumming that the people in Photo 5 are playing. He is demonstrating a traditional dance to the younger generations who watch eagerly. These demonstrations are later practiced by the younger generations, who, with time, master them and pass them down to their children. The process goes on.

Photos 5 & 6: Community eco-education and the passing on of indigenous values to younger generations

Some Policy Statements in Ghana

Ghana aimed to reach the middle-income earning country status by the year 2020. For this purpose she had developed a road-map known as Vision 2020. The basic objectives of the Vision 2020 document were to "reduce poverty, increase employment opportunities and average incomes, and to reduce inequities in order to improve the general welfare and the material well-being of all Ghanaians . . ." (Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana).

The Vision 2020 document contains an educational policy with the objectives to "ensure all citizens regardless of gender or social status are functionally literate and productive at the minimum" (United Nations). It further states that in order to achieve Vision 2020, the education system must embrace science and technology, as it is the technological era, and countries that fail to recognize this will not be able to escape the clutches of poverty. The education policy mainly extends to four major groups of the education system:

1. Basic Education (Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education [FCUBE])
2. Secondary Education
3. Teacher Education
4. Tertiary Education

Theatre for Development (TfD)

Theatre for Development is a well-known means of communication used among people in less-developed societies. It employs theatre in various ways to achieve functions like educating people for a change of attitude, critiquing society, and communicating development-oriented messages for the improvement of the standard and quality of life of a people (Zakes 1998, 1–10). After a performance, people can discuss the actions of the people in the play. They can test potential ways of problem-solving on stage in front of the whole village, and then discuss them. Daring to take action within the playful situation of a theatre play, villagers realize that they have just performed an action they could also undertake in real life (Kerr 1997, 25–40). For example, as is shown in the picture, the people of Odomase in Afram Plains discussed the impact of climate change on their social and economic life.

Photos 7 & 8: Odomase Community Theatre on climate change impact on agriculture on the Afram plains of Ghana

Eco-education in Practice

A close study of two communities—i.e., the Akrofo and Kwame Ntifro communities—reveals the fact that human beings, over a given period of time, develop a system of education relevant to them. Being educated in those communities (both formally and informally) is to have the ability to apply one's knowledge to improve upon the living standard of an individual or a group of people, community, or nation. Formal and informal education are vital in the educational processes of the nation, as observed in the Akrofo and Ntifro communities. Observation, participation, and direct involvement of human interactions, as well as apprenticeships, are the main ways learners acquire the skills and knowledge through informal education. To illustrate how eco-education is impacted, the Akrofo and Ntrifo communities will be focused on.

The Akrofo Jasikan-Buem project offers concrete and clear illustrations about how teaching and learning take place. The bringing of people together (i.e., human mobilization activities), the identification of possible teaching and learning materials, and the processing and filtration of possible educationally useful materials for public domain use and appropriation are what the Akrofo and Ntifro experiments achieved.

It is now a challenge for Ghanaians—in fact, for all Africans—to consciously produce from their ecologies, educational materials, concepts, principles, methodologies, and other economic finished or semi-finished products for the development of our African nations. To achieve this, a careful study of indigenous knowledges, indigenous values, and the conscious selection and collection of all wisdom and the experiences of the rural people should be purposefully managed.

The Akrofo and Ntifro projects become relevant here. Students of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, and the Department of Plant Medicine and Pharmacology of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) have benefited from these experiments in diverse ways.

Indigenous experts (i.e., Living Archives)[1] become central in the use of eco-education. Recognition and acknowledgement of their contributions to promoting knowledge is paramount in eco-education. Traditional songs, dances, medicine, and theatre/drama are all useful for the promotion of a people's development, and these and other cultural resources must be the focus of eco-education.

For example, at the Kwame Ntifro Centre in the Duakwa District of the Central Region of Ghana, the use of this methodology within the community and its surrounding areas has yielded dividends that were, however, not without their challenges. The idea and concept was to see how typical rural communities learn or appropriate knowledge. The need for space arose; hence the purchase of a piece of land. The land was acquired in 1998. It was meant to be used for demonstrating how rural communities could overcome poverty, ignorance, apathy, and negative tendencies. The population of Ntifro was not above 200 inhabitants at the start of the research in 2002. There were no provisions for electricity or health care. There exists a basic school with some trained teachers who face difficulties in their

1. *"Living Archives" is the terminology adopted for experienced and resourceful individuals knowledgeable of the past, of situations, and of factors that affect people in a given community and who can throw more light on research work.*

posts owing to the challenging rural conditions. The majority of the Ntifro community are farmers who depend mostly on cocoa cultivation, coconut plantations, and, of late, lumbering, which has seriously affected the environment.

The facts collected revealed that these communities had indeed been wealthy due to cocoa farms, but, as of 2002, that had become a thing of the past. Primarily, all the inhabitants of Kwame-Ntifro are closely blood-related. There are cases of both endogamy and exogamous marriage. Residents worshipped a deity rooted in an African tradition, the Tiger God. However, today, many in younger generations have converted to Christianity, prostelytizing for Roman Catholicism, Assembly of God, and others.

It was clear to me that "poverty," as Rahjid (1997, 7–20) argues, is a self-inflicted condition. The factors that put people into situations of poverty are conscious constructions that begin mainly in how people see and evaluate themselves. Kwame-Ntifro produces cocoa, which earns Ghana her foreign exchange and income. Ironically, most of the children had never tasted chocolate, let alone had a full bar of Golden Tree chocolate as a birthday gift. Most of the rural resources are those which come together to create the national cake. However, it is rather sad to note that these very "creators" of the bulk of the national cake benefit little or nothing at all from what they help to create.

These challenges formed the bedrock of what I term the "eco-educational" approach to teaching in Ghana today. Teachers who employ the eco-education approach must have an orientation which makes them committed to doing all it takes to bring quality education to rural dwellers. This quality education originates from the creative imagination of both teachers and learners. The experiments undertaken at Kwame-Ntifro included crocodile- and antelope-raising, and woodlots, cocoa, and pawpaw management; however, my focus would be on the crocodile experiment.

The Crocodile Experiment

A theatre-for-development expert, I viewed Kwame Ntifro as a potentially attractive area to establish a crocodile farm as a catalyst for the promotion of eco-tourism. There are bodies of water in the landscape, which offer easy aquaculture; hence the idea of constructing a crocodile zoo. After lengthy discussions and deliberations, the inhabitants responded positively, thus leading to the construction of a fenced pond. With the help of the Ghana Zoological Society, four crocodiles were transported and lodged in the pond in 2003. This was a really exciting and jubilant experience. Three months into the experiment, one of the crocodiles was shot dead, which left only three of the amphibians alive. People far and near heard of the presence of these crocodiles and began visiting the pond, thus opening the area up, giving the locals an opportunity to cook for visitors who came, further establishing income-generating services. It was not long before the remaining crocodiles were all shot in cold blood. Investigations showed that some men from the neighbouring community intentionally attacked the crocodiles, thus ending the experiment.

The Akrofo Case Study

Eco-education came alive at the Akrofo Environmental and Human Resource Development Centre at Jasikan earlier. This was precipitated by the rediscovery of the Ohinto myth through a storytelling "recovery" project among the Buem people of the Northern Volta Region. Storytelling among the Buem people offers opportunities for the transmission of knowledge and vital information to listeners. Audience participation was spontaneous, as people recounted various stories. Some of the stories were purely for entertainment, while others were for challenging people to reexamine their attitudes, habits, and behaviors. Many more of the Buem stories pivoted on environmental issues. One such narrative is the Ohinto myth.

There is no doubt that storytelling can be a catalyst for the development of various artistic "products," of which theatre/drama is paramount. In the retrieval of indigenous stories for performances, one would realize that the Buem case offers a clear basis for the use of myths, legends, folk tales, and other cultural practices like rituals and festivals. In these enactments, important cultural resources such as theatre/drama can be evolved or created. Joe De Graft's *Ananse and the Gum-man* example is a classic one. This is a story translated into play or drama. Martin Owusu's *Aku Sika* and Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* are all typical examples of how indigenous stories are transformed into theatrical productions. My research on the Ohinto myth offers a case study on how to handle cultural materials for performances and other artistic products (Ong 1999).

The Ohinto Story

Once upon a time, there lived a powerful king called Nana Konko, who ruled the Buem people. This king was so powerful that he would attack leopards and other wild animals with bare hands. He was a great warrior who was nicknamed by the Ashantis as Okofrobour (i.e., "the fighter who fights to ascend hills and mountains"). This was the king who could fold a whole piece of *kente* cloth into a match-box. Nana Konko would even drink medicine for his subjects. He did this by placing his right toe on the affected part of the body to the patient before drinking the medicine. The sick person was healed after Nana Konko had drunk the medicine.

Nana Konko was a leader respected by his subjects, honoured and revered. It is said that Nana Konko established a shrine called *Kuvo-oton*, meaning "the medicine room." This room had two doors—one for entering and one for exiting. During war, all the abled-bodied males who were willing to go to war were sent to the shrine to undergo a ritual meant to protect, fortify, and bless them. The potential warriors were to enter the Medicine Room through the appropriate door. However, any person who might lose his life in the battle would naturally be prevented from going to battle by the mystery of not being able to leave through the exit. Nana Konko, in such situations, instructed that these warriors stay home to protect the women and children from any possible enemy attacks. By this ritual, the lives of people were saved. Those who might have been war victims were quarantined.

Nana Konko was assisted by Ohinto, who was a Cyclops (a one-eyed creature). Ohinto made sure that the environment and ecology were protected and guaranteed the safety of the people. Ohinto, therefore, served as the guardian angel of the Buem people. Ohinto also instilled and ensured that there was discipline in the Buem society. Ohinto, under Nana Konko, helped to maintain the taboos within the Buem community. Hunters who got lost in the forest were helped back to town. Ohinto arrested those who misbehaved in Buem, such as those defecating in the open or in rivers, or those who committed crimes (rape, incest, etc.), and put them in a cave for reformation before setting them free. While Nana Konko saw to the political stability of the Buem community, Ohinto ensured the environmental and ecological balances in the Buem eco- and bio-diversity systems.

Ohinto made Buem to be Buem. Until the coming of the European explorers and missionaries to the Gold Coast, the wealth of the Buem people as held in the ecology was relatively intact. Christianity and Islam had some impact on the Buem socio-cultural life. The religion and indigenous spirituality of the Buem were equally affected. The death of Nana Konko and the departure of Ohinto from the Buem cultural heritage had devastating effects on the Buem people.

Ohinto left out of frustration and anger. On his way out, he stamped his "foot" at Akrofo near the current forestry plantation area. He also urinated under a tree, which has since never dried up, thus creating a "pond" or spring locally known as *Kyirikasa*. "This is the story of Nana Konko and Ohinto! May you who have listened to the story help to honor these two by finding ways and means of performing sketches or skits based on the story! The end."

Thus narrated by the storyteller.

Photo 9: A drawing of the one-eyed Cyclops Ohinto in the Ohinto mythology

"Nana Konko was assisted by Ohinto, who was a Cyclops (a one-eyed creature). Ohinto made sure the environment and ecology were protected and guaranteed the safety of the people."

Methodology Used

The recovery of this myth and its critical examination by the Jasikan College of Education students (300 students) offered a unique opportunity for the repackaging of indigenous stories for contemporary use. For instance, the recovered stories were translated into visual arts materials including paintings and sculpture and served as the inspiration for other literary works like poems and playlets. The discussions after these storytelling sessions planted a seed of thought in the minds of participants, leading to the re-awakening of interest in the need to revisit what their forebears had passed over the generations onto them. The Ohinto myth was an eye-opener to the participants, showing them that there used to be a high sense of environmental and ecological protection among the Buem people.

The Cyclops Ohinto was known amongst all the 21 Buem villagers; therefore, discussion about the Ohinto concept quickly spread through the population. While the Cyclops in the story became offended and went into hiding, thus bringing disaster to the people, it was realized that recreating a much more positive story and picture about Ohinto's return from his hiding would have had a developmental dimension and impact on Buem. Therefore, the need to consciously perform the Ohinto myth in three scenes was identified:

1. The Pre-Colonial Ohinto
2. The Colonial Ohinto
3. The Independence and Post-Independence Ohinto

All these were based on the stories collected over a period of time and reworked together with the people into performances. Since Ohinto was the overseer of God's creation in Buem, the wanton exploitation of the forest was considered an offense by Ohinto and explained his unhappiness with the Buem people for the destruction of the ecology. The effect of his departure resulted in drought situations and bush fires that climaxed in the conflagrations in 1983, from which Buem suffered a loss in wealth. Bush fires swept through cocoa farms, rendering the people to abject poverty. Having suffered this loss, Buem entered into a state of apathy and dejection until the Ohinto myth was critically re-examined. It was through the story and performance sessions that the importance of the environment and ecology as a source of holistic livelihood dawned on the Buem people.

As a result, interventions were made with the help of a German NGO known as Forest Resources Utility Management Project (FORUM). They nursed thousands of trees from endangered species for redistribution in Buem. Even the collection of these seedlings for replanting became a challenge. To the Buem people, forests are not planted but rather grow by themselves; hence they were reluctant to get the seedlings even when they were being offered freely to them.

The "second coming" of Ohinto took place when the Akrofo Research phase was introduced during 1998–2000. At this same time, the researcher had an opportunity to undertake a postgraduate and PhD degree. The oral histories recovered through this research included the Ohinto myth. The circumstances during the research period offered greater opportunities for the mobilization of various youth, cultural, social, and church groups for careful analyses and communal evaluation of situations. This culminated in a positive outcome when the researcher visited the FORUM office and realized the challenges they were facing while also identifying with their frustrations.

The FORUM workers collaborated with the indigenous researcher, joining "the insider's" knowledge with the "the outsider's" technical know-how. A solution was reached during a funeral when the researcher helped the NGO learn to speak in the idioms of the local people. This breaking of the ice led to a proactive response among the indigenous people, who then collected the originally rejected seedlings for planting in their individual farms instead of establishing mono-plantations. While there may be daunting challenges, when one carefully plans and consistently pursues the ultimate educational goals, aims, and objectives, one realizes the huge dividends to be derived from such ventures in which theatre was used in educating the indigenous people about deforestation. The Ohinto myth was the best story to use to help the indigenous people realize their mistakes, since Ohinto was a mythical creature who protected the environment. Through theatre, the Ohinto myth was relived, making the indigenous people of the place wiser and more active in stopping the deforestation processes they had been engaged in.

The Outcomes of Eco-education: Some Remarks

Eco-education taps into the highest creative abilities of learners and teachers to ensure a systematic way of retrieving and recovering knowledge for current use or application to meet academic, economic, and social needs of a people or a nation at large. Eco-education examines what already exists in an environment that could be appropriated for the people's self-development. The cultural heritage of a given people is central to this process. From this area, great assets could be repackaged, processed, and further handled for maximum use. For example, local stories could be retrieved, re-examined, and repackaged for classroom or academic purposes. Eco-education offers room for critical, creative, and constructive thinking and handling of local materials for the realization of national development and academic objectives.

Eco-education ensures learners the congenial environment that facilitates teaching and learning in the most practical manner. This is achieved by consciously illustrating and demonstrating to learners lessons meant to equip them with not only theoretical knowledge but also some basic life skills for the production of tangible products and goods. Eco-education seeks to explore the various resources found within given localities for integration into the teaching and learning programs.

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Beliefs and the Supernatural:
Methods of Research and the Folklorist's Experience

Maria Momzikova in Conversation with **Terry Gunnell**

Maria: Hello! Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions for our readers of the ISFNR newsletter. You have done significant research on legends, beliefs, and the supernatural. **To start with, how did you come to research folklore and specifically the supernatural and beliefs?**

Terry: I grew up in Brighton and Hove in the UK and from an early point was interested in stories relating to the world of the past, and not least those relating to the magic and mystery of the landscape. As Jacqueline Simpson's *Folklore of Sussex* (1973) shows, there was more than enough of that kind of material in my area. Of course, a great amount of the history that children like myself used to encounter at that time was also colored by all sorts of legends: Robert Bruce and the spider, King Alfred and the cakes, King Canute and the waves, and so on. Reading Tolkien in my teens fitted in well with all of these interests. Things started focusing when I started visiting the Nordic countries around the age of 20, first working in Norway in the summertime and then later moving to Iceland with my wife after I had finished university. By the mid-eighties, I had started doing lectures for tourists in Norway about the Vikings, Old Nordic belief, and Old Norse folklore, and was soon teaching similar courses (on Nordic folklore and folk tradition) at the University of Iceland.

Maria: In your article about legends and landscape in the Nordic countries, you mentioned that your personal background was in drama and theatre arts. **What does theatrical experience give you in your methodological approach to the supernatural and beliefs?**

Terry: I studied Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham between 1974 and 1977 and had been acting from the age of seven. Theatre is about performance, which underlines that the communicative messages we receive, not only in the theatre but also in daily life, are far from limited to written words (which we tend to concentrate on in our studies in academia). Performance involves communication and reception using all of our senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and even taste. At the simplest level, this means that anyone listening to storytellers (like those listening to a modern slam poet or stand-up comic) are going to be affected by not only the words of the story but also by who tells it, how, where, and when. Our own experiences and background knowledge will also be involved in our understanding of what is told. However, things do not stop there, because the performance is also likely to influence the way that we see the things, places, and people that they refer to. All of this underlines that we need to consider the records of oral stories or poems much as we consider plays, as multi-dimensional texts, if we want to consider how they really work and worked.

Maria: The spatial dimension of legends and beliefs is the crucial focus of your research, as well as for theatre studies. **What do you think—is the temporal dimension in belief narratives studies equally significant? What kind of temporalities and different temporal approaches to narratives could theatre give to researchers of folklore?**

Terry: Following on from what I said just now, the time and place when and where a story is received naturally matters a great deal. Considering legends about priests, outlaws, nature spirits, and ghosts, for example, the social context of the time matters as much as exactly when in the day they are told. At the same time, we need to consider the fact that (like theatre or any form of play or ritual), good storytelling introduces a certain state of liminality for all of these involved as they are temporarily transported to another time and place.

Maria: In the ISFNR lecture on beliefs in 2021, you mentioned a quantitative study of beliefs in contemporary Iceland conducted in 2006–07. **From your perspective, what are the benefits of quantitative methods in comparison to qualitative approaches to the supernatural and beliefs and vice versa?**

Terry: Both have their advantages. For us working in folkloristics today, there is naturally a great deal of focus on the individual interview, and the individual piece of fieldwork, both of which focus on the individual her-, him- or theirself, and the individual moment. These provide us with a multi-faceted example of a story or a belief, but they do not enable us to talk about the community as a whole. If we want to look at the wider overall context of these individual pieces of work, quantitative surveys in the shape of questionnaires naturally provide us with a great deal of additional valuable information. Arguably an ideal method is to follow up the quantitative with the qualitative, as we tried to do with our survey.

Maria: You, as well as Timothy Tangherlini, applied methods of digital humanities to legends and beliefs. You conducted the *Sagnagrunnur* (Editor's note: *Sagnagrunnur* is a geographically mapped database of the main published collections of Icelandic folk legends. See https://sagnagrunnur.com/en/) project which offers to researchers the digital database of Icelandic folk legends connected to geographical maps. **What observations did the digital map and database allow you and other researchers to make that were previously invisible without such kinds of digital lenses? What opportunities can digital methods give to folklorists in the future, both in studies of archival and contemporary belief narratives?**

Terry: Of course, the digital approach opens up the doors of the dusty archives, not only making the material more easily available to people, but also giving them the opportunity to take the records out of their boxes and look at them in different combinations and new contexts. As with our *Sagnagrunnur*, Timothy Tangherlini's ground-breaking project on Danish legends, and Theo Meder's work in Holland, mapping also allows us to reconnect legends to their original surroundings, putting them back into their original performative context. While the digital approach does not always provide all the answers, it certainly opens up a whole new range of questions that were not evident in the past.

Maria: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts on the methodological part of studying beliefs and the supernatural with me and the readers of the ISFNR newsletter!

"... the time and place when and where a story is received naturally matters a great deal."

ISFNR COMMITTEE ON Folk Narrative, Literature, & Media (FNLM)

Anne Duggan, a.duggan@wayne.edu
Mayako Murai, murai@kanagawa-u.ac.jp
Jill Terry Rudy, jill_rudy@byu.edu

We announce an ISFNR committee on Folk Narrative, Literature, and Media (FNLM) to support, recognize, and extend the work and achievements of scholars and practitioners who create, perform, and study folk narrative in relation to literature and media, widely conceived.

This committee gathers scholars and practitioners to encourage the study of folk narrative including wonder tales, folktales, fairy tales, legends, and myths as they are performed, transmitted, and transformed through different media forms, including: oral tales and their transcriptions, literary texts, graphic novels, film, radio, television, painting, illustration, photography, design, fashion, sculpture, architecture, music, choreography, theater, video, gaming, fandoms, podcasting, and all varieties of social media. Some related scholarly fields include, but are not limited to, adaptation, comparative, critical race, decolonial, disability, ecocritical, gender, intermedial, intersectional, labor, queer, reception, and translation studies.

Throughout their history, folk, fairy tale, and wonder tales have demonstrated an incredible suppleness to adaptation across different media forms: from oral to print, print to oral, literary tale to theater, theater to film, printed tale to Tumblr, film to fashion, etc. This adaptability or the transmedial nature of folk narratives also points to the multifarious ways in which people think with and through tales of wonder to (re)image the past, present, and future. Their transmedial nature also foregrounds the different ways these stories are communicated to different types of audiences. Of all types of stories, folk narratives prove that people are communicative omnivores. We tell traditional stories in every new medium and keep telling them in the older ones as well.

Much work has been carried out in the past ten years on folk narrative as it relates to film (Zipes 2010), television (Greenhill and Rudy 2014), media studies (Greenhill, Rudy, et al. 2018), and theatrical/pantomime studies (Schacker 2018), among others. The proposed committee would seek to encourage further research on folk narratives across older mediums (literature, painting, and illustration) as well as new ones (blogs, YouTube vidoes, Tumblr).

With the rise of new media forms of folk and fairy tales, new methods of approaching them have also emerged. Increased attention has been given to questions related to disability, environment, postcoloniality, queerness, and race within different folk narrative traditions and media. Retellings in each new communicative technology confirm the popularity and import of such narratives while scholarship attends to, contextualizes, and inquires about such transformations.

This newly organized ISFNR committee does not announce a new subfield of folk narrative research as much as it acknowledges the significance and transformations of the media people use to share stories as well as changes to the field, reflecting the current status of folk narrative research in the twenty-first century. The committee advocates and facilitates studying folk narrative, literature, and media as a continuing exploration of the reach and deeper necessities of sharing stories.

Committee members may meet in connection with ISFNR conferences and participate in other activities, which may eventually include newsletters, research reports, collaborative research projects, sponsored conference and publication opportunities, and online events.

BOOK

Minna mizu no naka

Makoto Yokomichi

In May 2021, the largest medical publisher in Japan, Igaku Shoin, enriched the "Open Care" Series (*Sirizu kea wo hiraku*) with a book *Minna mizu no naka* ("We're All in the Water") by Makoto Yokomichi. The book addresses a recent understanding of neurodevelopmental disorders from the perspective of "neurodiversity" and states that once society sufficiently improves, the person experiencing neurodevelopmental issues will cease to be a "disabled person" and become a "normal person with unique neurodevelopment."

The book is an example of a case-study based on autoethnography. The author's own neurodevelopmental disorder experience is narrated from the folk narrative perspective, and, as the author emphasizes, "techniques I acquired from folk narratives" are applied. In the book, the author develops an interest in the relationship between folklore and psychiatry. In folklore, all sorts of supernatural occurrences are discussed; meanwhile, psychiatry can provide modern explanations for these supernatural phenomena.

"While weaving the narrative for this book, I developed an interest in the relationship between folklore and psychiatry. . . . I always feel the unique sense of unreality engendered by the atypical communication and acute senses of autism spectrum disorder, as well as the 'fuzzy feeling' elicited by the hyperactive thinking of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Autism spectrum disorders are often accompanied by developmental coordination disorder (DCD), of which I am an example. This disorder compromises my sense of balance. Additionally, many people with developmental disabilities often experience 'dissociation,' when an individual feels disconnected from reality and the reality being experienced is mixed with illusions. The fact that I constantly experience this dissociation led me to titling the book 'We're All in the Water.'"

Biographical note: *Makoto Yokomichi is an associate professor at Kyoto Prefectural University (Japan) specializing in literary studies. The case-study book was driven by the author's depression disorder, which was diagnosed in March 2019 as being caused by congenital neurodevelopmental disorders.*

ARTICLE

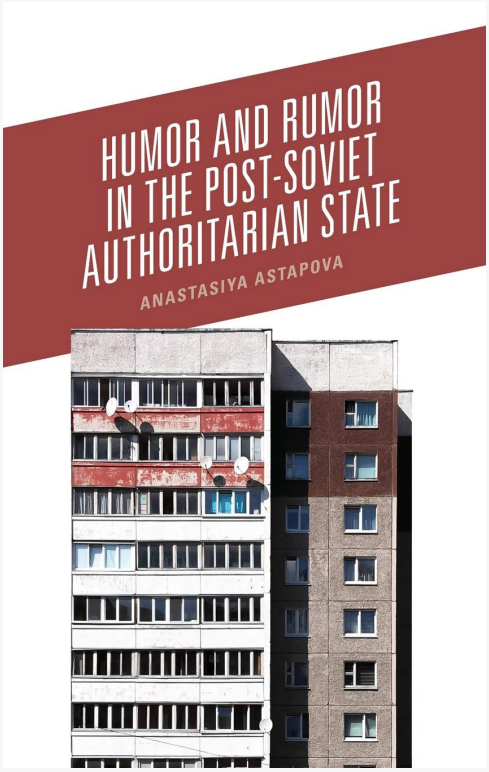
Solovyeva, Alevtina. 2021.
"'A Miracle Walking Tree': the Supernatural in the Landscape Mythology and Social Space of Contemporary Mongolia." *Mobility and Immobility in Mongolian Societies*, edited by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Lhagvademchig Jadamba, Anja Kirsch. *Acta Mongolica* 19 (539), 172–191.

Winner of the AFS The Don Yoder Prize and the Belief Narrative Network Prize

Available at: http://ims.num.edu.mn/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ACTA-Mongolica-Vol-19.pdf

Abstract:
This article examines a peculiar case in contemporary Mongolian landscape mythology—a tree with the supernatural ability to move. The tree features as a character in contemporary folk narratives and is the object of worship practices shared by various communities. This article investigates the basis of Mongolian folk traditions from which the conception of this unusual tree grew, the cultural concepts the legend transmits, and the roles and functions it performs in contemporary vernacular beliefs and social interactions. This article is based on both fieldwork materials and internet sources.

BOOK



Humor and Rumor in the Post-Soviet Authoritarian State

Anastasiya Astapova

Astapova, Anastasiya. 2021. *Humor and Rumor in the Post-Soviet Authoritarian State*. Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield.

"Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Belarus, an example of an authoritarian state, *Humor and Rumor in the Post-Soviet Authoritarian State* presents over one hundred contemporary political jokes in the contexts of their performance. Throughout, Anastasiya Astapova demonstrates the salience of the joke genre, the multiplicity of humor manifestations, and the fundamental presence of intertextual links between jokes and another folk genre—rumor. Informed by real-life fieldwork in an authoritarian regime, *Humor and Rumor in the Post-Soviet Authoritarian State* challenges many common theories of political humor, including the interpretation of political jokes as weapons of the weak. It illustrates how jokes and rumors remind communities of their fears, support paranoia, shape conformist behavior, and, consequently, reinforce the existing hegemony. In this rare study on everyday life and reactions to repressive regimes, Astapova unveils political humor as it is lived."

The book is available on Amazon.com and the Rowman & Littlefield website.

ARTICLE

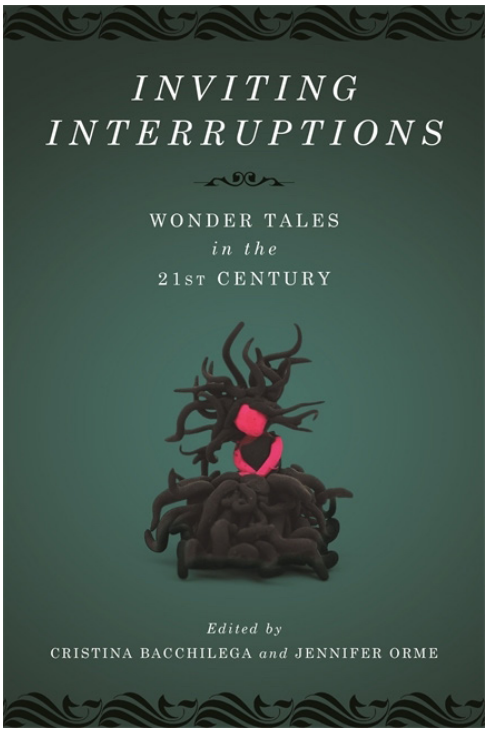
Goodare, Julian. 2021.
"Witchcraft and Prophecy in Scotland."
Journal of the Northern Renaissance (12).

Published online and available at:
http://www.northernrenaissance.org/witchcraft-and-prophecy-in-scotland/

Abstract:
In Scotland, between about 1370 and 1690, numerous narratives told of prophecies made by "witches" or witch-like prophetic women. This article examines both the prophetic witches themselves and the prophecies they made. The main protagonist of most stories was a male political figure who sought a "response" from a witch or witches; the prophecy was embedded in a narrative of his downfall. . . . This article focuses on prophecies that were ascribed to witches or witch-like prophetic women. It will already be apparent that this will raise questions about the nature of a witch, about the status of witch-like figures for whom the sources do not use the word "witch," and about whether these figures are human or not. It will also raise questions about the nature of prophecy, since the sources do not always use the word "prophecy" for the predictions that they narrate. . . .

Narrative prophecies are embedded in narratives told in the past tense. They should be distinguished from ordinary written prophecies, which are not part of a narrative. . . . The principal sources for the main part of this article are Scottish narrative accounts of the past. Chronicles in narrative form are first found in Scotland in the late medieval period, and gradually develop into "histories" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Mason 2006). . . . The survey takes in not only prophecies and other such predictions attributed explicitly to witches, but also those attributed to witch-like figures.

BOOK



See: https://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/inviting-interruptions .

From Wayne State University Press website description.

Inviting Interruptions: Wonder Tales in the Twenty-First Century

Cristina Bacchilega, Jennifer Orme

Inviting Interruptions: Wonder Tales in the Twenty-First Century (2021). Edited by Cristina Bacchilega and Jennifer Orme. Series: The Donald Haase Series in Fairy-Tale Studies. Wayne State University Press.

"*Inviting Interruptions: Wonder Tales in the Twenty-First Century* anthologizes contemporary stories, comics, and visual texts that intervene in a range of ways to challenge the popular perception of fairy tales as narratives offering heteronormative happy endings that support status-quo values. . . .

The book is organized in two sections. "Inviting Interruptions" considers the invitation as an offer that must be accepted in order to participate, whether for good or ill. This section includes Emma Donoghue's literary retelling of "Hansel and Gretel," stills from David Kaplan's short Little Red Riding Hood film, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada's story about stories rooted in Hawaiian tradition and land, and Shary Boyle, Shaun Tan, and Dan Taulapapa McMullin's interruptions of mainstream images of beauty-webs, commerce, and Natives. "Interrupting Invitations" contemplates the interruption as a survival mechanism to end a problem that has already been going on too long. This section includes reflections on migration and sexuality by Diriye Osman, Sofia Samatar, and Nalo Hopkinson; and invitations to rethink human and non-human relations in works by Anne Kamiya, Rosario Ferré, Veronica Schanoes, and Susanna Clark. . . ."

"As we make our way deeper into the twenty-first century, wonder tales—and their critical analyses—will continue to interest and enchant general audiences, students, and scholars."

Domovoj as a Black Cat

When I already graduated from school . . . I lived in my parents' place for a year or a bit less. . . . I was sleeping alone in the room. (I am distressed about sleeping alone, anxious. I always sleep with the lights on.) . . . And I wake up at night and see . . . It seemed to me that a black cat with glowing green eyes was gazing at me from the floor. And he is staring at me. He sits and gazes, and I realize that it is ***domovoj****. He looks at me with these eyes, and I understand that something starts to press on my body, and pressing so that I cannot move. [I] realize that it is this* ***domovoj*** *who is pressing, but he wasn't sitting on me. I saw this cat sitting about 1.5 meters from me, but he was pressing on me ostensibly with his eyes. And I was laying down like this for about a minute, then closed my eyes, prayed the Paternoster, and then [I] likely woke up. And he wasn't there already. . . .*

Female, 30 y.o., Central Ukraine, 4 November 2020. Collected by Alina Oprelianska

BOOK

Carrassi, Vito. 2021. *Il lago e la città scomparsa. Una leggenda eziologica nel Gargano settentrionale.* (The Lake and the Vanished City: An Etiological Legend in the Northern Gargano). Bari, Italy: Edizioni di Pagina.

Il lago e la città scomparsa.

Una leggenda eziologica nel Gargano settentrionale.

(The Lake and the Vanished City: An Etiological Legend in the Northern Gargano)

Vito Carrassi

Lake Varano—along with the narrow isthmus separating it from the Adriatic Sea and the five towns standing around it (Ischitella, Carpino, Cagnano Varano, Rodi Garganico, Vico del Gargano)—is not only an enchanting piece of Gargano (Apulia, Southern Italy) landscape; it is also at the centre of an oral narrative tradition that is here examined in its wholeness (historical background, written and literary sources, ethnographic data, narratological and comparative analysis). It is an etiological legend, namely a narrative explaining the origin and the features of something or someone. As a mixture of history, myth, and vernacular beliefs, this legend tells an extraordinary event, i.e., the sinking of an ancient and prosperous city, Uria—punished by a biblical deluge due to the sins of its inhabitants—and the resulting birth of the lake, the surrounding towns and the Annunziata shrine. This last one, according to the legend, was originally the outlying house of Nunzia, a young and pure woman, devoted to praying and spinning. Nunzia is the key figure of the story: thanks to her miraculous ball of thread, she (along with her house) is the only survivor of the deluge and, at the same time, the founder of a new order, both geographical and spiritual, as symbolized by the holy crucifix worshipped within the shrine. As a form of space- and place-lore, as well as of religious tale, this legend tells about the ideas, beliefs, and images raised by a particular landscape, and the relationships the human communities establish with the territory they inhabit.

The book includes eight chapters, among which are: Narrating the Origin and the Features of a Territory; Uria, Between History and Myth; The Religious Component; and The Legend in the Web, Plastic Arts, and Folk Music. The book is available at Amazon.it.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics 2022 (Volume 17, Issue 2)

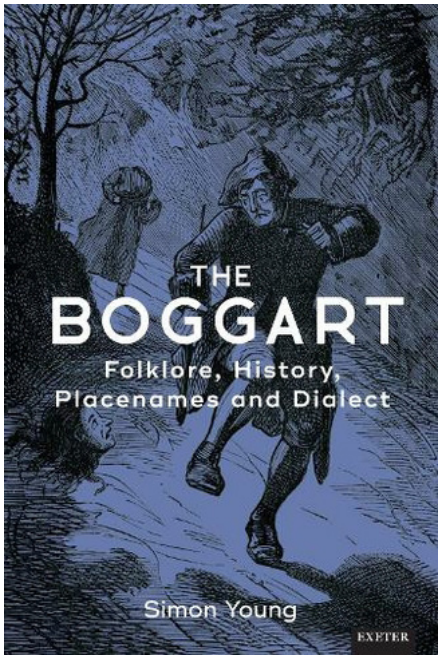
Hybrid Beliefs and Identities

Hybridity is the act of living in borderlands. In many regions of the world, we witness an unexpected rise in ethnic and religious sentiments. Simultaneously, articulation of religious belonging becomes mixed with changes in the group or ethnic identities. Mixed reactions to change on different levels of society appear in everyday conduct but also in state politics. How can the process of hybridization influence people's religious experience and sense of belonging? How are ethnicity and everyday religiosity connected? What happens at the boundaries of ethnicity and religion? How does postcolonial ambivalence trigger the contestation of religious and ethnic differences?

The 2022 special issue of the Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics (https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/jef/jef-overview.xml) calls for articles that discuss mediation of belief and belonging in postcolonial and postmodern settings. We expect to collect a volume of scholarly articles that examine diverse modes of hybridization of religion and collective identities. We encourage our authors to foster theoretical discussions regarding the hybridity of religious conduct and ideas and focus on intriguing case-studies based on field experiences.

The deadline for submitting article manuscripts is February 15, 2022. The deadline for notes and reviews is April 30, 2022. The issue will be published in autumn 2022. Please submit your article to e-mail jef.editors@gmail.com. Editor-in-Chief responsible for the issue is Prof. Art Leete. Contact e-mail: art.leete@ut.ee

For details see: https://www.jef.ee/index.php/journal/index



Exeter University Press New Series Announcement:

Exeter New Approaches to Legend, Folklore, and Popular Belief

Exeter University Press is pleased to announce a new book series: Exeter New Approaches to Legend, Folklore, and Popular Belief (https://tinyurl.com/davsf3b4). This series provides a venue for growing scholarly interest in folklore narratives, supernatural belief systems, and the communities that sustain them.

Global in scope, the series will encompass milieus ranging from ancient to contemporary times and encourage empirically-grounded, source-rich studies. The editors favour the broad multidisciplinary approach, which has characterised the study of folklore and the supernatural and that has brought together insights from historians, folklorists, anthropologists, and many other branches of the humanities and social sciences.

The series welcomes proposals from scholars at all career stages, including proposals for multi-author works. Volumes might cover topics as widely spaced thematically, temporally, and geographically as: imaginary parasites in antiquity; medieval shamanism; early modern water spirits in the Pacific; ghost-lore in nineteenth-century American newspapers; and COVID urban legends from around the globe. In short, the series seeks the best folklore writing in the world today.

The first two volumes to appear in the series will be the paperback edition of *The Folklore of Cornwall: The Oral Tradition of a Celtic Nation* by Ronald M. James (https://tinyurl.com/7ta54mdz), and Simon Young's *The Boggart: Folklore, History and Dialect* (https://tinyurl.com/vuetnsc5).

For questions or to submit a proposal, please contact Anna Henderson at a.henderson@exeterpress.co.uk or one or both of the series editors: Simon Young, University of Virginia (CET, Siena) at simonryoung@cantab.net; Davide Ermacora, University of Turin at davide.ermacora@unito.it. The editors are also putting together an email list for the series: if you want then please get in touch and they will include you so that you will be notified of new titles and calls.

Supernatural Place

Harjit Tynhiang is a farmer in Nongmyndo village. One night he dreamt that his home was built on the site of the marketplace of the sangkhini, *or people who shapeshift into snakes in "congruent geographies," or the dream-state, to fulfill social functions. He made an agreement with the weresnake that he wouldn't use a machete to hack at the body of the weresnake, as long as the* sangkhini *would not move (in which event, the movement would destroy his home). "Congruent geographies" are "mirror worlds" and mundane and mirror worlds have the ability to impact each other.*

Nongmyndo Village. Photos by Margaret Lyngdoh, March 2020

ual: london college of fashion

CALL FOR PAPERS

Interim Conference of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR)

20 – 23 July 2022 at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London.

Folk Narrative and the Visual Arts: Fashion, Design, Materials and Media

The University of the Arts London (UAL) and London College of Fashion is proud to host the 2022 International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) Interim Conference. Reflecting the disciplinary expertise of UAL the conference will explore the intersections of folk narrative and visual culture in all its various forms, including the fine arts, sculpture, ceramics, installation, fashion, costume, film, TV, performance, digital media, illustration, book design, and material culture. Themes will include the interrelationship of oral traditions and visual arts, cultural appropriation of traditional cultural narratives through visual arts, adaptation of narrative traditions in diverse media, and the role of the visual arts in constructing notions of popular traditional storytelling. Visual culture has been a critical dimension of the mediation, interpretation, and adaptation of traditional stories throughout recorded history, enabling forms of communication that depend upon imagery, form, and spatiality, as well as fusions of auditory and visual experience. This conference aims to explore the distinctive aesthetic that this dimension of storytelling allows and to consider its social, political and cultural dimensions.

The conference is affiliated with the **Institute for Storytelling,** which is in development at UAL.

The conference committee is currently developing a proposal to run the conference in hybrid mode to allow participants to join in person or remotely. This is to help address the challenges of travel in the pandemic period, and also reflects UALs commitment to reducing air travel as part of its Climate Action Plan. The format of the conference will be confirmed by February 2022.

Conference fees will be set at the following rates:

Regular ISFNR member rate: **£150**

Reduced member rate (unemployed colleagues and PhD students): **£100**

Additional fee for non-members: **£20/15**

The International Society for Folk Narrative Research: ***www.isfnr.org***

LCF Research: Research at LCF | London College of Fashion (arts.ac.uk)

Proposals for papers are invited on subjects such as:

- Book design and illustration of published folk narratives
- Fine art, sculpture, and installation drawing on folktales
- Adaptation of folk narratives in film, TV, and digital media
- Folk art and storytelling
- Material culture and folk narrative
- Intersections of oral, literary, and visual culture
- Representations of clothing and dress in folk narrative and the functions of clothes in storytelling
- Use of folk narrative in fashion design, collections, and shows
- Clothing and magic/magical clothing
- Cultural appropriation through dress & costume in folk narrative/fairy tale
- Constructing and reconstructing identities through story and the visual arts

Proposals for papers should include:

- full name
- e-mail address
- institutional affiliation
- ISFNR membership status
- title of paper
- 250 word abstract
- 150 word bionote

Proposals for panels are welcome. Panel proposals must include the name of the panel chair, the topic, the titles of papers, and the names of panel participants.

Papers should be a maximum of 20 minutes. Each panel will last for an hour and a half, and will comprise three papers followed by up to 30 minutes of discussion.

The deadline for proposals is 15 January 2022. Please send these to lcfresearch@arts.ac.uk. Proposals will be reviewed by the conference organisation committee, which will send notification of acceptance or rejection by the end of February 2022. A preliminary program for the conference will be made available by March 2022.

Folk Artist in Focus:

Dajiedsing and *Da Thymmei* Performing Arts

Folk music in the Khasi tradition has strong connections with ritual as well as vernacular life. All aspects of Khasi cosmology are interwoven into the lyrics of the song that is featured in this special showcase on Khasi traditional music. Over time, melody has come to reflect the transitions that have taken place in the cultural and religious fronts. Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya, at one time styled itself to be the "rock music capital of India" because of the inherent inclination toward musicality that people of this community have. We have included a QR code and a link that you can click to lead you straight to the video of the song that *Da Thymmei* has recorded to accompany this feature article and for ISFNR members. Grateful thanks to Hammarsing for all his help with audio and video recording and processing of the song.

"I had the longing to somehow thank, or even venerate, my clan ancestress and ancestor (*ïawbei* and *thawlang*)."

Interview with Dajiedsing Kharkongkor:

"I am from the Kharkongor clan and while I was writing this song, I had the longing to somehow thank, or even venerate, my clan ancestress and ancestor (*ïawbei* and *thawlang*). No one taught me the keening melody for the song. . . ."

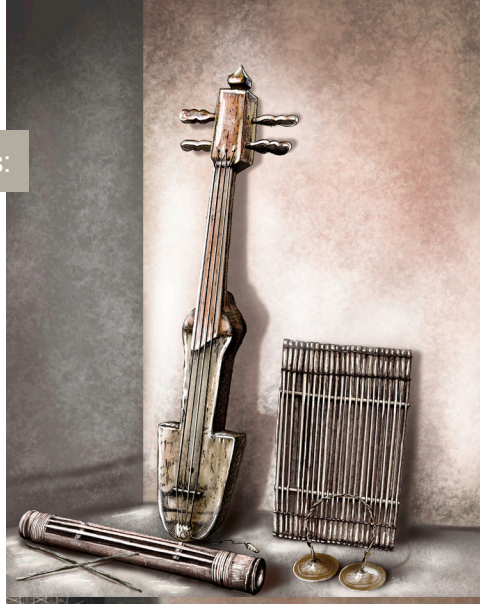
A characteristic of the Khasi lullaby genre is a peculiar way of singing that is called *kynud*. The present song incorporates this singing-sound that involves dragging a note out at the end of a sentence.

Da Thymmei began in 2017. Dajied started out as part of *Snap Paka*, a hugely popular drum ensemble, begun by the Seng Khasi Nongthymmai in 2005. (Seng Khasi is an institution set up in 1899 to preserve and promote the interests of the Khasi indigenous religion.) Dajied left them in a few years in search of new challenges.

Steadily Kharumnuid was Dajied's father, and his main inspiration, and he remembers him playing traditional instruments for leisure. Dajied would accompany his father to the Seng Khasi hall, where, with a child's curiosity, he began touching the musical instruments, thus stirring a desire to play them. This began his foray into learning how to play multiple Khasi musical instruments.

His approach to music is deeply rooted in the Khasi way of learning music, i.e., observing and listening to senior Khasi folk musicians in the villages and elsewhere.

Dajied is 27 years old. He is influenced by two women in his musical career: Synroplang Shabong, the daughter of well-known deceased Khasi songwriter Amio Lyngskor, and another woman named Joyfully Kharhunai, a friend and mentor. Currently, Dajied is the founding member of *Da Thymmei* Performing Arts, a collaboration of Khasi folk musicians from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. He has travelled and toured extensively across the state and around the country with *Da Thymmei*.

1.


2.


3.


4.


1: **Duitara** (left) **& Dymphong** (right)
2: **Ka Bom**
3: **Ki Ksing Shyngrang, Kynthei & Padiah**
4: **Maryngod** (left) **Marynthing** (middle) **& Tangmuri** (right)

Illustrations by **Shanborlang Kharbudon**

He also collaborates with a plethora of other musicians from Shillong and elsewhere. Some of these acts include the Khasi New Wave act Ñion and the band Summersalt. Recently, in 2020, he was fortunate to have been involved as a session musician at the prestigious Yash Raj Studios, Mumbai. In November, he concluded a European tour with the Khasi band Summersalt in Germany and Denmark. Dajied is looking forward to releasing an album of his own in the future.

Vocals & Duitara: **Dajiedsing Kharkongkor**
Guitar: **Hammarsing Kharhmar**
Ka Bom: **Pyniarbok Marbaniang**
Ki Ksing: **Kyntiewborlang Nongkynrih**
Kynshaw **Marbiang Dkhar**
Dymphong: **Marwan Rymbai**

Back Row: Kyntiewborlang Nongkynrih, Marbiang Dkhar, Marwan Rymbai
Front Row: Hammarsing Kharhmar, Dajiedsing Kharkongkor, Pyniarbok Marbaniang

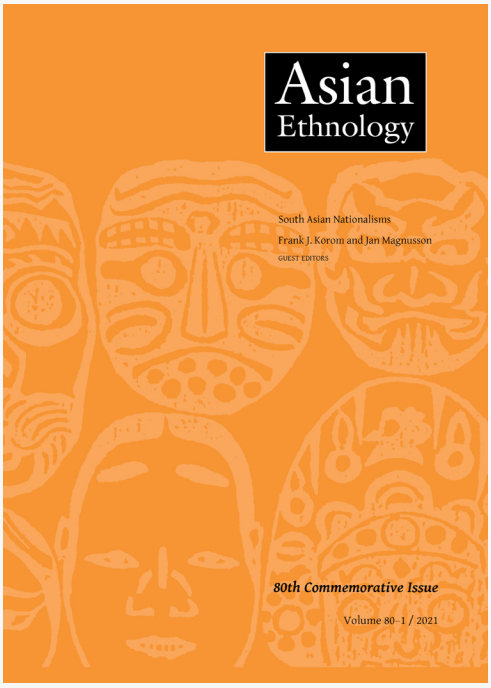
Scan to watch the performance:

Or visit: https://vimeo.com/658200208

JOURNAL IN FOCUS

Asian Ethnology 80 (1)

In 2021, the journal *Asian Ethnology* reached its 80th birthday. The occasion was marked by the publication of a corresponding 80th volume with a Special Issue on South Asian nationalism that focuses on the multiplicity of nationalisms in the Indian Subcontinent. Each of the articles concentrates on a particular type of nationalism in countries that belong to a geopolitical union of states in South Asia. "The overall purpose of this collection of articles is to highlight the varieties of nationalism found in the region, with the goal of interrogating the idea of a singular form of nationalism inherited by postcolonial societies from their European colonizers" (Korom and Magnusson 2021, 5).



In this special issue of* Asian Ethnology, *the contributors collectively want to address some, if not all, of the questions and issues pertaining to nationalism often left unattended. . . . Breaking with the metanarrative of majoritarian nationalism, the articles in this volume attempt to expose a sense of the plurality associated with the contestation of the multiple forms of nationalism at work in South Asia today. In other words, how do particular kinds of nationalistic expression interact with populist nationalisms often propagated by the state? (Korom and Magnusson 2021, 6)

At the same time, we have seen the emergence of "vernacular" forms of nationalism (Korom 2006), the creators of which have crafted subtle ways of opposing the hegemony of the state to receive recognition on behalf of a downtrodden or forgotten minority group on their own linguistic and local terms. Clearly, new forms of nationalism seem to be on the rise in South Asia. Such forms need to be identified, interrogated, and critically analyzed to provide us with a better understanding of the current dynamics concerning cultural politics in the region. (Korom and Magnusson 2021, 6)

This issue was published with guest editor Jan Magnusson and permanent editors Benjamin Dorman and Frank J. Korom. *Asian Ethnology* 80 (2) was also recently published.

Frank J. Korom, a professor of anthropology and religion at Boston University and a faculty associate of Harvard's Program in Folklore & Mythology, is a 2021 recipient of the Humboldt Forschungspreis (https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/apply/sponsorship-programmes/humboldt-research-award). During the tenure of his multi-year award, he will be affiliated intermittently with the South Asian Institute at Heidelberg University (https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/en/). To the special issue of Asian Ethnology, *he also contributed a co-written introduction and two chapters, one on Bangladesh, the other on Bhutan (co-authored with Mari Miyamoto & Jan Magnusson). Individual chapters or the entire volume can be downloaded for free here: https://asianethnology.org/volumes/145.*

The Executive Committee

The executive committee of the ISFNR is elected by the General Assembly and consists of the President, Vice Presidents representing five continents, Treasurer, Secretary, and three ordinary members. Along with the President, the Vice Presidents form the Membership Committee of the Society, under a chair to be elected from their own number.

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Supernatural Belief Narratives

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