

Weeping out Loud: Embodiment in the Contemporary Lament Learning Process

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Introduction

Lamenting is a bodily experience, a means of expressing grief or sorrow, involving the shedding of tears and crying while singing. It stands as a deeply communal expression of grief and other profound emotions. This tradition is global and has been found in different parts of the world, from rural China (McLaren 2008) to Bangladesh (Wilce 2009) and from Ireland (McLaughlin 2019) to Greece (Caraveli-Chaves 1980). While some variation exists across traditions, a common thread worldwide is that laments have predominantly been oral traditions among women (McLaren 2008, 2). In this article, we look at the learning process of lamenting in contemporary Finland from a bodily and experiential perspective using somatics and somaesthetics as our framework.

Geographically and culturally, the Karelian and Ingrian lamenting traditions are closest to Finland. These regions bordering Finland and Russia, also share a historical connection with Finland. Moreover, the laments among the Skolt Sámi people in northern Finland and Russia closely align with the Karelian tradition (Jouste 2020). Folklorist Eila Stepanova defines Karelian laments as sung poetry that “follows conventionalized rules of traditional verbal and non-verbal expression, most often performed by women in ritual contexts and potentially also on non-ritual grievous occasions” (Stepanova 2017, 487).

A new lament phenomenon emerged in Finland at the turn of the 21st century, described with various terms such as neo-laments (Silvonen 2022b; Wilce 2011). These contemporary laments in Finland are composed of various public and private lamenting practices, based on the Karelian and Ingrian traditions. In present-day Finland, lamenting is used, for example, as performing art and music, and it is taught in workshops and lament circles (Hytönen-Ng, Patrikainen & Silvonen 2021). While the contemporary Finnish lament culture awaits comprehensive study, ongoing discussions in various cultural studies, such as the *Kyynelkanavat* project, funded by the Kone Foundation during 2021–2024, are actively addressing this topic. Our research, presented in this article, is part of this project. As ethnomusicologist Elina Hytönen-Ng and folk music educator Emilia Kallonen, we form one of the three researcher-artist pairs working in the project. Our study aims to delve deeper into the process of learning contemporary laments. (See, for instance, the work by Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023; Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022, 2023; and the forthcoming themed issue on *Musiikin Suunta* journal 1/2024).

In this article, we focus on the laments practiced within a lamenting circle, part of the broader context of workshop activities on contemporary lamenting in Finland. Generally, these activities

are not intended for public audiences but rather aim at learning and understanding the tradition through personal experience within a guided group. In our research, we have conducted and studied this kind of circle to explore the potential of embodied approaches like somatics and somaesthetics in the learning process of contemporary lament. Our emphasis is on the *practical somaesthetics* approach, which, according to Shusterman (2012, 45), involves “not just reading or writing about somatic disciplines, but systematically performing them.” However, our work also aligns with *pragmatic somaesthetics*, as we view lamenting as an embodied practice that can be taught and cultivated.

The article commences with a subchapter detailing our research process and methodological choices, setting the grounds for our work within the lamenting circle. This is followed by a brief overview of the Karelian lament tradition and related research, which has framed our engagement with the lamenting circle. Subsequently, we briefly examine the contemporary wave of lamentation and workshop activities in Finland, providing context for our work. We then move on to our backgrounds, elucidating our interest in somatics and somaesthetics concerning lamenting, followed by our definitions of these terms. Finally, we scrutinize the lamenting circle and the activities conducted within it in more detail.

The Research Process and Methodological Choices

Our research focused on a lamenting circle following a short yet intense workshop, allowing participants an extended opportunity to engage with the laments. In this circle, Kallonen implemented her teaching method, wherein participants learned and did laments based on the Karelian lamenting tradition while embodying the essence of the new lament tradition. The circle's work was driven by a keen interest in teaching and learning more about the laments, exploring somatics, and understanding associated communal aspects. The group's aim was to cultivate lamenting skills within a confidential community of the circle, not for public performances or audiences.

Kallonen convened and led the circle, comprising voluntary participants. The lamenting circle spanned over two years, involving a closed group of eleven individuals. Across both years, there were nine active participants, with slight membership changes; two individuals exited after the first year and were replaced by two new members. The group consisted of individuals of diverse genders, while men were in the minority, ranging in age from their late twenties to their sixties. Participants were aware of their involvement in a research project while participating in the circle. The group encompassed individuals speaking different native languages, each crafting laments in their respective languages. Meetings occurred both in-person and online using the Zoom platform, convening approximately once a month from July 2021 to July 2023.

Our research data included the field notes generated from observations by Kallonen and Hytönen-Ng, along with Hytönen-Ng's autoethnographic notes detailing the learning process in the circle. While Kallonen planned and guided the lamenting circle's process and maintained a reflective diary, Hytönen-Ng immersed herself in learning the lamenting process and traditions as well as observing the circle as a participant. Engaged in autoethnographic research, Hytönen-Ng documented her circle attendance and was also interviewed by Kallonen about her experiences in the circle. These discussions, where the roles of researcher and artist-musician interchanged, facilitated deeper self-reflection on the learning process and encountered the difficulties she was having during the process. Interviews with the participants, not included in this paper, will be discussed in another forthcoming paper.

As a researcher-artist working pair, our backgrounds initially seem quite disparate. Our paths to engaging with somatic and somaesthetic theory distinctly differ. Yet, despite these differences, our mutual interest in soma and somaesthetic, particularly in lamenting practice, unites us.

Elina Hytönen-Ng, an ethnomusicologist, specialized previously in musically induced experiences (Hytönen-Ng 2013) and imagined community in popular music (Hytönen-Ng 2017). Initially drawn to embodiment through anthropology, particularly sensory anthropology (see Pink 2015)¹, and already experimenting with autoethnography (see Adams, Ellis & Holman Jones 2017), she noticed that these approaches felt insufficient in capturing the depth of the lamenting experience. Although autoethnography employs “personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices” (Adams et al. 2017, 1), it did not seem comprehensive enough when focusing on bodily experiences. Seeking deeper insight, Hytönen-Ng turned to Shusterman's somaesthetics.

The linguistic association of body-related words with death and funerary traditions somewhat tarnished the beauty of the lament tradition in Hytönen-Ng's mind. However, reading about somaesthetics, particularly Shusterman's (2012, 3) view on the body's central role in artistic creation, resonated with her thoughts. Shusterman's emphasis on *soma* when talking about the body (see Shusterman 2008, xii) resonated with Hytönen-Ng's thoughts. Understanding somaesthetics' emphasis on bodily experience in shaping aesthetic encounters, she recognized its potential in comprehending the lamenting process and its associated somatic dimensions. This realization underscored the significance of the body in learning processes.

Emilia Kallonen, a professional folk singer, lamenter, and folk music educator, specializes in archaic Baltic-Finnic music cultures such as laments and rune singing. Central to her work as a performer and educator are improvisation and auditory music-making. Relating to the perspective of the folk music emeritus professor Heikki Laitinen (2003), Kallonen perceives her role as a contemporary folk musician as a blend of artist and researcher. Her work entails respecting tradition while creatively engaging with historical material, drawing from analytical thinking, imagination, and empathic understanding. Her background in dance also informs her work as a lamenter, emphasizing the need to honor tradition while innovating.

As a contemporary dancer, Kallonen's specialization in somatic movement practices like Body-Mind Centering (Bainbridge Cohen 2012), emphasizes a multi-sensory and embodied approach. Echoing artist-researcher Leena Rouhiainen, Kallonen describes somatic practices as holistic engagements with humans as sensing, feeling, and acting beings. According to Rouhiainen (2006), *somatics* intersects artistic, well-being, and therapeutic realms. Drawing from Thomas Hanna (1928–1990) and Shusterman, she writes:

[...] various experiential and bodily methods that enhance an individual's well-being through movement and physical manipulation are commonly referred to as somatic practices, particularly in the Anglo-American context. [...] However, the broader aim of somatics is to function as a multidisciplinary field encompassing both research and practice, aiming to elucidate the nature of human life and foster well-being among individuals. [...] the research orientation he [Shusterman] calls somaesthetics should consider the significance of sensorial and corporeal aspects in the construction of knowledge. (Rouhiainen 2006, 13–16, translation by EK)

¹ More about the difference between sensory anthropology and anthropology of senses see Bajic (2023).

Based on her own artistic experience and education, Kallonen emphasizes the embodied and experiential approach to the lamenting process. She explains her view of somatics in teaching laments, in which mental images and physical exercises are central to the creative process when adapting oneself to the archaic lament aesthetics and forms of expression.

The theory of somaesthetics offers our joint research a unique perspective, bringing us closer to each other as artists and researchers, while it provides a common ground where we can share equality despite our backgrounds. Our research commenced with the corporeality of the laments and the embodied practices within the lamenting circle. In examining the body's role and embodied approach in the lamenting process, we recognize that a lamenter expresses not only through verbal and vocal channels but also through physical gestures. As an age-old practice expressing intense and deep feelings, the lament inherently involves the entire body. In the context of lamenting, personal creative experience offers us knowledge about individual and communal aspects of the lamenting process and their significance for the lamenter.

Scrutinizing and unraveling the embodied experience of the lamenting process, encompassing the lamenter's emotions and inner imagery of the lamenter, grants deeper insights into the essence and dynamics of lamenting. This broadens our comprehension of this traditional means of expressing profound emotions. It is crucial to recognize that the traditional laments serve not only as a verbal expression relieving emotional burdens but predominantly as communal avenues for processing and releasing diverse emotions.

“Weeping out Loud” as the Karelian Lamenting Tradition

The historically closest lamenting cultures to Finland have thrived in Orthodox Christian regions in Ingria and Karelia, both representing Baltic-Finnic cultures. Ingria, a historical area surrounding St. Petersburg in northwestern Russia, and Karelia, a more expansive and diverse region spanning both sides of the Finnish-Russian border, share many commonalities in their lamenting traditions. Their cultural ties and parallels offer a framework and starting point significantly adopted in contemporary laments in Finland. Our research and creative endeavors specifically reference the Karelian lamenting culture. Here, we will provide a brief overview of this tradition.

Defining Karelia and Karelian culture is intricate, with definitions varying based on perspectives. Karelia, situated in Finnish and Russian territories, comprises several sub-regions where the lamenting traditions vary from one another to a certain degree. The lamenting tradition has held stronger roots in Orthodox areas than in Lutheran ones, where its presence might have been nearly absent (Silvonen 2022c; 28–29, see also Karjalan Sivistysseura 2023a, 2023b).

In Finland, newer definitions, and manifestations of Karelia and Karelians emerged during the 20th century, largely due to the relocation of over 400,000 Karelian individuals to different parts of the country post-Second World War. For these relocated Karelians, laments lost their customary place in the daily life of their now separate communities. The surrounding Finnish populace often didn't comprehend the laments, the Karelian language, or customs. Additionally, Orthodox Christianity was perceived as culturally Russian and somewhat unconventional. With the modernization of society and the disintegration of Karelian communities through migration, the old lamenting tradition seemed to gradually fade. Yet, despite remaining largely concealed and nearly forgotten to the wider public, the skill of lamenting endured among a few elderly women, eventually resurfacing in new forms within subsequent generations toward the century's end. (Tenhunen 2006)

Traditional Karelian laments have been extensively documented through recordings, writings, and studies dating back to the 19th century in both Russia and Finland (Silvonen 2022c; 30–31). Recent recordings in Russian Karelia are also available (see Karjalan Sivistysseura 2023c.) Researchers, such as Konkka (1985), Tenhunen (2006), Stepanova (2014), and Silvonen (2022c), among others, have contributed to work on this tradition. The Karelian lamenting tradition, as an ancient pre-Christian folk culture, that comprises of sung poetry where special lamenting words, plaintive voice, and crying interweave into a singular expression. The Karelians called this practice “weeping out loud,” or “*äänellä itku*” in Finnish, distinguishing ritualistic weeping from singing and natural wordless crying (Konkka 1985). Described by Honko (1963) as the “poetry of eternal longing,” “*ikuisen ikävän runous*,” laments historically marked significant transitions within the community and individual lives. They functioned to release emotions tied to these changes and shielded the community from potential threats (Wilce 2011). However, the most remarkable aspect of laments lies in their highly sophisticated, poetic, and metaphorical language. The traditional lyrics exude reverence, tenderness, and an abundance of natural symbolism while profoundly reflecting ancient worldviews, attitudes toward death, and traditional life order (Stepanova 2014).

Traditionally, within Karelian community life, laments played a crucial role in maintaining communal harmony, encapsulating intergenerational memory and the community's ancient worldview. Typically performed by older women, the skill was transmitted orally within communal contexts. Laments conveyed deep emotions of sorrow and grief, particularly during separations, absences from loved ones, and departures from the community. Most significantly, the laments played a central role in transitional rituals like deaths and funerals, weddings, and young men leaving for war. These pivotal community moments demanded acknowledgment and were marked appropriately through lamenting, believed to reach and resonate with the departed. (Konkka 1985; Nenola-Kallio 1982; Söderholm 1989; Stepanova A. 2012).

In addition to ritual contexts, occasional or everyday laments (see Nenola-Kallio 1982) dealt with emotional situations in the individuals' daily lives. These everyday laments often centered on the lamenter's life story, reminiscences of the deceased, or served as greetings or companions in personal contexts. Unlike ritual laments, these expressions were less community-oriented and more individualistic, offering a platform for personal expression within the framework of the traditional lamenting style. The contemporary laments practiced, for instance, in Finnish workshops today, align with this Karelian everyday lamenting tradition (Tenhunen 2006).

Contemporary Laments

Towards the end of the 20th Century, there arose an increasing interest in relearning the lament tradition. Workshop activities emerged as a part of a “new wave of lament,” described by Tenhunen (2006) as the development of contemporary laments in Finland.² She describes the emergence of “new lamenters” in her dissertation, briefly summarized here. Professional education for folk musicians began in the 1980s at Sibelius Academy, emphasizing laments as part of Karelian music heritage. Simultaneously, renewed study of laments occurred in Finnish (such as Nenola-Kallio 1982) and Russia (see Konkka 1985). Enthusiastic women, primarily of Karelian descent, eager to learn laments from elderly Karelians in Finland, collaborated with professional folk musicians and researchers knowledgeable about Karelian and Ingrian

² There are other practices related to the same phenomenon, which we will not focus on in this article (see more on the forthcoming themed issue of *Musiikin Suunta* journal 1/2024).

lamenting traditions. Together, they began developing workshops, and established the Äänellä Itkijät association in 2001, aiming to revive and “maintain the legacy of the Karelian lament tradition in today’s Finland” (Äänellä itkijät ry. 2023). This association has been a prominent contributor in this field.

Since then, workshop activities have evolved further. Presently, workshops typically span intensive 2–3-day courses open to anyone interested. Teachers are usually professional musicians or individuals who have long engaged with laments (see Äänellä Itkijät ry. 2023). Workshops primarily cover lamenting principles and the tradition’s history, utilizing written research material and archive resources such as photographs, and written and recorded laments. Alongside, there is a common practice of crafting new laments inspired by personal experiences, following the verbal and musical expressions of traditional laments. However, new laments, within the workshop context, are detached from traditional ritual and communal contexts. They are interpreted and created more freely and in various languages, reflecting the absence of a shared culture and oral transmission within villages. Consequently, contemporary contexts yield more individual interpretations. To bridge this gap, new communities, practices, and contexts are being forged to sustain the tradition.

This “new wave of lament” has birthed what we refer to as *contemporary lamenting practices in Finland*, which are mostly based on Karelian and Ingrian lament traditions, primarily highlighting personal topics and emotions of the lamenter. Through these practices, laments have become accessible to a wider audience, including individuals unrelated to Karelian culture, or disconnected from it. Finnish individuals — both men and women — engaging in workshops can now learn about the tradition and its expressions, and create laments as a form of creative self-expression. (Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2011; Silvonen 2022b).

Kallonen, with over ten years of lament study and practice experience and seven years of workshop leadership, has played an active role in the Äänellä Itkijät association from 2018 to 2022. She observes significant diversity among workshop instructors and content, highlighting a field that lacks homogeneity. She notices varying interpretations, methods, and connections to Karelian and Ingrian lament traditions within lamenting practices. The teaching methodologies across different workshops lack cohesive organization and a shared perspective. Consequently, our research delved deeper into a specific lamenting circle as an illustrative example of contemporary lamenting practices.

Since 2018, Kallonen has developed a lamenting circle, extending the intensive weekend workshops. Here, participants can deepen their ties with the tradition in a guided setting over an extended period. The circle aims to evolve a communal approach to practicing laments, paying homage to the Karelian tradition while adapting to the contemporary world. Maintaining this connection to the tradition becomes critical, given the loss of oral transmission and the hindered intergenerational passage of the tradition. The circle allows participants to learn the lamenting tradition through a personal, creative process, beyond archival materials and written research.

Kallonen defines the cultural framework for lament practice in the circle through a guided and embodied learning process, providing the so-called *lamenter student* somatic experiences and understanding of the physiological, mental, and emotional aspects of lamenting. Combined with written research, this holistic approach enhances the understanding of the tradition. Within this group of passionate learners, the circle becomes a community where shared understanding of the practice of the tradition are nurtured.

In contemporary Finnish society, laments offer a channel for individuals and communities to address various losses in their lives. Without traditional communal structure or close family

connections, new communities formed around lamenting, such as those found within the lamenting circle (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen, 2023). However, contemporary Finnish society's unfamiliarity with lament content and forms underscores the necessity of constructing new communal and contextual frameworks where the tradition and its practice are comprehended and shared.

Nonverbal and Bodily Aspects of Lament



Figure 1 *Lamenter woman Tatjana Teronen. Village of Korpiselkä, Ladoga Karelia. (Photograph by A.O. Väisänen, 1917. Finnish Heritage Agency.)*



Figure 2 A lamenter woman by a grave at the annual village celebration. Ilomantsi, Finnish North Karelia.
(Photograph by Kyytinen, Pekka, kuvaaja, 1970, Finnish Heritage Agency.)



Figure 3 A young wife laments after the husband leaves for invitations to the army. Village of Ruva, White Karelia.
(Photograph by A.O. Väisänen, 1915. Finnish Heritage Agency.)

There has not been extensive research on the corporeal or embodied experience of lamenting within the traditional Karelian laments. Historically, the focus has leaned towards the poetic lyrics of the lament. Musicians and new lamenters, however, have started employing an experiential approach since the late 20th century (Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022; Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023). Recently, researchers have begun paying more attention to bodily and emotional expressions. For instance, Silvonen (2022a) has studied the affectivity and emotions in laments preserved in Olonets Karelia's archival tapes. In our research, we explore somatic approaches to deepen the process of learning lamenting, utilizing the somaesthetic framework, which offers a novel and innovative perspective on approaching lamenting.

When examining the bodily aspects of traditional laments, it is crucial to note that collectors in the 19th and 20th centuries, typically from the upper class, were predominantly men who visited villages to gather traditions alien to them by default. We rely on archived photos and recordings to creatively emulate and empathize with traditional lamenting expressions, attempting to perceive them from the lamenter's viewpoint. However, it's imperative to acknowledge our position and perspective, considering the entire research history and available material.

According to Laitinen (2003), musician-researchers must immerse themselves in archival material, treating it as an actual field study. They use personal imagination and multi-dimensional, and multi-sensory methods to adapt archaic traditions' aesthetics, creating new music within the terms of old aesthetics (Laitinen, 2003; 335–338). Stepanova (2014) points out that using archive materials in studying non-verbal communication of traditional lamenting necessitates using multiple senses and methods to grasp a realistic understanding of the laments' comprehensive expression. Konkka (1985; 17) also stresses that "understanding the emotional charge of crying requires emotional reliving and empathizing" (Konkka 1985, 17, translation EK).

Archive photographs from the early 20th Century offer glimpses of lamenters in static positions, often sitting or leaning on the ground or another individual, holding a cotton handkerchief or cloth pressed against their cheek (see pictures 1.–3.). These photographs capture moments of lamentation, though they might have been staged, and detailed field notes about non-verbal communication are scarce. However, notes by tradition collectors describe lamenters' performances as obscure and dramatic (Tenhunen 2006; 66–73.) Fortunately, a 1920s film by Kalevalaseura (2023) showcases a reconstructed wedding ritual involving lamentation, although without sound due to technological limitations. Archived recordings from the early 20th century, however, allow us to hear the voices of old lamenters (see Tenhunen 2006, Silvonen 2022c).

Referring to the archives, we offer a brief description of the bodily aspects of lamenting. Lamenting encompasses musical expressions, the lamenter's voice, special poetic words, and the entire performance situation with its participants and sounds. The lamenter's typical physical posture involves inward-facing protection, often characterized by bowing or rocking from side to side while shielding their face with a cloth or handkerchief. Lamenters might lean on the ground, a grave cross, a tree, their knees, and arms, or another person.

Lamenters articulate words with a weeping, song-like voice, using a special descending melody distinctive to the lament. The words are created and improvised in line with tradition at the time of performance, differing from everyday speech or singing. The bursts of crying, sobbing, sighing, changes in breathing, and tears form part of the lament. Strong emotions connected to the topic and situation impact the lamenter's voice and breathing, introducing variability. (See Silvonen 2022c).

Expressing and venting strong emotions is fundamental in both traditional and contemporary laments. The Karelian tradition provides specific lamenting language and melody guidelines, allowing room for improvisation. These guidelines help laments release emotional tension within themselves and their community, whether in ritual or daily life. Lamenting engages the lamenter's physical body, voice, personal emotions, and imagination. The lamenter's inner world of experience and their ability to empathize are crucial in the lament's expression. Traditionally, lamenter women have been interpreters of emotions within communities. In contemporary lamenting circles, a confidential environment fosters empathy toward each other's laments.

Embodiment and Somatics in the Lamenting Circle

For us, the connection between somatic practices and lamenting seems natural, given that sorrow or sobbing is an inherently bodily and somatic experience. In this section, we'll delve deeper into Emilia Kallonen's somatic approach to teaching laments within the lamenting circle. We'll elaborate on why we find somatic approaches crucial in both understanding the tradition and expressing new laments. As our work progressed, we discovered that somatic engagement aids in transmitting oral traditions while making expressions more personal. We believe it's vital to grasp the essence of lamenting through personal practice, allowing the traditional expressions to serve as our teachers. Engaging in practice enables us to comprehend the emotional and bodily processes involved in lamenting, which we believe are fundamentally human and have existed in various forms throughout time. (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen, 2023).

Throughout our research and creative work within the lamenting circle, we observed participants finding somatic methods intriguing and meaningful. The embodied approach hasn't often been a central focus in this field. Drawing from Hytönen-Ng's autoethnographic work, participatory observations of workshops,³ and interviews with ten laments in a previous project, it becomes apparent, alongside Kallonen's feedback on her teaching, that some Finnish workshop teachers emphasize aspects other than the bodily, such as the poetic and metaphorical qualities of traditional lamenting language. On the other hand, some teachers focus more on the emotions and psychological or even therapeutic interpretations of the lamenting process. Nonetheless, for Kallonen, somatic exercises remained integral, and developing an embodied teaching method was an area of interest.

As a lament educator, Kallonen takes a comprehensive approach, blending experiential and somatic methods with research-based teaching. Her aim is to guide students in understanding the tradition from within, as creative, sensitive, feeling laments. This approach has been vital for her as a contemporary lament artist. In our research project, she has developed exercises and methods that utilize personal imagery, breathing, movement, voice, words, and writing. Her bodily practices are akin to mindfulness exercises (Kabat-Zinn, 2023), incorporating variable improvisations with voice, movement, and creative writing. Through these methods, she incorporates somatics as diverse embodied practices within a holistic view of individuals as creative, sensing, feeling, and social actors, as previously discussed in this article.

Kallonen's multisensory and imagery exercises guide the group to sense both their bodily and emotional internal impulses. This strengthens the sense of presence and shifts the group from analytical to deeper creative and intuitive thinking. According to her, this environment allows for the creation of personal lyrics and expressions of lament. She acknowledges, through

³ Hytönen-Ng has participated in four different workshops taught by Kallonen and one another intensive workshop led by folk musician Liisa Matveinen and also Matveinen's one longer course. Planned courses led by two other teachers were canceled during the research period due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

practice, the therapeutic or empowering interpretation of this holistic approach for the participants. However, she emphasizes that the lamenting circle is not a therapy group, and she does not guide therapeutic lamenting in her workshops or circles. For her, contemporary lament is a process of creative self-expression that strengthens the lamenter's relationship with the tradition while allowing the communal expression of deep emotional experiences. Each participant defines their own needs and goals in practicing laments.

In one of Kallonen's teaching sessions, the structure followed the exercise outlined below. This warming-up exercise aimed to attune the group to the auditory image of the lament and practice producing individual lamenting voices, grounding the preparation and presentation of personal laments in the group.

[Instructions to the group by Kallonen:] Let's tune in first by listening to a traditional lament from an archive recording. When listening, let the sound be around you and accept it without analyzing it. Let the lament move your mind and emotions. If emotions rise, don't strive for anything. Just notice your own sensations and reactions in your body while listening, but do not try to modify them.

After listening, the group participants started to produce the voice together.

Breathe out with an s-sound, then with lips closed m-sound, and finally with an open vowel. The sounds last throughout the whole exhalation. You can think that to produce a voice is to breathe aloud. You can take a break from breathing between the vowel sounds. Then, move your voice with open vowels from a higher pitch to a lower so that they start to form descending phrases. Let your own voice and the simultaneous voice of the group happen, and treat it the same way as when listening to the lament earlier. Let the sound be around you and inside you and let it awaken feelings and images in you and let them color the voice. The goal here is not to produce a clean or "beautiful" voice but to dare to let our inner impulses be heard in our own voice.

Kallonen views creative alertness as the state in which laments are created, fostering and genuine compassion and a deeper connection to our own experiences and others. Bodily and multisensory practices help achieve the archaic and introspective expression of traditional laments, counterbalancing our highly rational modern society that often limits emotional expression and lacks compassion.

Feedback from Kallonen's workshops and the circle highlights that embodied practices aid in the personal learning process of lamenting, revealing the depth and comprehensiveness of the practice. These observations underscore the importance of incorporating somatic exercises and methods in the lamenting circle. These practices align with Shusterman's (2008, 4) notion that being aware of our somatic self-knowledge enriches our lives and artistic pursuits. In the context of lamenting, this suggests that being fully aware of our somatic aspects while engaging in lamenting deepens our experiences, offering layers to adapt to the lamenting experiences of previous generations.

As a Participant in the Lamenting Circle

Elina Hytönen-Ng was an active participant in the lamenting circle conducted as part of our research from 2021 to 2023, led by Emilia Kallonen. Hytönen-Ng engaged in five intensive lamenting courses since early 2018, mostly under Kallonen's guidance, with some led by another instructor, Liisa Matveinen. As part of her involvement in the circle, Hytönen-Ng employed autoethnography, focusing on her own experiences as the object of study. Reflective discussions between Kallonen and Hytönen-Ng provided a platform to share sensory and somatic knowledge related to laments. These discussions also allowed Hytönen-Ng to address challenges and seek guidance. For instance, initially, she struggled to control the lamenting process, often breaking into uncontrollable sobbing midway through the lament. Through the discussions with Kallonen, she learned that while sobbing was acceptable and expected in lamenting, the goal was to attempt to complete the lament. Having the freedom to repeat lyrics, revisit storyline elements, and navigate challenging emotional segments helped her find closure in the lament.

Somatic knowledge offers a different perspective on the learning process compared to textual knowledge. For Hytönen-Ng, accustomed to organizing knowledge textually as a researcher, the somatic approach allowed her to comprehend the practical aspects of lamenting more effectively. The somatic exercises have allowed her to learn the lamenting tradition by processing it bodily. Throughout this learning journey, she became more attuned to various feelings and their corresponding bodily sensations. For example, impending grief during the lament manifested as a heavy sensation in her chest. She observed that the recency of emotional issues reflected in stronger bodily reactions, occasionally causing singing to devolve into sobs and tears, especially with intensely personal topics. The breaking could have stemmed from a single word or expression within the text that amplified or appeared to emphasize the emotion conveyed in the lament. The further removed the subject became in terms of time and emotional processing, the more the intensity of emotional reactions appeared to wane. Revisiting the same topic for lamenting also seemed to provide a comparable sense of distance.

Sometimes, focusing on the lyrics or recalling previous somatic experiences during laments could intensify emotions. Emmi Kuittinen, reflecting on achieving the right emotional state before performing a lament, emphasized using certain facial expressions associated with crying, akin to muscle memory (Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022). Rather than terming this as “muscle memory,” (Shusterman 2012, 98–99), we prefer to use the term “somatic memory,” encompassing broader associations beyond muscles. These somatic changes, like squinting or facial expressions, trigger appropriate reactions and emotions, integral to the learning process in the lamenting circle. Hytönen-Ng's learning journey revealed that with time, emotional reactions to a certain event diminish to some extent, making singing laments easier. Repeated lamenting about a specific topic gradually eases the emotional impact in daily life. Engaging in laments seems to strengthen the learning process and somatic memory. It also offers a new perspective on the topic, often reducing its emotional intensity and painfulness.

As an autoethnographic note, Hytönen-Ng realized during her reflective work within the circle that her relationship with her deceased father continued to develop through laments, contrary to her earlier belief that it had ended upon his death. The realization stemmed from the idea prevalent in laments that the deceased can still hear and be addressed through laments. This realization evolved further during discussions about war when the war in Ukraine began in 2022. Considering her father's past as a retired army officer and his involvement in U.N. peacekeeping, she contemplated creating a lament about the war and addressing it to her father. This process helped her deepen her understanding of her father's experiences, establishing a renewed connection with him.

Conclusions

This article has looked at the somatic approaches as integral to the learning process of contemporary lament. Our focus has centered on the embodied experiences of practicing laments in the context of one lamenting circle in contemporary Finland. It is evident that somatic experiences play a crucial role in laments and lamenting, an aspect often overlooked in prior research. Past research primarily emphasizes archival images and fleeting references to the singer's posture, while the focus remains predominantly on the lament's text and lyrics. While these textual elements are essential to the overall performance, the somatic and experiential facets have remained concealed.

Examining the somatic dimensions of lamenting offers a deeper comprehension of lament as a holistic practice. Hence, we regard the body and corporeality as pivotal in the learning process of lamenting. However, the emphasis placed by instructors in lamenting circles significantly influences individual participants. Some instructors may prioritize linguistic aspects, eclipsing somatic experiences and leaving participants to navigate the multifaceted somatic learning on their own. We believe it's crucial for participants in lamenting courses and circles to attune themselves to their bodies, focusing not only on melody lines or chords. Emilia Kallonen, therefore, incorporates numerous somatic exercises into the courses and circles she leads.

Consciously or unconsciously, participants in the lamenting circle also engage with somatic memory associated with lamenting. This somatic memory, discussed by Shusterman (2012, 98–99) also with the term muscle memory, serves as a reminder of somatic changes related to sorrow and crying. It prompts the body to respond appropriately to evoke the necessary emotions for lamenting. The lamenting circle provides participants with the opportunity to practice laments, learn correct reactions, and integrate them into their somatic memory. This enables reliance on their body's instinctual knowledge of the correct reactions, bypassing the need for conscious focus. The embodied experience and shared understanding of the somatic aspects of lamenting are integral to the learning process. The orally transmitted cultural heritage, acquired aurally, continues within the lamenting circle through observation, listening to others' laments, and developing a personal relationship with text and melody lines. These elements are then instrumental in evolving individual expressions.

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