



Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore,

Department of Ethnology,

University of Tartu

Studies in Folk Culture

Volume II

Peoples' Lives:
Songs and Stories,
Magic and Law

Tartu 2004

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Volume 2

*Peoples' Lives: Songs and Stories,
Magic and Law*

 TARTU UNIVERSITY
PRESS

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Preface

The second volume of the series "Studies in Folk Culture" encompasses a wide range of topics concerning the folklore and everyday life practices of Estonians, Udmurts, Forest Nenets, Khantys and the other indigenous peoples of the circumpolar region. It contains the descriptions, analyses and interpretations of different folklore genres, folk laws, folk singers' worldviews and popular magic. Hence, this volume differs considerably from the first volume in that its predecessor was more concerned with the traditions, worldview, and rituals of Siberian peoples.

In the preface of the first volume of our series it was promised that the first two issues would include papers from the international symposium "Sacred and Profane in the Dialogue of Cultures: Ritual and Generic Aspects" which would thereby complete the second volume. The symposium was organized by the Departments of Estonian and Comparative Folklore and that of Ethnology of the University of Tartu in April, 2002. In reality, as is often the case, not everything goes according to plan, so, only two of the papers included in this volume are more or less connected with that symposium.

We are still quite optimistic that "Studies in Folk Culture" will keep appearing more regularly than its predecessor, "Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion", issued by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu from 1996 to 1999. There is also some grounds for this optimism, as the next couple of volumes are already in the process of being edited. This series is an important part of the scientific activities of the Departments of Folkloristics and Ethnology of our university. With "Studies in Folk Culture" we will attempt to expand our contacts

with colleagues and research centres around the world. There is also the hope of broadening the range of topics and scientific problems touched on and developed by our authors, and friends – old and new.

Torsten Löfstedt (Kalmar), in his article “Eden and the Animal Languages: A Comparison between the Paradise Narrative and AT 670”, examines the hypothesis “that the paradise narrative was a reworking of a folktale known as The Animal Languages”, as first suggested by Koolemans Beynen in 1986. Löfstedt concludes his analysis by arguing that the similarities between the tales are “striking” and the differences as “significant, but can largely be accounted for in terms of differing functions”.

Problems of folklore genres are the concern of **Eva Toulouze** (Tartu). She concentrates on the oral traditions of the Forest Nenets people whose culture, essentially, has not been studied until very recent times. In her pioneer study, Toulouze makes an attempt to distinguish some folklore genres of the Forest Nenets. She discusses the folk interpretations of these genres as well as the problems of classification of texts that can be considered as belonging to different genres at the same time.

“Notes on Customary Law and Worldview”, written by **Collin Hakkinen** (Kasilof) and **Art Leete** (Tartu) is the discussion of an article by Art Leete, published in the previous volume of “Studies in Folk Culture”¹. The authors attempt to analyse and compare some of the ideal and real aspects of indigenous hunting rules and gender issues of folk law in Alaska and the northern regions of Russia. A few words are dedicated to the dialogue between official and customary law in general.

Problems of conflict management in an isolated community form also an important aspect of **Tatyana Minniyakhmetova’s** (Innsbruck) paper “The Case of a Cat and a Dog in a Well”:

¹ Leete, Art. “Role of Customary Law in the Kazym War: Women and Sacred Rules”. In: *Studies in Folk Culture*, Tartu: Tartu University Press 2003, vol. 1, 23–45.

Motifs, Folk Inquiry and Metafolkloristic Interpretation (on Udmurtian Folk Beliefs)". This study explores one actual case of witchcraft in the Udmurt village of Bayshady in Bashkiria. The article primarily utilizes folk interpretations of magic and gives some intimate insights into human relations within a local community. Another important aspect of the article is the humour that has been retained. Tatyana Minniyakhmetova's paper is based on a presentation she gave at the symposium "Sacred and Profane in the Dialogue of Cultures".

Kristiina Ehin's (Tartu) paper with the lengthy title, "The Heritage of Estonian Folk Singer Kadri Kukk of Karksi Parish in light of Feminist Research: The Ache and Authority of One's Gender. Questions and Not Only Answers: Feminist Folklore Research and the Interviews Conducted with Kadri Kukk by Folklorists, from the point of view of an "Armchair Scientist"", is an attempt to deal with some very personal aspects of the life-world of one of the last great Estonian runo-singers from an essentially temporal distance. Decades ago, when Estonian folklorists "discovered" Kadri Kukk, she was used only as a living reservoir to collect old folk songs from. Using old recordings, especially those containing some informal discussions between the professional folklorists and Kadri Kukk, Ehin tries to comprehend the singer's personal attitude towards gender relations, as might be mirrored in her songs. The primary message of the article is that the folk singer was not just an anonymous carrier of some archaic traditions, but rather, also had her own interpretations of these folk songs, as well as personal reactions toward the realities of life.

In many ways similar in topic, **Merili Metsvahi's** (Tartu) article, "Cultural Differences in Life Story Narration", is an analysis of the relationship between narrative tradition and personal feelings. She compares the telling of two different life stories of two elderly women – one a representative of modern western society, the other having lived almost all her life in the border area between Estonia and Russia. Metsvahi interprets striking differences in the way these women narrate their life stories as a result of profound cultural differences. This study discusses the multiple

ways in which the intimate aspects of one's life can be expressed within various cultural contexts.

The editors of this volume would like to thank everyone who helped in making this edition possible. We would like to extend our especial gratitude to our language editors Collin Hakkinen, Bruce McAlister and to all authors who contributed to this volume. We would also like to thank the Estonian Ministry of Education (state program "Estonian Language and National Memory" (the project "Everyday Culture: Aspects of Terminology and Critics of the Sources") and the target financed project "The Discourse of Everyday Life and the Dialogue of Cultures", TFLKN0531) for its support in the preparation of this volume. At various stages of our work we also received help from Tatyana Minniyakhmetova and Tiiu Jaago to whom we are also grateful.

September 2004

Eden and the Animal Languages: A Comparison between the Paradise Narrative and AT 670

Torsten Löfstedt

Introduction

In a paper delivered at the World Archaeological Congress in Southampton in September 1986, G. Koolemans Beynen first suggested that the paradise narrative was a reworking of a folktale known as *The Animal Languages*. Although the paper was published in 1990 and reprinted in 1994, it does not seem to have left any impression on Old Testament exegetes. I find that this theory is worthy of attention, and will therefore examine the relationship between the two narratives more closely.¹ Before presenting Beynen's thesis, I will give a very brief overview of some of the questions regarding the origin of the paradise narrative.

¹ Unaware of Beynen's presentation in 1986, I reached the same conclusion as he did in a paper that I presented at Prof. Juha Pentikäinen's seminar in religion at Helsinki University on April 2, 1990. A modified version was presented at the Berkeley Slavic Graduate Colloquium on Nov. 12, 1990.

The paradise narrative

Ever since Julius Wellhausen put forward the “Documentary theory of the Pentateuch” in several articles written in 1876 and 1877, most commentators have subscribed to the belief that Genesis is a composite work, involving at least three different redactors, and incorporating material from several different genres including legend, myth, and genealogy.² Identifying the literary units and classifying them according to genre are some of the tasks of OT form criticism.³ The paradise narrative (Gen 2.4b-3.24) is traditionally identified as a distinct literary unit. It begins with a second creation account that differs significantly from the one recorded in Gen 1.1-2.4a. It comes to a logical conclusion in 3.24, whereas chapter 4.1 marks the beginning of a new narrative, the story of Cain and Abel.⁴ But this narrative includes many inconsistencies, which suggest that it too is a composite creation, originally comprised of independent narratives. These inconsistencies include the number of trees in the garden; at first two trees are mentioned as standing in the middle of the garden – the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2.9). However, subsequent verses mention only a single tree in the garden (Gen 3.3). The tree of life disappears from the narrative, only to be mentioned again later in Gen 3.22, almost as an afterthought.⁵ A second inconsistency is stylistic in nature, in that the description of the four rivers (Gen 2.10–14) differs stylistically from the rest of the narrative and does not contribute to the development of the story.⁶ The creation of Eve (Gen 2.18–25) also

² See Gunkel 1997 (1910): 25; see also von Rad 1972: 74.

³ Much of the pioneering work in this area was carried out by Hermann Gunkel in his commentary on Genesis, first published in 1901, third edition (1910) translated into English 1997.

⁴ Cf Gunkel 1997 (1910); Westermann 1994; Mikaelsson 1980.

⁵ Cf Gunkel 1997 (1910): 16.

⁶ von Rad 1972: 79; Westermann 1994: 194, 215.

breaks the flow of the narration and was presumably inserted to explain the origin of the fourth character, the woman.⁷

The paradise narrative presents many puzzles for exegetes one of which is the serpent in the garden. The true nature of the serpent in paradise has been the subject of discussion for several millennia.⁸ Traditionally Christian commentators have interpreted the serpent in this passage as being the devil, or at least as being possessed by the devil. This would give the serpent a motive and explain his unusual intelligence.⁹ Christian commentators find support for identifying the serpent with Satan in the New Testament. The connection is most clear in Rev 12.9: “The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled down to earth, and his angels with him” (NIV), and in Rev 20.2: “[the angel] seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore...” (NIV). These references to a

⁷ Cf Westermann 1994: 194.

⁸ See for example Gregory Allen Robbins, ed., 1988 *Genesis 1–3 in the history of exegesis: intrigue in the garden*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 282pp; Martin Metzger 1959 *Die Paradieserzählung: die Geschichte ihrer Auslegung von J. Clericus bis WML de Wette*. Bonn: H. Bouwier u. Co Verlag 173pp.

⁹ Arguably this equation of the serpent and the Devil has its origin in Jewish tradition. While Russell (1981 *Satan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p 28) asserts that “the rabbis... did not identify Satan with the serpent of Genesis”, others have found the two equated in the Wisdom of Solomon: “Through the devil’s envy death entered the world...” (Wis 2.24, NRSV). Winston argues in his commentary on Wisdom that the author is identifying “the serpent of Genesis with Ahriman” the destructive spirit of Zoroastrian religion, which in turn is one of the figures that has inspired later Jewish and Christian traditions of the Devil. Winston 1979: *The Wisdom of Solomon (Anchor Bible)* p 122. Others argue that Wis 2.24 refers to Cain’s jealousy, or to the Watcher story (cf Gen 6.1–5). See Neil Forsyth 1987 *The Old Enemy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p 223 for discussion.

serpent that “leads the whole world astray” build on the paradise narrative and have been combined with a traditional interpretation of Isa 14.12.¹⁰

In the Gospels, Jesus also makes an indirect connection between the devil and a serpent.

After the 72 return, they tell Jesus of their success in carrying out their mission, saying “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name”, but he replies, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10.18–19, NIV). The reference to Satan’s fall echoes Isa 14, while the sentence that follows might well be an allusion to Gen 3.15.¹¹ John 8.44 may also be a reference to the devil as the serpent of the Paradise Narrative – [the devil] “was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (NIV).¹² 1 John 3.8 is similar: “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning” (NIV).

Paul also infers a connection between the serpent in Eden and the devil in Rom 16.20: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (NIV). This may be an allusion to the paradise narrative, where God had said to the snake regarding Adam – “he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3.15, NIV).¹³ This traditional interpretation equating the serpent in the garden with the devil is still widely accepted in Christian circles,

¹⁰ Cf Mounce 1977: *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT) p 242.

¹¹ The possibility that this is a reference to Ps 91.13 cannot be ruled out.

¹² So also G.R. Beasley-Murray 1987: *John* (Word Biblical Commentary) p. 135.

¹³ In his commentary on Romans, CEB Cranfield suggests that this verse may also be referring to Ps 91.13, *Test Simeon* 6.6, *Test Levi* 18.12 (1979: *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC) p 803. See also Forsyth: “It is likely... that Paul and his correspondents were aware of the alignment of the Genesis serpent with Satan” (1987: 272).

and if the paradise narrative is seen as an integral part of the Scriptures, it is a fitting interpretation.

However, many other commentators who have examined the paradise narrative in its immediate context have not accepted this interpretation. They assert that the snake is not identified with the Devil in the paradise narrative, but is rather, the shrewdest of the animals that God created. The paradise narrative specifically would exclude any dualistic interpretation of the origin of evil.¹⁴ There is no counter-creator in Genesis. But if the snake is not the devil, then who or what is it? Westermann identifies three approaches to the origin of this narrative: the narrative was written as an allegory; the episode is in origin a myth, and the snake is a god whom the Hebrew redactor has demoted to a mere animal; the episode is based on a folk- or fairytale, and the talking snake is a character without religious significance.¹⁵ There is something to be said for each alternative. If the text was in origin an allegory, the question then arises, what does the snake stand for? It has been argued that the snake represents evil in general, but this interpretation is not entirely persuasive as the snake is said to be cunning, not evil.¹⁶ The snake does, however, show itself to be evil through its actions, so this interpretation cannot be rejected outright either. Another interpretation, put forth in the Talmud, is that the snake symbolizes curiosity.¹⁷ The connection between the snake and human curiosity is an interesting one that I will return to later in this paper. That the snake has symbolic value is certain, but it does not follow that the narrative as a whole was intended as an allegory. I will therefore

¹⁴ Cassuto 1961: 139–40; von Rad 1972: 87; Davidson 1973: 39; Westermann 1994: 238–9; Sarna 1989: 24.

¹⁵ Westermann 1994: 237.

¹⁶ The cunning of the snake is proverbial; see Matt 10.16. The Hebrew dietary laws may have included the snake among those animals that swarm on the ground and which would therefore be detestable, unclean and unfit for human consumption, but it is still not called evil (see Lev 11.41).

¹⁷ Westermann 1994: 237 refers to Talmud, B. Jacob.

briefly examine the other two explanations for the origin of this passage.

The paradise narrative itself is rightly considered a myth, as it is “a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form.”¹⁸ It is not too farfetched then to seek its background in other mythological materials. The mythological explanation assumes that the paradise narrative is a retelling of an older myth; the snake of Genesis refers to a deity either worshipped by the ancestors of the Israelites or by neighboring tribes. This snake deity, possibly even a counter-creator, was demoted to the status of common serpent by the Hebrew redactor in order to fit his own view of the supreme God.¹⁹ The snake’s unusual knowledge and ability to speak are vestiges of its former prestige. One might ask why the redactor retained the snake at all, if it referred to a foreign god. One possibility is that he sought to counteract the snake cult in Israel. There are hints of such a cult in the passages regarding the bronze serpent in Numbers 21; see especially 2 Kings 18.4:

King Hezekiah removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze serpent Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelities had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan) (2 Kings 18.4 NIV).

Yet even given the background of the snake cult, the editor’s reasons for including this episode in the creation narrative are still not clear. Was it to show both that the snake god was evil and to show that the snake god was not a god after all, but merely a snake? The two motives seem to contradict one another.

¹⁸ Dundes 1984: 1.

¹⁹ “Originally the ‘serpent’ will have been an evil serpentine demon, hostile to God and humans, which was reduced to an animal in Israel” (Gunkel 1997 (1910): 15).

Cassuto believes that the paradise narrative is related to an ancient Israelite myth about the revolt of Leviathan, the ruler of the sea, against God. This myth is reflected also in Isaiah 27.1: "In that day the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great, and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea" (NIV).²⁰ Although both texts mention serpents that oppose God, and although later biblical texts fuse Leviathan and the serpent of Eden, the serpent in Genesis shows no connection with the sea. Rather, it is cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust. In Isa 27.1 Leviathan is more closely related to Lotan, the sea monster of Ugaritic texts, whose imagined appearance cannot be determined with any certainty.²¹

Other Biblical parallels to the paradise narrative may be found; one of the most interesting is Ezek 28. 11–19.²² While some scholars have used this text as a separate witness to the narrative behind the Genesis text, I am inclined to believe that it is dependent on the Genesis text.²³

There certainly are parallels between Genesis and other mythological texts from the ancient Near East, but none of the parallels mentioned are clearly ancestral to the paradise narrative

²⁰ Cassuto 1961: 140. So also Sarna: "Biblical texts such as Isa 27.1 demonstrate that in Israel popular compositions once existed in which the serpent, a monster representing primeval chaos, challenged, to its own ruin, God's creative endeavors" (1989).

²¹ Oswalt 1986: *The Book of Isaiah*, chapters 1–39 (NICOT) p. 490. Other biblical references to Leviathan include Job 3.8; 7.12; Ps 74.14; 104.26; Isa 59.1.

²² Westermann 1994: 245.

²³ Zimmerli maintains that it is an independent tradition (1983: 90); Block does not: "One should not exaggerate the influence of extrabiblical traditions. Ezekiel's theology is informed primarily by his Yahwistic heritage, and most of the features of the present oracle can be accounted for within the biblical tradition" (1988: 120).

as a whole.²⁴ Having failed to find clear mythological parallels, scholars suggested that the origin of the narrative might be found in folktales.²⁵ This is a view I share. There are great similarities between myths and folktales and it is not always possible to maintain a generic boundary. I will use Dundes' formulation of the widely accepted distinction between myths and folktales: myths differ from folktales in that myths are considered sacred, while folktales are usually "secular and fictional"²⁶. In suggesting that a folktale is the basis of the paradise narrative, I mean that this religious narrative was originally derived from a narrative of a more secular nature. Several folkloric traits have been identified in the first eleven chapters of Genesis and because of the close affinity between folktales and myths, these could equally well be considered mythological traits.²⁷ For example, as Gunkel noted, the forbidden tree in the garden in the paradise narrative is a version of a common folktale motif. Just as Adam and Eve are free to eat from all of the trees in the garden with one exception, so too, fairytales tell of a luxurious castle that contains all the hero could need, and where he may walk freely throughout, but with the exception of one room that he is not allowed to enter. The hero of the folktale, like Adam and Eve, breaks the interdiction.²⁸ There are several other folkloric traits in the paradise narrative; some examples follow.

²⁴ There are for example ancient Near Eastern parallels to the creation of man and woman, to primeval life in the garden, and to a great flood.

²⁵ Cf Gunkel 1997(1910), Gaster 1981, Westermann 1994: 238, Niditch 1993. See also Dundes 1999: 24–25.

²⁶ Dundes 1984: 1.

²⁷ Much has been written regarding the folkloric elements in the paradise narrative (See Gunkel 1997(1910), Frazer 1919, Gaster 1981, Niditch 1993); I will not review all the literature on this subject, but merely identify those traits that are most relevant to the present paper. For further reading, see also Patricia G. Kirkpatrick 1988 *The Old Testament and Folklore Study*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

²⁸ Gunkel 1997 (1910): 11; cf Beynen 1990: 45 (see also Motif Index C611).

The LORD God is described in quite anthropomorphic terms, and walks around in the garden, looking for the man and the woman. He is far from the all-knowing, invisible God of the theologians or of Genesis 1, but more akin to the taskmaster of a folktale.

In fairytales, conversations are stereotyped, and a character cannot speak to more than one character at a time.²⁹ The same holds true for the paradise narrative; God calls on Adam alone in 3.9, even though Eve is also hiding; the snake speaks to Eve alone in 3.1. In many fairytales, and myths, as well as the paradise narrative, animals speak, and the hero is not surprised.³⁰

The cunning snake is introduced into the paradise narrative quite abruptly, and upon having played out its role, is removed from the story. Similarly, in fairytales, a character often enters the story without any introduction and serves only to give the hero a gift that would prove important during the course of the narrative.³¹ Having given its gift and thereby fulfilled its task, the character is forgotten. In folkloric terminology, these gift-giving characters are called donors.³² The source of the donor's gift is not explained in fairytales, just as the source of snake's knowledge remains unexplained in Genesis. We are not told of how the snake knew that Eve would become like God if she ate of the fruit. Prior to that God had only informed Adam that he would die. In fairytales, donors often act without motivation (although the hero is first tested). Likewise, in the paradise narrative, the snake has nothing to gain by convincing Eve to eat the fruit of the tree.

²⁹ "Two is the maximum number of characters who appear at one time [in an oral narrative]". See also Westermann 1994: 239: "conversations in ancient narratives are always conducted by two people only" (Olrik 1965 (1909): 134).

³⁰ Cf Gunkel: "It is not remarkable for animals to speak like humans in fairy tales, animal tales, and even in legends" (1997 (1910): 15).

³¹ Gunkel: "The quiescence of figures not necessary to the main story line characterizes legend style" (1997 (1910): 17). (The term 'folk tale' would have been preferable to 'legend' as a translation of *Sage*. TL)

³² Propp 1968 (1927): 39.

Other folkloric traits in the paradise narrative can also be identified, but these examples suffice to show that it is not unreasonable to seek parallels and ultimately sources for the biblical narrative in folktales.

Old Testament commentators seeking to trace the paradise narrative back to a folktale have not succeeded in showing which folktale it would have come from.³³ They may have assumed that since the folktale must be older than the Genesis account, it could only be preserved in ancient Near Eastern inscriptions. Among these inscriptions, no close parallels to this text have been found. Some scholars have resorted to supplying their own reconstructions of the folktale.³⁴

Beynen's thesis

To the best of my knowledge, Beynen was the first to identify a folktale that could plausibly serve as a source for the paradise narrative.³⁵ That folktale is *The Animal Languages* (AT 670)³⁶. *The Animal Languages* is an oral narrative, and as such there is considerable variation between the different versions. Most versions of the tale have the following traits in common:

³³ Recently Hans-Peter Müller compared some African myths about the origin of death with the paradise narrative (Müller 1999). While he does identify some parallels, he does not resolve the question of genetic relationship.

³⁴ Cf Gunkel 1997 (1910): 35; Frazer 1919 who combines the story of the cast skin with the story of the falsified message; and Gaster 1981: 35ff, who incorporates Frazer's reconstruction.

³⁵ Beynen's identification is rather indirect. On the one hand he speaks of "the transformation of the AT 670 tales into the Genesis narrative" (1990: 49), on the other he writes "the story of mankind's Fall cannot be traced to a tale that has served as its prototype" (1990: 50).

³⁶ AT 670: this is the number the tale is given in the Aarne & Thompson tale type index (Aarne & Thompson 1981).

A man helps a snake in some way. In turn he receives from it the power to understand the languages of animals, but only on the condition that he not reveal his knowledge to anyone. If he does, he will die. He hears some animals saying something funny and laughs. His wife demands that he tell her what he was laughing at. The man hesitates and says that he will die if he tells her. But his wife insists on knowing. The man is about to reveal his secret to his wife, when he hears a rooster brag of how easily he rules over his many wives, whereas the man cannot rule over his one wife, and would die to satisfy her. When his wife insists again on knowing his secret, the man refuses to submit to her demand and beats her into submission.³⁷

There are some remarkable similarities between this tale and the paradise narrative. One striking similarity is that three of the characters are the same – the man, the woman, and the snake. But the differences between the narratives are also significant. Drawing inspiration from Lévi-Strauss, Beynen considers the opposition between management and production to be of central importance to both narratives and “basic in the narrative’s course of action”³⁸. This opposition is more significant than that of the one between the man and the woman. He interprets Lévi-Strauss as saying “the management-production opposition ... is apparently not necessarily connected with the male-female opposition...” In other words, these narratives are not so much about men and women, as they are about managers and producers. In the two narratives man happens to be assigned the role of manager and woman that of producer.³⁹ Where they differ is in the failure of man as a manager within the paradise narrative.⁴⁰ Beynen argues that the message of AT 670 is

³⁷ My construction of this ‘normal form’ of the tale is based on the reconstructions of Aarne 1914: 55 and Aarne & Thompson 1981: 233.

³⁸ Beynen 1990: 45.

³⁹ Beynen 1990: 45 refers to Lévi-Strauss 1969: 50, a reference of only marginal interest.

⁴⁰ “Man is an incompetent manager” (Beynen 1990: 51).

“life is just, ... predictable and manageable,”⁴¹ and man has “control over his fate,”⁴² whereas in the paradise narrative man finds himself completely dependent on Yahweh’s mercy. Beynen acknowledges these differences, while nevertheless maintaining that the two narratives are related:

The adherents of the Israelite religion selected a tale that in its original form – like the Canaanite religions – assumed that mankind could solve its own problems. The reworking of the tale is part of an ideological attack by the Israelite religion on other ideological systems. (Beynen 1990: 51)

I would agree that the paradise narrative might well be a reworking of AT 670, but I do not think that the main theme of AT 670 is that “life is just, predictable and manageable”, nor is the intent of the paradise narrative to portray man as an incompetent manager. Beynen assumes that in the paradise narrative the male alone is given the role of manager – but that claim is not supported by the text. It is only after the woman is deceived by the serpent that God establishes a clear hierarchical relationship between the man and woman.⁴³ One reason Beynen emphasizes the managerial roles of the two narratives is that he finds a parallel between God the good shepherd and the shepherd hero of AT 670.⁴⁴ This parallel does not stand – the portrayal of God as good shepherd is foreign to the paradise narrative, and the hero’s occupation in AT 670 varies greatly between the different versions. In short, Beynen reads the

⁴¹ Beynen 1990: 46.

⁴² Beynen 1990: 48.

⁴³ Although the preceding chapters are not part of the paradise narrative, it may also be mentioned that both the man and the woman were created in God’s image, and both were ordered to subdue the earth (Gen 1.27–28).

⁴⁴ “In the AT 670 tales man is typically represented as a shepherd, which brings to mind the biblical image of the Good Shepherd” (Beynen 1990: 49).

manager-producer dichotomy into the text, while neglecting a more significant dichotomy.

A new comparison between the paradise narrative and AT 670

Dichotomies and oppositional pairs are certainly evident in AT 670, but not those that Beynen chose to focus on. One aspect that all versions of *The Animal Languages* have in common is that the hero is a man, and his foil is his wife.⁴⁵ It is therefore more helpful to examine the sex roles of the two narratives. AT 670 clearly teaches that men should assert their dominance over women. Like AT 670, the paradise narrative also establishes gender roles. It too can be seen as teaching male dominance, but as shall be shown, it is a measured dominance.

In both AT 670 and the paradise narrative, the man and the woman are the only human characters. In both cases the woman tries to give orders or advice to her husband, and in so doing causes his death, or nearly so. In neither case was it the woman's intention of bringing about death, and although she had been warned of the danger, she simply does not believe what she has been told. In neither case does the narrative actually end with the death of any characters.

Both narratives tell of the harmful result of excessive curiosity and disobedience. In both narratives, the moral (or one of the morals) is that a man should not obey or take advice from his wife, rather the woman should submit to her husband. God reproved Adam because he listened to his wife and ate from the tree which

⁴⁵ In the Indian folktale "The woman who understood animal languages" the roles are reversed. But this tale differs significantly enough from *The Animal Languages* in other respects as well, so much so that it merits its own entry into the tale-type index (AT 670A). A comparison of all narratives related to *The Animal Languages* would require a new monograph-length treatment.

he had been commanded not to eat of (Gen 3.17). Her punishment is to be subject to her husband: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3.16, NIV). In both narratives the woman is punished physically for her actions. It can be argued that in both the man punishes her: in the folktale he whips her, and in the Genesis text God punishes her with delivery pains (Gen 3.16), which are ultimately the result of being impregnated by her husband.

There are of course many differences between the two narratives. In the Genesis account, there are four characters – the man, the woman, the snake, and God. God creates the tree of knowledge of good and evil and forbids Adam and Eve to eat of it. He then disappears from the scene, returns to find that his commandment has been broken, then punishes the man, the woman, and the snake. In *The Animal Languages* the characters include a man, a woman and a snake, but God has no role. This is the central difference between the two narratives.⁴⁶

In *The Animal Languages* the hero is usually apprehensive when he first finds the snake, but he overcomes his fears and gives in to the snake's pleading. He passes the first test and is rewarded. With his reward he is given a new test – an interdiction: he is not to divulge his secret knowledge. He succeeds in this as well, and for him, the tale ends happily. In the paradise narrative God arranges the first test by setting up an interdiction which the (anti-)heroes break. The result is a lack – the man and woman are deprived of eternal life and of living with God. The lack is not overcome in the paradise narrative, and the rest of Jewish and Christian history may be seen as an attempt to remedy this situation – to liquidate this lack. The paradise narrative is an intentionally incomplete folktale. Man is not rewarded for passing any tests, his failure is the point of the story.⁴⁷ And while only the woman suffers in the end of *The*

⁴⁶ Cf Beynen: "Yahweh is the real hero of the Genesis narrative" (1990: 49).

⁴⁷ Cf Beynen: "The Genesis narrative is a fairy tale gone wrong" (1990: 52).

Animal Languages, the ending of the paradise narrative is negative for both the woman and the man. God drives them both out of the garden and both now must make their living in a hostile world.

In both narratives the snake gives something to the human, but in each the snake's gift is different. In the paradise narrative the snake offers the knowledge of good and evil, while in the folktale it gives the hero knowledge of the languages of animals. Yet these two gifts may be more similar than they seem at first. When they received knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve noticed that they were naked, and they were ashamed (contrast Gen 3.7 with 2.25). After they had been driven out of the garden, Adam *knew* Eve (to use the Hebrew idiom of Gen 4.1), and the result was Cain. While many modern theologians do not subscribe to it, the interpretation of the knowledge of good and evil as involving *inter alia* sexual awareness is not unreasonable.⁴⁸ I find it significant that it is only after Adam and Eve become aware of their sexual differences that a hierarchical relationship is soon established.⁴⁹

In *The Animal Languages*, the snake gives the hero knowledge of the languages of animals, so he can understand what the animals are saying to one another. This seems completely different from the knowledge acquired by man in the paradise narrative. In the folktale, the most important application of the newly acquired knowledge comes when the hero learns from the rooster that a wife should submit to her husband. One of the basic rules in the

⁴⁸ So also Leach 1969: 15. See the survey of OT commentators in Westermann 1994: 242–245. See also Gunkel: “The myth wants to say that, formerly unknowing children, they are now instantaneously adults” (1997(1910): 17); “The knowledge and ignorance treated here concern, ... in the first instance, the difference between the sexes” (1997(1910): 14).

⁴⁹ So also Niditch: “God’s words to Adam and Eve after they eat from the tree make clear the contrast between community, with its lack of emphasis on hierarchy, and society with its structure, work rules and hierarchy” (1993: 40). Gunkel is of the opposite opinion: “Nor does the myth mean that the woman was originally ‘coordinated’ with the man, that she did not stand ‘under him’” (1997(1910): 13).

interpretation of folktales is that an action should be judged by its result.⁵⁰ Thus the result of acquiring knowledge of animal languages is to subsequently learn dominance over one's wife. In both narratives, the end result of the encounter with the snake is knowledge of marital roles, and in both the man is told that he is to be the ruler over his wife. It is significant, however, that whereas the hero of AT 670 whips his wife into submission, the only physical violence that is mentioned in the paradise narrative is that which occurs between the man and the woman and between their offspring (Gen 3.15). Although the paradise narrative reads like a male chauvinist fable, it is in fact much more egalitarian than *The Animal Languages*. The message of *The Animal Languages* is that male dominance over females is in accordance with the natural order, whereas in the paradise narrative the hierarchical relationship is one of the several unfortunate outcomes of the first humans' disobedience to God.

In *The Animal Languages* the snake is, if anything, a positive figure simply because the outcome of his gift is positive. The recipient of the gift learns to understand what animals say, and with this knowledge his work becomes easier to manage. He learns how to deal with his wife, and he does not die in the story. In Genesis the snake is rather a negative figure. It deceives the woman and causes her and Adam to go against the will of God. In contrast to the folktale, the man and woman lose the possibility of living an easy life with the animals, and in addition, lose (eternal) life as a result of following the snake's advice.

God puts enmity between the snake and the woman, and between the offspring of the snake and those of the woman (Gen 3.15).

It is significant that in Genesis, the snake offers the gift to the woman, who then passes it on to Adam, and in doing so, becomes a negative figure. She is not altogether negative, however, because although she ate of the fruit before passing it on to Adam, her eyes

⁵⁰ "Function is... an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action" (Propp 1968 (1927): 21").

were not opened until Adam had eaten of it: "She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened..." (Gen 3.6b-7, NIV). Eve did not become a knowing temptress. Some have even argued that, if anything, Eve is a positive figure.⁵¹ The text makes clear that Adam and Eve share the guilt. By contrast, in *The Animal Languages* only one of the characters, the man, receives knowledge of the languages. He remains a positive figure, his wife negative.

To return to the earlier question, who is the snake in *The Animal Languages* and in the paradise narrative? In *The Animal Languages*, the snake only interacts with the man, and his primary role is to give him knowledge of male superiority. The snake is, in Propp's terminology, a donor. Holbek argues that in fairy tales, donor figures "are actually nothing but extensions of the bodily aspect of the hero."⁵² Borrowing a term from psychology, he writes that donor figures are the result of a split, wherein "conflicting aspects of a character are distributed upon different figures in the tale."⁵³ In *The Animal Languages*, the knowledge given by the snake to the hero is knowledge that the hero had all along, but had suppressed. Deep down the hero always knew that he should rule over his woman. The serpent in the paradise narrative may also be interpreted in a similar manner, and can be seen as being split off from the woman, representing, as the Talmud has suggested, her unbridled curiosity.⁵⁴ (The possibility that the snake is split off from both the man and the woman, and represents human curiosity cannot be ruled out, although shared splits are hardly

⁵¹ Niditch compares Eve and Pandora, and concludes that Eve is a "much more independent minded, interesting, and complex protagonist who is neither a fool nor a temptress but a culture bringer whose choices anticipate what most makes us human" (1993: 46). Further, "She, not her husband, is the protagonist of the story" (1993: 47).

⁵² Holbek 1987: 437.

⁵³ Holbek 1987: 453.

⁵⁴ The phonetic similarity between *hawwa* (Eve) and *hewya* (snake) was noted by the rabbis (Wallace 1985: 148).

commonplace.) Westermann also sees the snake as representing an aspect of the human characters: "The function of the serpent derives from the structure of the narrative... [The temptation] could have been portrayed as something that took place within the person, but that would not suit the character of the narrative."⁵⁵ Whereas the snake in *The Animal Languages* is merely a donor figure, the serpent in the garden of Eden is a step closer to becoming an independent character, reentering the story to be cursed by God.⁵⁶

The search for historical connections

There are significant parallels between the two texts. But parallels can be found between any two texts – their presence does not by itself establish any historical connection. In what sense then are the two historically related?

In his article Beynen repeatedly mentions Bulgarian versions of AT 670. The reader might well wonder how a modern Bulgarian folktale could possibly be the origin of the paradise narrative. But as Beynen explains, AT 670 is not known only in Bulgaria. AT 670 is an international folktale; it has been recorded in most parts of Europe and the Middle East, and also in Siberia, India, Indonesia, Japan, the West Indies, and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁷ There are also several early attestations of the tale. Dov Noy writes,

⁵⁵ Westermann 1994: 238.

⁵⁶ The snake in the paradise narrative has many other roles, including those of culture bringer, trickster and mediator (Niditch 1993: 44–45, who disagrees with Westermann 1994: 238).

⁵⁷ See Aarne & Thompson 1981 #670 and later tale type indices for the individual countries. The tale with its many versions has been the subject of several articles and at least one monograph (e.g. Benfey 1864; Aarne 1914; Noy 1971; Beynen 1978, 1990).

Its written versions are attested in the pre280CE *Tripitaka* (No 112; translated into Chinese from the Sanskrit), in Appolodorus' story (I: 9, 11) about Melampus (2nd cent BC) and in Philostartus' biography (200 CE) of Appolonius of Tyana in Asia Minor. These were probably preceded by oral versions originating in India, where their appearance in literary texts (*Ramayana*, *Jataka*, Jaina literature, *Shukasp-tati*, etc.) is very frequent, and where the stability of the oral versions has been proved. (Noy 1971: 199)

The early attestation combined with such a wide distribution suggest that The Animal Languages could have been in circulation before the final redaction of Genesis was made.

But what do we know about the earlier, unrecorded versions of AT 670? The most striking similarity between the paradise narrative and The Animal Languages is the list of characters. But how do we know that the character of the snake is an original component of this folktale? In the version included in the Arabian Nights, no snake is mentioned, the hero simply possesses this knowledge.⁵⁸ Is it not possible that the paradise narrative has influenced the shape of the European and Middle Eastern versions of The Animal Languages and not the other way around? If it could be shown that the snake figure is found only among versions of the tale recorded in areas where Christianity or Judaism have been established, and if the oldest reconstructible form of The Animal Languages has a donor that is not a snake, then the case for this folktale as the catalyst for the formation of the paradise narrative is greatly weakened. However, Aarne, in his study of the tale, found that the snake figure also occurs in versions recorded outside Europe and the Middle East, as well as some of the versions found in India.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey and The Tale of the Merchant and his Wife in Haddawy's translation of Muhsin Mahdi's text (Haddawy 1990: 11–15).

⁵⁹ Aarne 1914: 28.

Can the differences between the narratives be accounted for?

The *Animal Languages* contains many episodes that have no parallel in *Genesis*. The conversation between the two animals that causes the hero to laugh; the wife's wanting to know the reason for his laughter; the boastful rooster's speech, these are found in almost every version of the tale, but not in the paradise narrative. The two texts are so unlike each other that it would certainly be improper to consider the paradise narrative as simply another version of *The Animal Languages*. But, as the following parallel shows, that does not mean that they are not related.

In his study of the Jewish versions of *The Animal Languages*, Dov Noy divides the recorded Jewish versions into two groups. The first group includes those tales which differ slightly from the basic tale type – the snake is replaced by Leviathan or King Solomon, but otherwise the tale is kept intact.⁶⁰ Regarding the replacement of the snake, Noy writes,

the snake ... has always had a very unpleasant, negative connotation for the Hebrew ear, nurtured on the *Genesis* story of the Fall of man. As gratefulness and good favours to a man cannot be attributed to a snake, which has been ordered by God to "bruise man's heel", the magic donor, who in AT 670 is mostly a helpful serpent, had to be replaced. (Noy 1971: 177)

The second group of tales differs enough from the basic tale type to warrant giving it a separate name and tale type number: "Cast your bread upon the waters" (AT 670B*). This tale differs primarily from *The Animal Languages* in its beginning and ending. The normal form of this tale contains the following episodes:

⁶⁰ Noy 1971: 177.

I Dying father orders son to give alms to the poor; if no poor are available he is to cast bread into the sea for fish. II. The son does so. Only one fish keeps eating the bread. Grown up, he eats up small fish. These complain to Leviathan, king of the fish. III. The man is summoned to Leviathan and accused of over-feeding the big fish. He defends himself by referring to his father's will. IV. As a reward the man receives from Leviathan the power of understanding animal languages. He is forbidden to reveal his secret..... V. The hero catches a young raven who, contrary to his mother's advice, attempted to peck out the man's eyes. As ransom for the young raven, the hero receives an indication to a hidden treasure from the mother-bird. [The mother-bird punishes the disobedient chick.] (Noy 1971: 178, 184, 196)

Here the original tale is reworked to serve as an interpretation of Ecclesiastes 11.1: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."⁶¹ Instead of teaching that a man should rule over his wife, this tale teaches that a son should obey his father and he will be rewarded in accordance with the fifth commandment. Other changes were made to support this change. Instead of telling of how the man punishes his wife for not obeying him, it is the mother bird that punishes her chick for being disobedient. The episode in which the wife threatens her husband has been dropped from the story, as has the cock's lecture on how to rule one's roost, due to their no longer being relevant.⁶²

I conclude that in at least three instances *The Animal Languages* has been adapted to fit the Jewish culture. In each instance the narrator could not tolerate a helpful serpent. In the first instance, the serpent was presumably associated with snake cults in the area that competed with the belief in a single God. The tale was therefore reworked to fit this view of God. It made clear that the snake was not to be seen as a deity, but merely as one of the

⁶¹ Noy 1971: 182.

⁶² Noy 1971: 199–200.

animals that God had created and to make the ideological stance even clearer, the narrator has God curse the snake. He thereby incorporates existing explanations as to why snakes are built so strangely and why humans instinctively fear them. The tale's message that a man should beat his wife did not fit the Jewish view of marital relations, and was deleted. (The early Hebrews seem to have been much more respectful of women than their neighbors.) Instead the moral of the story was changed to emphasize obedience to God. The story also came to serve the purpose of explaining the origin of death and evil, and to account for the separation of man from God. The new narrative was to show that all people, both men and women, have fallen from God's grace because they were disobedient. It was therefore necessary that both the man and the woman eat of the fruit and be punished for their disobedience. The redactor thus brought man down to almost the same level as woman, and placed them both under God.⁶³ This strongly modified version of *The Animal Languages* was then woven into the creation narrative, where the editor combined it with a narrative that explained the creation of the first woman as well as the tradition regarding the two trees in the garden.

The second time the tale was borrowed, the Jews, presumably influenced by the now canonical passage in Genesis, as Noy suggests, could still not accept a snake as a helpful donor, and the message of the tale remained foreign to them. Thus they reworked the tale again, thereby forming a new tale type, "Cast your bread upon the waters" (AT 670B*). Whereas the first reworking taught obedience to God, the second reworking taught obedience to one's father.

The third time Jews borrowed this tale, they still found the snake unacceptable. The ending was preserved, although Noy points out that recently some narrators have considered it

⁶³ But Mikaelsson (1980) notes that the redactor still gives primacy to the man and lets God speak with him first, leaving the woman to converse with the snake.

incongruous with their values and changed it.⁶⁴ If my thesis is correct, we have a wonderful example of the amazing adaptability and stability of the Jewish culture.

Conclusion

The possibility that the paradise narrative was based on a reworking of The Animal Languages merits serious attention. The similarities are striking. The differences between the tales are significant but can largely be accounted for in terms of differing functions, just as was the case with the differences between AT 670 and AT 670B*. While AT 670 simply teaches that man should make sure that his wife is obedient, the paradise narrative calls on both men and women to be obedient to God. It also explains that the daily difficulties faced by humans are all the result of disobedience to God. Both texts assign gender roles, but the paradise narrative encourages a more egalitarian relationship, as both man and woman are held accountable to God.

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⁶⁴ Noy 1971: 206.

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On Forest Nenets Narrative Genres

Eva Toulouze

I. Research on Forest Nenets

The Forest Nenets are a small people of maximum 2000 persons living in the taiga and tundra areas of the North-Eastern Ob basin. This ethnic group has long been neglected by ethnographic as well as linguistic research as they live mostly in remote zones or on the high banks of different rivers (The Ob tributaries flowing both North-South¹ and East-West² as well as those rivers flowing into the Ob bay (flowing South-North³)). The access to their territory is thus complicated, and much determination is needed to get near to them. On the other hand, since the 19th century researchers have concentrated their efforts on the Tundra Nenets, a closely related ethnic group, or more precisely the main branch of the same people. The Tundra Nenets occupy a huge territory in Northern Russia, from the Kola Peninsula to the Taimyr Peninsula in Central Siberia, covering thus thousands of kilometres of European and Siberian tundra. They have maintained a strong identity consciousness, based on reindeer herding, and still live in some regions much as they did at the beginning of the 20th century⁴. The

¹ The Nazym and the Lyamin (nowadays this last community seems to be very small), the Agan and its tributaries the Vatyogan and the Amputa.

² The Kazym.

³ The Nadym and the Pur, with their tributaries.

⁴ Such are for instance the Nenets groups living in the Yamal Peninsula: in this area, Soviet collectivisation was not achieved before the 1950 (Niglas 1998, 1999).

Forest Nenets' culture and way of life is very different and depends on a different ecological environment. Reindeer herding is practised on a lesser scale, and the Forest Nenets – instead of being nomadic all year round – are rather semi-nomadic with the function of other activities such as hunting and fishing being much more extensive than in the tundra. Linguistic analysis shows that the language spoken by both groups is structurally the same, and historically linguists have considered Forest Nenets a mere dialect. Nevertheless, phonetic dissimilarity between these forms is such that mutual understanding between Forest and Tundra Nenets is simply impossible. Moreover, as Forest Nenets is influenced by the neighbouring languages of Khanty and Selkup, the lexical divergence is also very significant. Therefore the present trend among linguists when dealing with Samoyed languages is to identify not one, but two independent Nenets languages, subdivided into dialects.

There are three main territories inhabited by Forest Nenets: the larger group occupies high and central course of the Pur, whose two main tributaries are called Pyako-Pur and Ayvaseda-Pur, the first element of these names being the names of two Forest Nenets clans. The centre of this region is the village of Tarko-Sale, which, according to visitors, is still an unassimilated Forest Nenets village, where even children still speak Nenets among themselves⁵. During the Soviet period, in this area, as well as throughout the Northern areas, indigenous peoples formerly living in the forest were moved to villages. In this area, the main Forest Nenets villages are Kharampur and Khalesovaya, where, according to Tapani Salminen, who visited this region in 1998, the Forest Nenets traditional culture is still alive. The second group lives westwards, on the high courses of the Nadym and the Kazym rivers. They are concentrated around the village of Num-to, on the shore of a lake that is considered, by both the local Khantys and the Nenets, sacred. This region has, as of yet, been spared industrialisation and traditional rules are still dominant: the children speak

⁵ Personal communication by Tapani Salminen (may 2001).

Nenets, and motor sledges are still a luxury⁶. The third group lives at the upper course of the Agan and its tributaries, Vatyogan and Amputa. During the first third of the 20th century, families from Halesovaya migrated down to this zone, where fish and pastures were abundant. But since the mid-1960s, the oil industry has massively taken root in this region, and this has most directly influenced the Forest Nenets' way of life as well as the ethnic contacts in this area. Some of the indigenous families are ready to give their lands up to oil extraction in exchange for different kinds of compensation. Others are trying to resist this penetration. They fight in order to protect the local environment from pollution, and to save seriously threatened reindeer pastures and forests which provide them with food and with life overall. Moreover, even before this invasion, the Agan Forest Nenets were in a weaker position as they have always been fewer in number than the Khantys. Now the arrival of oil workers from all the regions of the former USSR have led to a clear demographic unbalance that is to the detriment of the indigenous peoples. In this area, Forest Nenets have lost ground: in 1999, the youngest Nenets person speaking Nenets as a mother tongue was 23 years of age. As far as I know, no child either speaks it or understands it and it is actively spoken only by the elder generation⁷.

The information regarding Forest Nenets is quite limited, as this ethnic group was identified as such only at the end of the 19th century. The older data is to be found in M.-A. Castrén's travel reports. The Finnish explorer and linguist also collected Forest Nenets language samples (Castrén 1940, Castrén 1960). His work was continued and systematised by Toivo Lehtisalo, who spent much time at the beginning of the 20th century doing fieldwork among both the Tundra and the Forest Nenets.

In 1914, Lehtisalo worked among the Western Forest Nenets on the river Kiselyovskaya and collected precious samples of oral

⁶ My conversations with Vadim and Taysya Pyak (February 2000), as well as Kaur Mägi's fieldwork (September-October 2001).

⁷ My own fieldwork 2-4/1999, 9-10/1999, 8-10/2000.

tradition (Lehtisalo 1947, Lehtisalo 1960). The ethnographic information that he received from some very impressive informants, such as the blind shaman Kalyat Ngahany, was used by Lehtisalo for his general studies on Nenets culture (Lehtisalo 1924) and language (Lehtisalo 1956). Most of the data available at the moment is due to the Finnish researcher's efforts. Later, after the October Revolution, Russian researchers took over Nenets studies. One of the most competent specialists on Samoyed peoples and languages was G. Verbov – a young scholar who did not survive World War II. He was the first to publish a substantial article (Verbov 1936) about the Forest Nenets. Primarily a linguist, he collected data about the language and left to posterity a monograph on this subject that was published thirty years after his death (Verbov 1973). This work includes two short tales. The Russian ethnographers from later on have done occasional fieldwork with the Forest Nenets, and although L. Khomich (1972), and more recently A. Golovnev (1995) have inserted data about them in more general issues, very little specific research has been dedicated to this topic. Among the linguists, the Finn, Pekka Sammallahti (1974) has done major work with his grammar of Forest Nenets that was based on co-operation with a Leningrad student, of half Nenets, half Selkup extraction, who provided him with two texts (42 sentences). Sammallahti presents them with extensive and useful comments. Finally two Hungarian scholars, P. Hajdú (1959a, 1959b) and J. Pusztay (1984), have abundantly used Lehtisalo's material for linguistic analysis.

This survey shows that the last extensive collection of Forest Nenets language and folklore dates from the very beginning of the 20th century. Therefore in 2000, a working group from Tartu University⁸ undertook to fill this gap and began systematic fieldwork research, the final aim of which was to provide a collection of Forest Nenets texts with morphological analysis and translation. The first expedition took place in autumn 2000 and lasted two months. We worked in the Agan region, but we had also the

⁸ Formed by an Estonian linguist, Kaur Mägi and myself.

opportunity of working very closely with a remarkable informant⁹ from Num-to. This first expedition was directly followed by a visit of two Forest Nenets¹⁰ to Tartu, where several hours of folklore¹¹ – songs, tales and other forms of oral tradition were recorded from them. A second expedition (Kaur Mägi) took place in the autumn of 2001 to the Num-to region. These materials have been partly published, i.e. in the booklet accompanying a CD of Forest Nenets songs (Mägi, Ojamaa, Toulouze 2002). The present article is based on these materials.

II. The Forest Nenets' folklore: a general survey

As we see, there is still a limited amount of Forest Nenets folklore material available. As opposed to other Siberian peoples, most of the available texts have been recorded recently. This complicates undoubtedly the diachronic research and reconstruction of what Forest Nenets folklore could have been one century ago, but does give an interesting picture of the situation at the beginning of the 21st century. However, this absence of older data does make comparative analyses quite difficult, as most of the Tundra Nenets folklore collections reflect the situation of some decades ago. We shall have to take this fact permanently into account when referring to comparative data. For the same reason, although we may find some occasional studies in linguistics and ethnography, absolutely no mention of Forest Nenets folklore is to be found in Russian research. Russian specialists on the Nenets' folklore have devoted

⁹ Tatva Logany.

¹⁰ Tatva Logany and Yuri Vella.

¹¹ This expedition was supported by the Estonian Cultural Endowment (Eesti Kultuurkapital) and the Endangered Languages Fund. The invitation for the Nenets informants to visit Tartu was delivered by the Estonian National Museum (Eesti Rahva Muuseum). Yuri Vella and Tatva Logany spent two weeks in Tartu. All their recordings, as well as those made in Siberia, are available in the Estonian Folklore Archives (Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv) in Tartu.

themselves to the study of the Tundra Nenets oral tradition and especially on Tundra Nenets epics. I am therefore compelled to base my analysis on my own data and on a prudent comparison with Tundra Nenets oral tradition.

We have recorded the following folklore genres as part of the living tradition of contemporary Forest Nenets: songs, two distinct types of narratives, and riddles.

a) Songs (*kynaws*¹²).

This genre seems to traditionally have had a major function in social communication, similar to that of the Tundra Nenets (Ojamaa 2002: 63). Although some kinds of songs have clearly lost their former function, the present practice of Forest Nenets singing shows the structural importance of this activity, and gives the individuals a materialised identity inside the community. For the Nenets, singing is a solo effort, and choral singing is simply unknown. True, in the last decades, under the influence of Russian and Western music, the Nenets have started to adapt their songs to collective performance in order to – consciously or not – bring it closer to the audience’s musical habits, and to also collectively support an endangered ethnic identity¹³. Nenets singing includes extended improvisation where people sing about their life and its significant events. Songs may be divided into different types. Accor-

¹² The Tundra Nenets form of the same word is *hynabc*, *hync* (Pushkaryova 1990: 82)

¹³ I have an example from the Agan region: some elder women (the younger is 50, the elder about 70) from the village of Varyogan, where Khantys are the majority, have sung together for some years and performed at local cultural events until the death of one in 1999. One of these elder women, Yuri Vella’s mother, is my primary informant. Her son does not approve of her lack of respect toward the traditional performance style, and often criticizes the Russian influences he perceives in his mother’s singing. Regardless, I am sure that one of their main motivations is the wish to be together, speak their language that the young no longer understand, and feel a stronger sense of themselves in a non-Nenets environment.

ding to the collected corpus as well as our informants' data, the main subgenres are shaman songs, individual songs, and narrative songs.

Shaman songs, called in Nenets *tachepyang-kynaws*, were ritual songs, performed during the shamanic séance. As this aspect of Nenets culture has practically disappeared after the cruel Soviet repression in the 1930s and the subsequent weakening of religious practices of indigenous societies, shaman songs are now no longer an active communication form. However, although I have not heard it mentioned, it cannot be absolutely excluded that some kind of ritual has survived and exists marginally even nowadays. Shaman songs are mostly remembered by elder people who have witnessed shamanic séances in their youth or by descendants of shamans. Some songs refer explicitly to the mushroom, called *vipi* in Nenets, used by shamans to achieve the trance. Researchers connect these songs to the shaman song type (Ojamaa 2002: 73–76). Our informant Tatva Logany nevertheless asserts that these songs could be performed by any person who ate these mushrooms, and not only by shamans. Anyhow it is interesting to notice that some of these songs have been transmitted as parodies of the performer: Yuri Vella performs a *vipi*-song that was sung by an old shaman who used to fall asleep for some seconds or minutes during the performance (Mägi, Ojamaa, Toulouze 2002).

The so-called “individual song” is probably the main form of singing in Nenets society as well as in other cultures of the Arctic. The term “individual song” is used by scholars and its Russian form, *lichnaya pesnya*, has spread among the Nenets, so that many scholars make use of this term, or its Nenets form *nyeshang-kynaws*. The Nenets themselves, however, used to call this kind of song a “drunken song” or “drunkard’s song”¹⁴. Every song is pro-

¹⁴ According to Lehtisalo, the Tundra Nenets call them *yabe'ma syo* or *yabe'ma hync* (drunkenness song), or just *yabe'mai* (drunkenness) (Lehtisalo 1947: 551–591). Although Yuri Vella (from the Agan region) asserts that such a word is unknown by the Nenets themselves, Kaur Mägi's fieldwork in Num-to proves that this indeed is the way that the Nenets there use this kind of song.

duced by an actual person¹⁵ who usually performs it while drinking. It is to be noted that drinking is not a male peculiarity, and these songs are performed both by men and by women. Although gender division of work is a part of the Nenets' way of life, traditionally a Nenets couple forms a very coherent unit that rarely splits. Men usually work outdoors and women mostly indoors. But recreational activities are usually done together such as drinking, wherein women drink and get drunk like men. It seldom happens that one performs one's song in an ordinary situation, but it may happen, for instance, that the presence of a stranger creates a special, stimulating context. When Yuri Vella was asked to perform his own song, he laughed and answered: "Nobody is so stupid as to sing his own song himself!", showing that individual songs are usually performed by others, not by the person to whom they have been ascribed. Songs invented by the parents for their children represent one special form of individual song. When the children have grown up, they may use this song but may also change it and create a new song of their own. These songs have no other name except, "owner's" one. The tune is always the same and is characteristic of the song, but the words may change after having been subjected to improvisation. This is, thus, a communication form characteristic of small groups. This kind of performance is undoubtedly still alive and represents a way of spending leisure moments when gathered together.

Another kind of song falls under the general name of narrative song (*shotpyaws-kynaws*, "tale-song"). This term can hardly be considered definitive, but rather, is more an empirical way of describing, by means of external characteristics, a phenomenon that the Nenets themselves identify as varied in origin. There are short tales performed in their entirety with melody. The samples we have of this kind of song are animal stories, with children likely being

¹⁵ This is the criterion adopted by Pushkaryova in order to identify this kind of song (Pushkaryova 1990: 82). The explicit existence of an author leads the Nenets folklorist to consider this type a literary genre and to exclude it from folklore (Idem: 85).

the intended audience. The other form termed such is considered by all the informants to be a kind of reminiscence where fragments of a narrative are sung while the rest of the narrative is performed as a prose text. The unanimous opinion is that formerly those tales were entirely sung, but the performed fragments are the only original part retained by the performer. As a matter of fact, tune is not the only way of identifying these more ancient elements. There is what Yuri Vella called a “recitative”, rhythmic performing style. There is no specific Nenets term recorded for this style, which is also known by the Tundra Nenets¹⁶. Yuri Vella, in an introduction to his poems, states: “We, the Nenets, used to sing many poems – tales, lamentations, songs – which were performed in an artistic language with a popular melody or in the form of incantation poetry. Everyday language is used for everyday life, it is poor, without colour, taste or smell, it transmits no warmth or cold. It is impossible in this language to tell a tale or to sing a song – to talk about wood, food or money would insult the artistic tongue”. For different reasons, the “artistic” language has been lost. According to Yuri’s experience, “My grand-mother found a new way [of telling tales]. At the beginning, she sang the tales according to tradition, but in order to make clear what happened, she repeated the contents in everyday language. Then she went on singing, and again translated the meaning into understandable language” (Vella 1991: 3, 5). It would be interesting to analyse both parts of these narratives from the linguistic point of view, and to identify whether the difference is really as significant as Yuri Vella contends. This reminiscence of tales sung in an archaic manner is not to be confused with the introduction of songs as such into tales. A character’s personal song may appear in the tale and play a role in the narrative pattern¹⁷.

¹⁶ According to Lyudmila Taleyeva, a Tundra Nenets from the Small Land and Tundra (in Northern European Russia) recognised in the Forest Nenets “recitative” a well-known pattern.

¹⁷ More developed analysis and samples of Nenets songs may be found in a CD published by the Estonian Literary Museum in 2001.

Nowadays, singing suffers from the loss of language skills of younger generations. Moreover, not only is the text dimension becoming totally estranged, but also the melodic pattern is less and less familiar to people who are used to the “Western” aesthetics transmitted by the media (Ojamaa 2002: 63).

b) Riddles

Certainly the riddle (in Nenets *kowsu*) has better resisted the fade of traditional culture and although not every cultural pattern may easily be translated into Russian, it is easier to translate a riddle into a different language. Many Nenets riddles are still known in Russian by the younger generation and are part of children’s games, or are performed by adults at gatherings of families or friends. Nenets riddles are deeply connected with the Nenets’ material culture and its environment, and nature and reindeer as the most concrete details, are inexhaustible items. A distinctive feature of Nenets riddles is probably the abundance of scatological elements. This kind of riddle is not as easy to transfer into other languages where language taboos may respond to different rules¹⁸.

c) Prose narrative genres (*shotpyaws* and *wanlh*)

Later on, I will focus more on this topic. As a general overview, and before analysing any details, I must relate that storytelling remains a primary form of entertainment among the Forest Nenets nowadays. It is true that other media have broadly developed their influence over the last decades especially in the villages where all the families have televisions and many of them may also watch videos. The radio has been in general use for decades. In the taiga camps the presence of electricity varies from region to region. Wherever the oil industry has expanded, as in the Agan region, the use of generators has become commonplace over the last decade.

¹⁸ According to my personal observations. This is particularly true for translation into Russian, where the social use of some terms is strictly limited to male society.

This means that even if television programs are not seen due to insufficient reception, most families in this region have video players and may spend evenings watching film cassettes. This entertainment is insufficient for filling all the free time and therefore more traditional ways have still been retained. So, unlike the well-known situation in other parts of the world (Thomas 1976: 197), new technologies have not led to the total disappearance of storytelling as a form of family entertainment. In other Forest Nenets regions, modern media forms have not penetrated as deeply and therefore have less influence on everyday life.

Before I present the details of narrative genres pertaining to the Forest Nenets, it may be of interest to recount how our material was recorded. When a Forest Nenets tells a story, his or her audience is far from passive¹⁹ and the storyteller expects reactions to message being delivered in the form of expressions of approval or surprise (*ta-ta, kay-to*), interruptions, questions and comments. Without this kind of interaction, storytelling has no meaning at all. When we recorded most of the stories of our informants' repertoires, our knowledge of Nenets wasn't sufficient enough to give proper and satisfactory responses. That is why there was no instance of storytelling intended specifically for recording. All of our recordings were therefore made during actual storytelling occasions, when other Nenets²⁰ were the intended audience. We

¹⁹ This of course is not an original feature: "This activity of participation involves both understanding and enjoyment. The audience receptive competence in no ways refers to passivity" (Abrahams 1976: 16).

²⁰ Strangely enough, what could be considered as a shortcoming on our side – ignorance of the language – undoubtedly played a positive role in this instance. Our experience seems to contradict Honko's objection to some trends in folklore research: "We seem to wish to come as close as possible to the informant and the performance, the social interaction, the empirically observable human mind and *at the same time* as we want to affect the authentic folklore communication process as minimally as possible by our own presence. This attempt is bound to prove rather illusionary – not even the long cherished technique of participant

not only recorded the pure text of the narrative, but also the preparation and the final comments of the narrator as well as the audience's reactions. As a matter of fact, our interest in their language and culture was a very effective stimulus for our hosts who live in an environment where they know the dominant languages of their neighbours (Khanty, Russian), without anyone knowing theirs²¹. As most of them are integrated into ethnically mixed (Khanty-Nenets) families²², Forest Nenets do not have frequent opportunities to gather and spend time speaking their language and telling their tales in Nenets. There is always somebody around who does not know Nenets, and the entire company adapts to this single person by switching to Russian. We encouraged them to communicate among themselves in their own language, and as we were guests, the non-Nenets members of the

observation (...) will solve the problem" (Honko 1976: 23). Our presence undoubtedly influenced the process in that the Nenets were given a rare opportunity. But our ignorance of the idiom soon excluded us from the picture, and the Nenets found themselves undisturbed and behaving in a familiar manner, specific to their group, and in a way that is not often actualised because of other disturbing factors that our presence removed. Our presence was acknowledged verbally, usually at the end of a narrative, either with jokes about our not understanding the point or, with comments wondering what we would make of these unintelligible materials.

²¹ This is true for Russian as well as for Eastern Khanty. Languages are set in a clear hierarchy, Russians don't know any of the local idioms whereas Khanty know only their own and Russian. If the younger Nenets speak only Russian, it is the elder ones who are able to communicate either in Russian or in Khanty. In the Agan region, the only Khanty who spoke Nenets was an old man called Mikhail Sardakov, who died in October 2000, some days after participating in a Nenets story-recording event.

²² Many Nenets are married to Khanty women, and the reverse situation also exists. Anyway mixed marriages have very long been a reality of the region. In 1936 G. Verbov demarcated clear exogamic relations between Eastern Khanty and Forest Nenets clans (Verbov 1936: 69).

family were more tolerant and did not impose the use of a common language.

III. Historical and comparative remarks on narrative genres

Serious discussions have taken place regarding the practice of using indigenous names for oral traditional genres. Ben-Amos asserts that "the names of folklore forms reflect their cultural conception and significance" (Ben-Amos 1982b: 134). Honko is more sceptical, "I doubt that the indigenous names for genre categories will be of much help in our empirical research" (Honko 1976: 24). Still, if our goal is not to find categories fit for universal folklore classification, but rather to concentrate on one culture and try to get deeper and deeper into its inner coherence, these names may open up some interesting perspectives. Therefore, while sharing Ben-Amos' caution toward the danger of etymology's fetishism (Ben-Amos 1982a: 49), I still consider the analysis of indigenous names for genres useful. This approach may yet uncover key information for genre evolution history among the Nenets as a whole. The fact remains that despite slightly different cultural and linguistic evolutions, Northern Samoyeds²³ have remained a pretty homogenous group, as is evidenced by the presence of common clans (Ayvaseda/Ayvasedo/Ayvashata, Vylla/Vyllo, Vylko/Vylka/Valey) that exist both among the Forest and the Tundra Nenets. Some of them, such as the latter, cover an impressive span of territory.

Ethnomusicologists have pointed out a remarkable similarity between the Tundra and Forest Nenets singing cultures, in that both have the same kind of songs, the same melodic features, and the same way of adapting the text to the tune with special syllables, etc. Singing is performed in identical circumstances and its

²³ This group includes, besides Forest and Tundra Nenets, the Enets and the Nganassans.

function in social life is similar (Ojamaa 2002). The difference in the system of narrative genres is therefore most intriguing.

It must be mentioned that folklorists (Kupriyanova²⁴, Pushkaryova) and linguists (Tereshchenko²⁵) have mostly dealt with Tundra Nenets folklore. However, not all aspects have received equal attention and some important areas have yet to be uncovered. Soviet research tended to emphasise the use of folklore for historical and ethnographic research, and as Soviet folklorists did not focus on oral traditions as elements of a people's spiritual culture but instead expected concrete information on precise elements, it explains the reason certain genres were considered less interesting than others. As the following quotation, from Lyudmila Khomich, clearly shows: "among the Nenets folklore genres, stories occupy a remarkable place. Because their goal is to entertain and due to their being based on fictive elements, tales (*wadako*) actually convey less data about real phenomena of the past than other genres do" (Khomich 1995: 260). The most popular genres among the folklorists are the so-called epic genres²⁶. For slightly different reasons, they are important also for the present research.

Folklorists distinguish two epic genres in Nenets oral traditions: the most archaic, called *syudbabc*, focus on supernaturally strong heroes, while the more recent *yarabc* are more similar to lamentations of poor Nenets suffering injustice. Probably the rich ethnographic data about the Nenets' material culture and ultimately the history that is found in these kinds of texts explain their popularity with researchers. Anyhow the fact remains that entire books have been dedicated to their analysis. I am mostly concerned with the etymological coincidence of the Forest Nenets word *shotpyaws*, which we could translate as "tale", and the Tundra Nenets term *syudbabc*. The latter's origin is connected to the verb *syudbars'*, "to sing a heroic song" (Poshatayeva 1988: 61).

²⁴ Cf. Kupriyanova 1965.

²⁵ Cf. Tereshchenko 1990.

²⁶ According to the terminology used in Russia.

Another scholar mentions this in connection with the word *syudbya*, “giant-hero” (Kupriyanova 1965: 28). According to our Forest Nenets informants Yuri Vella and Tatva Logany, the word comes from *shotpya*²⁷, “strong, great, powerful” and *wata* “word, language, speech”²⁸. The whole term is supposed to mean “powerful speech, heroic discourse”. Clearly the two words are connected as far as their origin is concerned. The etymology of the Forest Nenets word also corresponds to the meaning in Tundra Nenets, but the notion contained in the Forest Nenets word is far from parallel.

The main themes of the Tundra Nenets heroic *shyudbabc* – the quest for a wife, the orphan’s bloody revenge, the fight for reindeers and pastures – are themes that are practically absent from the Forest Nenets tradition. At least, in our collection, there is no correspondent item. I cannot assert that such themes are absolutely unknown, but we have an extended amount of samples and these are absent. I may deduce that if they once existed²⁹, they are nowadays most marginal. But we must resist the temptation of treating these notions similarly. The fact is that we have no diachronic insight into Forest Nenets folklore, while most of the data on Tundra Nenets was collected decades ago. Hence, there is a chronological gap between the materials which folklorists are working on and our material.

The absence of such forms in Forest Nenets folklore may be explained by two contradictory hypotheses: 1) These forms have never existed; 2) these forms have existed but have disappeared. There are circumstances that lend credence to both. The fact that, as far as we know, the Tundra Nenets *syudbabc* form, which is considered the older style, declined in usage during the 20th century makes, synchronically speaking, the picture seem more balanced.

²⁷ In Nenets, there is no distinction between substantive and adjective.

²⁸ Personal communication, in Tartu 29/10/2000.

²⁹ We have no records from the Pur region. The collection of new data from that area may possibly modify the present picture, as the Nenets from the Pur are in very close contacts with Tundra Nenets groups.

But we are not obliged to reconstruct a special epic form similar to what the Tundra Nenets had. The social conditions between the two groups have been thoroughly dissimilar – the Forest Nenets had no huge reindeer herds, a much less developed social stratification, and probably this kind of society did not provide sufficient basis for the development of the same kind of epics. At the moment, we have no elements that allow for the choice of one hypothesis or the other. As a matter of fact, they are presented here only in order to open the way to further and deeper fieldwork research.

As far as *wanlh* are concerned, the situation is reversed. If the Tundra Nenets heroic tale has had its share of attention and is considered, without chronological considerations, a very important element of oral tradition, then the stories aspiring toward historical truth are considered a fading genre by the Tundra Nenets' specialists. "The tales about the past (*lahanako, wa'al*) are little known nowadays, even by elder people" (Khomich 1995: 260). However, among the Forest Nenets, I would assert that the opposite is so, and these tales are as popular as the other genre: the principle *wanlh*-tellers are men who are aged 40–50³⁰. This genre seems to me to be alive, or at least as much so as any language based genre may be among the Forest Nenets.

We know that genre history can hardly be reconstructed (Honko 1989: 22). Nevertheless, in this case, I think that the closeness of Forest and Tundra Nenets ethnic groups and the dissimilarity of folklore collection in the first case may reveal some elements of the Forest Nenets worldview and its evolution in the last century. We are allowed, with proper verifications, to use the better known Tundra Nenets genres of history to at least question eventual developments in Forest Nenets storytelling practices.

³⁰ Tatva Logany (Num-to, 44) and Semyon Ayvaseda (Varyogan, 49).

IV. Emic approach in a taxonomy of narrative genres

My approach is clearly focused on the Forest Nenets' own understanding of their folklore. Far from wishing to use categories reaped from other soils for the systematisation of fieldwork research or to construct a universal model to comprehend them, my approach has been to trace the way that oral tradition is actualised in practice and see how its perception by the Nenets themselves is articulated and connected to their own worldview. Here, I would follow Ben-Amos' approach: "Folklore texts and their performance have a different kind of subjectivity, their own cultural subjectivity. They constitute a reality that is culturally regulated. Like language, their repeated patterns, their regularities are cultural, not scholarly, constructs. We have the opportunity, duty, and privilege to find the meaning of these cultural creations, categories, and orders" (Ben-Amos 1992: 21). At least this is the approach I wish to implement at a nascent stage. Probably further comparison shall require a provisional framework of common elements between the elements of the comparison. But I consider this a future task.

Thus I have tried to understand how the Nenets themselves see and conceptualise their stories. According to Ben-Amos, the three means of designing a formal category are: "cognitively, by naming it, pragmatically by performing it in particular contexts, and expressively by formulating it in a distinctive language which is peculiar to the genre" (Ben-Amos 1982b: 135).

One of my first observations when doing fieldwork was that when a storyteller prepares to tell a story, he usually asks the audience to choose between a *shotpyaws* and a *wanlh*. In other circumstances, the storyteller began his narrative by announcing his own choice. This suggests that both types of narratives may be performed in identical conditions, by the same narrator and with the same audience. Therefore, if we use Ben-Amos' distinctions, the Nenets themselves do not pragmatically distinguish these genres. On the other hand, I have noticed that the Nenets did not make any such formal distinction in the expressive performance,

and I have not noticed any such distinction myself. Both genres – at least nowadays – are performed in non-metric prose. I have not noticed any special distinctive starting or closing formulas. And although Tatva closes all his narratives by *Chi, malhta!* ('Here it is, it is the end'), this formula does not introduce a formal taxonomic distinction.

If we look for distinctive formal elements we may find that length may be a consideration. An old man living in the taiga³¹ asked his audience to choose between a *shotpyaws* and a *wanlh*. The audience had no preferences, so he had to decide himself and thus discovered that all the *shotpyaws* he knew were very long. He told the shorter, which lasted forty-five minutes. So length may actually be a distinctive characteristic of *shotpyaws*, but this should be verified on a larger scale.

Therefore the main focus must be put on the cognitive principles on which the taxonomy of prose genres is based. During our fieldwork, we tried to identify the main features of these two genres, not according to our own analysis (inevitably inspired by exogenous elements), but on the basis of what seemed important to our informants. Who were they? A few words on the elements of their background may be valuable for the assessment of the data they transmitted. Our main informants were two men. Tatva Logany is in his early forties, and has been blind since he was three years old. He has therefore lived the two first decades of his life practically without any contact with the non-Nenets world. He did not go to school and was not inducted into the army. In Num-to, where he lives, there are very few Russians and no industrial exploitation of the region has yet taken place. In the first part of his life, he received from his family, the elder people especially, their vision of culture, and learned to sing and to tell tales by listening to his grand-mother. Later on he broadened his repertoire by listening to his neighbours, and of his own initiative, began to collect the folklore of his people. He is very inquisitive, mentally active, lives unassisted with his wife and his child, has built his own house, and

³¹ Vahalyuma Ayvaseda, 29/09/2000.

is an excellent hunter and fisherman. Without any theoretical knowledge (he is unable to read or to write), he has a comprehensive overview of the Nenets' culture and implements all his mental abilities to reflect on it. Our second informant, Yuri Vella, is a very well known personality. A reindeer herder with higher education, (he has studied at the Moscow Literary Institute), he is also known as a good poet who fights for the rights of his people. Yuri has never really left his region (when he studied in Moscow, he spent most of his time in his village working as a hunter), and his wife is a Khanty. He knows his own language well, and has a small repertoire of tales and songs inherited from his grandmother, as well as an extensive knowledge of the general culture. His deep understanding of both worlds makes him an excellent mediator between them, and although lacking formal training as a folklorist, he has become a scholar of indigenous origin. He also tries to conceptualise the most varied elements of his culture, and thus, in the process of explaining, the culture bearer and the educated observer get mixed up.

Both our informants agreed on a very simple distinction: *shotpyaws* are narratives based exclusively on fiction, while the *wanlh* is a tale from the past that is verisimilar with related facts that could have taken place in reality. The informants said that the most important thing is not that it actually happened, but that it could have happened. Likelihood is thus the main element. Therefore, we have been told, animal tales are undoubtedly *shotpyaws* – everyone knows that real animals do not talk. Also certain is that etiological tales which explain the origin of place names, a clan's history or special features, are clearly *wanlh*. The Nenets situate their narratives in a bipolar system that opposes – very roughly – fairy tale and legends.

This is no different from the folklore of other peoples of the world. Commenting on the nature of legends, Dégh observes that "Attitude toward belief is the essence of the genre [the legend]" (Dégh 1996 : 33). According to Bascom the distinction between fiction and reality is an element that structures many popular taxonomies. He states "it is certainly significant that some groups

[---] distinguish between narratives which they regard as true and false, while the Ojibwa regard all their tales as true. It is essential to the understanding and interpretation of folklore to know whether a given tale is regarded as historical fact or fiction" (Bascom 1965: 283–284). This is confirmed by Ben-Amos: "The referential distinction concerns with the truth value of narrative accounts" (Ben-Amos 1992: 24).

In the case of the Forest Nenets, this observation comes from their own comments on a tale. Moreover, this question has been submitted directly to them and has led to a detailed discussion on this point. For the quarter of an hour that it lasted, no criterion other than the above mentioned was presented. We may well appreciate the further potential developments opened by this explanation if we treat it as a single element in a system that functions according to its own logic. If the criterion of likelihood (the possibility of a tale being rooted in reality), is really the line dividing one genre from the other, then the distribution of tales into genres by the Nenets themselves allow for the identification of their own understanding of reality. What comes to the surface is belief. As Linda Dégh observes: "In the experience of folklorists, tellers state, explain, interpret or at least imply their personal attitude toward the belief content of the legend they tell" (Dégh 1996: 33). She insists on the need to work on beliefs, saying: "Any legend researcher needs to focus on the attitude towards belief expressed by individual participants in the legend process to gain insight into the dialectics by means of which believability, the purpose of any legend communication, are debated" (Dégh 1996: 38). We must deduce from the Forest Nenets very simple distinction that the whole of their tale repertoire is structured by belief and thus forms a kind of "corpus" of belief. It is therefore, possible to perceive data about the Forest Nenets mental universe in tales. That is, however, if we don't take the word "belief" in its religious context, but instead use it in order to analyse broader elements of mentality. It is therefore a guideline for further fieldwork to follow very precisely what informants and the people in the audience say about the recorded tales in order to analyse individual persons and

small groups from the point of view of their “belief”. This analysis is by nature complex, as the perception of likelihood is probably one of the elements most subject to evolution in cultural models. The research needs to be done with the utmost care³² and we must be conscious of the fragmentary nature of the recorded data.

The integration of people older than 50 into the school system, the increasing influence of the latter and the decline of family values in the lives of the younger generations probably have had direct effects on the belief system and on the extent of the verisimilitude field. Undoubtedly the Soviet power’s fight against religions, superstition, and against every kind of ‘magic’ way of thinking has led to certain stories being considered *shotpyaws*, whereas they would have been seen as *wanlh* by elder generations. Moreover, the very formulation of this criterion shows the progress of the so-called scientific way of thinking in the Nenets’ mentality. Some decades ago it would have probably been formulated as a direct distinction between truth and fiction, now, the informants have integrated a new way of thinking, one that is reflected in the caution of their formulation.

This criterion is, therefore very much alive, it develops and changes and follows the present worldview of the presenters in the communication process. Both Yuri Vella and Tatva Logany, each with his own version, presented the example of Toivo Lehtisalo’s main informant, the blind shaman Kalyat, who was Tatva’s great grand-uncle. For about half an hour³³ Tatva recalled this man’s legendary history; how he had acquired his shamanic gift and had become a mediator between the world of men and the world of spirits; how he implemented their guidance; and how he was killed

³² I agree with Linda Dégh on the impossibility of directly questioning the Nenets with “Do you believe in that?” She comments on this question as follows: “The question itself provokes distortion. In the first place, belief is fluctuating, hesitant and selective, non consistent or absolute. In the second place, the informant has many reasons not to tell what he or she believes” (Dégh 1996: 39).

³³ On 10/10/2000.

in a competition with a dark and stronger shaman. Integrated in Tatva's narrative were two songs that remind the listener of how Kalyat went to the South with the storks, returning with them at the beginning of spring, and how he had joined the divers after having covered his body with a diver skin in order to protect him from the cold. For Yuri Vella, this tale is considered as a *shotpyaws*, since Lehtisalo told Kalyat much about his own country, and about life abroad. Kalyat then, in his own way, transmitted this knowledge to his countrymen. The latter have turned him into the hero of legends. Kalyat's narratives show the birth of a legend, but Yuri occasionally shows how contemporary stories told by the Nenets might also one day, possibly, become legends.

IV. Hybrid narratives

This should not lead, nevertheless, to polarisation of Nenets tales classification. The fact is, between the *wanlh's* truth and the *shotpyaws'* fantasy there is a large field of uncertainty, as many stories may prove. One example includes abundant comments by Yuri Vella. Tatva announces that he is going to tell a *shotpyaws*³⁴. The story's main character is a young girl called Atpälha. Her stepmothers are jealous of Atpälha's father's love for her and decide to kill her. Pretending to give her marrow from reindeer bones they instead throw a hot thimble into her throat and Atpälha falls as if she were dead. The grieving father puts Atpälha on a sled with his best reindeer and orders them to take her to where she must go. Atpälha is not really dead – she can see but she can't move or speak. As the reindeer travel, she sees people in the forest; some people carry wood on their shoulders, but can't put it down – these are people who, while living, stole their neighbour's wood. We understand that she is in the other world where many other scenes like this are seen as she starts to live another life. But then she receives a blow on her back and the thimble falls out of her

³⁴ On 29/10/2000.

mouth. She is again in the human world, in a cemetery. When she returns home, her father hears what really happened and punishes the stepmothers.

After having told his story, Tatva adds: "This may be a *shotpyaws* or may be it is a *wanlh*, nobody knows". Yuri Vella further developed this theme by pointing out that if we consider that this trip to the other world is but a dream, it may very well be a *wanlh*. It is true that nobody ever harnesses only one reindeer and reindeer do not obey words (*shotpyaws* element), but the reindeer may have been taught to react to voice commands, so even this element may correspond to reality.

I presented this example with details for it shows interesting aspects of this question, which Yuri Vella himself brings to our attention. Even for a Nenets culture bearer the uncertainty of the relationship between tales and reality or potential reality still exists. Even Tatva, who presented the tale as a *shotpyaws*, did not exclude other interpretations. True enough, in another conversation, he clearly included Atpälha among the *shotpyaws* for children, so he does have a clear preference of interpretation. This suggests the existence of an interpretation margin that may lend a hybrid status to certain elements.

There is a fragment in Yuri Vella's repertoire that includes a recitative section once performed by Yuri's neighbour, Auli Yusi, who died in 1995. The main character is a man who discovers that his fish are being stolen on a regular basis. He sets a trap and one morning discovers that the culprit has been wounded. Following the footprints he arrives at the place where there is a hole in the earth. The man looks into the hole and realises that it is the upper hole of a Nenets tent. There is a woman speaking to a very old man, who is lying wounded in a cradle and weeping. What the woman says to the old man is reported in a recitative rhythm. She scolds the old man in the cradle for having taken human food, which is not meant for them, and tells him to be as wise as his grandparents, gesturing to children who are playing on the other side of the tent. The man understands that he is at the juncture between this and the other world, where time runs backward, the

children are adults, and the elderly are children. He becomes frightened and returns home.

What is interesting about this tale that Yuri performs is that it is titled, probably by Auli, *wanlh petyalh*. True enough, other Nenets, such as Tatva, do not understand this title and consider it to be without any doubt a *shotpyaws*³⁵, since the beyond is shown even more clearly than in Atpälha's story. But I would not dismiss Yuri's title so easily. It did not come from his fantasy. The fact that the elements of the title are scarcely understandable to Tatva shows that they are probably archaic remainders – I would suppose that Auli titled this piece, or perhaps the person who told it him and it may therefore reflect a different interpretation. Further research may or may not confirm this hypothesis. But in the meanwhile I would propose two possibilities. Perhaps this contact with the world beyond was considered real for an older generation, and the dread of the border between the two worlds was so material, that it justified the link with reality of this illustrative tale. A chronological difference could explain the discrepancy between Tatva's opinion (he is a man in his 40s) and the name given to the tale, either by Auli, who was a very old man when he died, or by some even more remote authors. Another possible explanation – and these hypotheses may not exclude one another – is that plausibility may not be the only criterion of a *wanlh*. Quite simply, a *wanlh* perhaps required a contact point with reality³⁶ and had a concrete function to warn or to provide the audience with useful information, as well as with convincing explanations, even as the intervention of supernatural elements gave more credence to a didactic message. Another text presented as a *wanlh* confirms this assertion. It tells the story of two friends who are compelled to

³⁵ Kaur Mägi's personal communication.

³⁶ Linda Dégh observes most convincingly: "'Truth' does not necessarily mean that people believe the legends they tell, but rather that legends are about what real people experience within their own topographically delimited territory in the real world. The real world is the referent of the legend" (Dégh 1996: 41).

spend the night in the taiga. One decides to sleep in a small raised hut³⁷ where usually food, working tools and sacral objects are kept. The other sleeps outdoors. By morning, the first has been reduced to bones. This *wanh* has been told by Yuri Vella's mother, who is now in her 70s³⁸.

As a matter of fact, the *shotpyaws* of our collection seem to ignore the moralising dimension, which is a basic element of folklore³⁹. There are many animal narratives where the fox, often for a good reason, cheats all his companions, or tales where the main character obtains what he wants by lying and deceiving. Their function, at least at first sight, seems to be more entertaining than edifying. On the other hand, the didactic element seems to be much more present in tales called *wanh* by our informants. But this hypothesis requires further research and probably a larger analysed corpus. I am only at the beginning of this work.

Anyhow, even the data available at the moment allows us to confirm some basic points. It clearly appears that in our informants' consciousness the notions of true/non-true are not in a contradictory relationship. When Ben-Amos states that these elements exclude⁴⁰ one another, just as a text cannot be prose and poetry at the same time, I can't but disagree with him. At least in Nenets culture, they occupy the extreme positions on an axis the poles of which are represented by the purest forms. Between them

³⁷ According to Nenets traditions, and because of the presence of sacral objects, only the family to whom the hut belongs is allowed to sleep there. The prohibition is particularly severe for women.

³⁸ Ateni Kazamkina, 5/10/2000.

³⁹ For Bascom this dimension is the third of folklore's functions "In many nonliterate societies the information embodied in folklore is highly regarded in its own right" (Bascom 1965: 293).

⁴⁰ "People make the distinction between true and false accounts within the framework of their own cultural knowledge and perception of their world. Within such a framework such a distinction is absolute. Like the differentiation between speech with and without metric substructure, there cannot be any intermediate position between truth and falsehood" (Ben-Amos 1992: 25).

there is a continuum, permitting, without any sharp rupture, passage from one to the other. There is a dynamics of difference but not of confrontation that reminds us of a fundamental feature of the arctic mentality, which is clearly revealed by religious beliefs: any kind of rigid opposition of contraries is unknown, as well as such values as good and evil as absolute opposites. Evil forces exist, but in Nenets worldview they are not to be fought or eliminated, they are to be neutralised. Thus the Nenets sacrifice to the spirits of diseases in order to protect themselves, and they do not traditionally fight against wolves, which are also considered as having a right to eat, as long as they do not do it to excess... By analogy, truth and non-truth are not in opposition, they complete one another.

Conclusion

This scheme of a continuum between two opposite poles also explains why the Nenets have not felt it necessary to create a third hybrid category that is neither *wanh* nor *shotpyaws*, but something different. The fact is that these two words do not cover closed categories whose aim is to encompass the whole of reality. This is not a scientific classification, but a functional distinction, pertinent to the Forest Nenets' mental logics⁴¹. This distinction gives both the performer and the audience much free room. There is place left, as required, for the hybrid (Stross 1999: 260), but it is to be found on an axis and not in a special compartment. I am sure, as far as Atpälha is concerned, that Yuri's and Tatva's perceptions are not the same, yet both, nevertheless, are conscious that this tale may be

⁴¹ Again Ben-Amos deserves to be quoted: "Native taxonomy has no external objective. It is a qualitative, subjective system of order. The logical principles that underlie this categorisation of oral tradition are those which are meaningful to the members of the group and can guide them in their personal relationships and ritualistic actions" (Ben-Amos 1982a: 48).

submitted to different interpretations and may be accepted by different sensibilities. Nenets tales seem thus, to be supplied with excellent tools that allow them to adapt to the evolutions in mentality that have taken place in the last decades for the Forest Nenets as well as other arctic peoples. The listeners may or may not believe the episodes of the narrative: the framework gives them the possibility of entering into dialogue with the performed story without having to make compromises with their own understanding of reality. Unlike the experience reported by Leea Virtanen of Finland, where, as electricity reduced the fear of ghosts, the corresponding legends lost ground (Dégh 1996: 34), I have the impression that Nenets taxonomy provides items that are no longer objects of belief, the direct possibility of being recycled.

This first analysis shows clearly that Nenets narrative genres, if analyzed from a cognitive point of view, supply us with very rich information, completing the scarce knowledge we have at the moment of this small Siberian ethnic group.

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Notes on Customary Law and Worldview¹

Collin Hakkinen, Art Leete

(Discussion on the article by Art Leete, “Role of Customary Law in the Kazym War: Women and Sacred Rules”. In: *Studies in Folk Culture*, Tartu: Tartu University Press 2003, vol. 1, 23–45.)

This paper contains the correspondences of Collin Hakkinen and Art Leete regarding Art Leete’s article in the previous volume of “*Studies in Folk Culture*”. Collin, an American, was born and raised in Alaska and works for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Art is an Estonian cultural anthropologist, and works at the University of Tartu, Estonia, as a professor of ethnology. He has been studying the northern peoples of Russia for 13 years.

Art writes: Even before this article appeared, we found that we share a common interest in the problems of Northern peoples and their cultures. Since this discussion was going on between us anyway, we realized that it might be good idea to edit the texts of our discussion (these were carried out by mail and online) and try to find some new method of analysis, then apply it toward certain aspects of northern cultures. Our dialogue has been carried out in a semi-academic and semi-essayistic manner, but the use of this kind

¹ The preparation of this paper was supported by the Estonian Science Foundation (grant no. 5057).

of mixed genre does not, hopefully, reduce the essential value of our arguments.

Collin: It was good you wrote this article because it was related to something I had been thinking about before, and it brings several things into the fore which really expanded my whole understanding of the relationship between our modern common law and customary law, and the role of women.

From what I understand, there is moral justice and applied, or distributive justice. Moral justice encompasses our individual and collective sense of justice based on some higher ideal, and conceptualizes the right ways against which real actions are measured, whereas, applied justice is the way in which our concept of moral justice is carried out or the system that becomes instituted. I believe that both of these are connected with myth or worldview.

Over time I have come to realize that myths are not dead, not rationalizations or things of the past, nor ways of making sense of the world. They are very real, vital and alive, and are the force that gives life to such aspects of culture as language, justice, education, government, economy, and faith. These are all loaded, broad terms, but it is myth that puts us in the frame to live with and apply these aspects of culture.

So myths never die, they are only replaced². And justice, in particular, tends to be determined by the way it is aligned with a

² About slow transformations of the mythical mental models, see, for example, the monograph by Anna-Leena Siikala "Mythic Images and Shamanism: A Perspective on Kalevala Poetry" (2002a: 11, 25–32), or her article "What Myths Tell about Past Finno-Ugric Modes of Thinking" (2002b: 15–18). Her conclusion on this discussion is:

"The more central and deeply-rooted the value, attitude and belief in question, the more wide-ranging are the changes needed to effect their innovation. Elements belonging to a religious and mythical world view may have tenaciously survived a number of different cultural periods. Their substance and meaning may have been reinterpreted and recast within the confines of a new cultural frame of reference" (Siikala 2002a: 32; see also 2002b: 29).

certain myth, and consequently gets carried out or applied in different ways – this is what I saw highlighted in your article, the connection between the Khanty worldview and how justice is enforced and distributed especially as it applies to women.

The gap between the moral and applied justice, or the ideal and the real, is filled with myth that determines the differences between the due processes of common law or Roman law, and customary law. One book which shows this very well is “The Cheyenne Way” (Llewellyn & Adamson Hoebel 1982) which illuminates some very interesting differences between the two ways of justice, and suggests a completely different way of understanding and conceiving justice and laws that are based on a completely different lifestyle or myth.

If law is intended as the avoidance of further conflict or a way of preventing wrongdoing, then the means to the same end are very dissimilar. In the American way, if a crime is committed, then the aggrieved individual interest is channeled into the public sphere. So homicide in modern law is a crime in addition to grievous tort. It is also the public and its institutions (police, judges, jails) which enact due process. These public laws are also codified and written, and are precisely defined by specialists, which can partly account for a certain looking glass effect where laws do not completely correspond to human behaviors and the crime must be contorted or characterized in such a way that it will fit into some category and trespass against some particular stricture within that category. If there is a punishment, it is usually in the form of time or money (such and such a fine, so many years in prison, etc) and more rarely execution.

I do not know the specifics of the Khanty way of justices, but in most customary law – and this is so for the Tanaina Indians as has been recorded in Osgoods “The Ethnography of the Tanaina” (1966) as well as the aforementioned work regarding the Cheyenne – due process is carried out by the aggrieved party and the focus is much more on private tort rather than public crime. Because of kinship structures in these societies, it also may be an extended family that seeks to redress a wrong acted against an individual.

And as in traditional Icelandic or Germanic law, there is often a failure to bring an immediate resolution to a conflict. There also tends not to be fixed structures in which the law takes place – no buildings I mean, so it is rather centralized in a different place – sort of more within the collective conscious or unconscious rather. So often these strange outcomes or decisions that satisfy their society leave us perplexed. Maybe partly because their laws are not out in the open and the punishments don't seem commensurate with the crime, like some of the very light sentences for grave crimes that you listed in your article, and some of the sanctions against women you also mentioned. These have not traditionally been given much credence in the American judicial system, and it seems like the two systems of justice coincide, and interact, but as your article showed, only one system of justice has precedence.

You mention the way that colonized people (generally the most likeliest practitioners of customary law) use the laws of the occupiers to their advantage (Leete 2003). Yuri Slezkine (1994) also talks about this. The native Northerners, when they considered their elders' decisions unfair or when they had no power to enforce it themselves, turned to Russians; they, however, accepted Russian help only if it made sense in their system. A lot of these themes also emerge in George Orwell's "Burmese Days" (1958), but the aspect of subverting the laws of the colonizers in particular comes through because it is this that is at the center of manipulation and tragedy happening within the novel.

The English complain over and over about how the Burmese never come out into the open and rebel, but use a sort of shadow resistance. After a reprisal killing of an English colonial, one English character laments that they cannot torture any native suspects. "Got to keep our own bloody silly laws." Another character states: "If any of those gutless curs would ever show fight in any conceivable way! Instead of just sneaking past you, keeping within the law so that you never had a chance to get back on them. Ah for a real rebellion" (Orwell 1958: 250–51). So it is as you said in your article, that the occupied can use the laws of the occupier to their own advantage.

I think, however, that it's also possible that indigenous people can use their own laws to their own advantage, or to subvert the laws of the occupiers. You also use a quote by Ann Fienup Riordan in your article³ (you might have noticed this too, but I find her a little bit tendentious and idealistic on this subject) about animals offering themselves to hunters, and it may be accurate, but it does not take into consideration the use of Kalashnikovs, or running animals down with snow machines, or leaving several rotting caribou carcasses out in front of your cabin or the indiscriminate killing of cows and calves. The perception is that there is little conservation ethic, and these are viable hunting methods in the villages. So a quote like that can be used to justify these hunting practices and can also be used for political purposes, especially in present day Alaska where subsistence is such a politically combustible issue. Anyway this too I think may be connected with myth and the use of white man's hunting implements, and modernized hunting practices.

What also struck me very profoundly, was your conclusion. I remember when Yuri and Tatva were visiting Tartu⁴ – and you may have mentioned this about others too when you were in Siberia – they were very hesitant almost unwilling to talk about the Kazym war. It seems to be a painful memory. Perhaps for the reason pertaining to jurisdiction that they themselves instituted justice best left to spirits. It could also have been an indicator of the deterioration or alteration of their myth or world center.

³ “If they see musk oxen and kill them, they are breaking the white man's law; if they see musk oxen and let them live, they are breaking Yup'ik law” (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 181).

This “illegal” hunting was explained by a Yup'ik hunter as unavoidable because if they don't take these musk oxen, their families will go hungry and animals will stop coming near the hunters. The animals will not respect the hunters any more (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 181). This also means that among the Eskimos native sacred rules supercede the official ones” (Leete 2003: 28).

⁴ Yuri Vella and Tatra Logany, the Forest Nenets (see also footnote 11 in the previous article by Eva Toulouze in this volume).

Art: Comparison of the official law of industrial societies and customary law of tribal peoples is not really the main topic of my research, but, of course, this question is connected to its theme. Somehow the contradiction between official law and an innate sense of justice is present in modern industrial societies as well, and perhaps this problem never entirely disappears.⁵ People of every society have some type of unofficial (customary) law. The conditions for customary law always exist.

One issue, connected to problems of the meeting of official and customary laws is the question of the relationship between law and worldview. The connection between worldview and justice is not really as direct as some authors [particularly, for example, indigenous Khanty scientists Maina Lapina (1998), Timofey Moldanov and Tatyana Moldanova (2000)] would assert. This is a quite complicated issue. Even if people themselves try to characterize this relationship as close and logical, there are anyway always some aspects that do not fit into this harmonious picture. There is really a gap between ideal law that is based on a worldview and applied folk law, and this is also the case among the Khanty and Forest Nenets people.

This problematic relationship becomes actualized in more extreme situations such as the case of the Kazym uprising. This event was somewhat unusual in that the ordinary customary law did not function perfectly so people modified it (temporarily) to

⁵ Ken Ross asserts that the application of unofficial and indigenous hunting rules in Alaska is an attempt by the natives to escape the influence of the state's regulations:

"Native subsistence customs, maintained in part to the present, often clashed with Euro-American methods of fish and game management. Lack of political power and clear legal standing by Native decision-making groups allowed Euro-American values to prevail in the form of statutes and regulations such as hunting and fishing seasons and bag limits. But the greater the Native majority and the more remote the village, the less likely that legislated rules would be honored in practice" (Ross 2000: 78).

suit the actual situation, and in doing so, approached the limits of their concepts of law and justice.

If we talk about Ann Fienup-Riordan's approach, I must state some reservations. It may be that the quote you mentioned was taken out of context by me a little bit. Perhaps Ann Fienup-Riordan realizes that the application of Yup'ik hunting laws on Nelson Island is less than perfect and that there are indeed some problems.

I just tried to demonstrate that in the Arctic there are some common attitudes towards normative hunting rules, although these rules may be somewhat idealistic, in real life a great deal of these idyllic hunting codes have been lost or are applied inconsistently. I did not try to analyze the entire Yup'ik hunting situation. But, perhaps, I was too direct in making a statement about Yup'ik hunting rules by using only one short sample text.

At the same time I think that I followed Fienup-Riordan's concept of Yup'ik hunting rules quite correctly. She emphasizes that the main idea of Yup'ik hunting is that animals offer themselves to the hunters and the game may disappear if humans do not treat them properly. And the fact that game is diminishing is explained by human misbehavior. However, the younger generation of Yup'ik will indeed admit that it can be the result of overhunting (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 167–172, 177–181; Fienup-Riordan *et al* 2000: 17–20). Although Fienup-Riordan does not describe cases of culturally unaccepted methods of hunting, she does write the following:

“Contemporary accounts about hunting experiences recall the consequences (including game shortages) of hunter's teasing or abusing his catch” (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 172).

Perhaps, this abuse and teasing may include cruel methods of killing the animals, so Fienup-Riordan does not argue that all Yup'ik hunters are perfectly following the ideal of their hunting codes. And, in regards to another Yup'ik community in Alakanuk, Fienup-Riordan tells us:

“Many older hunters held a traditional view of the relationship between humans and animals not shared by most young men” (Fienup-Riordan *et al* 2000: 20).

In the most recent book, edited by Fienup-Riordan, Paul John, a Yup'ik Elder from whom Fienup-Riordan, perhaps, has received the greater part of her native knowledge, stresses the necessity of proper treatment of fish and game. According to John, taking care of bones is important for people's luck, not only in regards to hunting or fishing but also for life in general. At the same time he states that nowadays “people ignore bones” (John 2003: 81–91). In one story, Paul John describes ten rules for the proper treatment of game (as well as general behavior) for a hunter who wants to be successful (John 2003: 33–49).

There are, of course, shortcomings in the adherence to these ideal behavioral attitudes in northern hunting regions. I can give an example from the Upper Ezhva Komis (*vylysezhvatas*) of the northeastern corner of European Russia as a comparison. One Komi hunter, Zhenya (b. 1966), would run down wild reindeer with a snow machine and kill them with a hatchet. After the reindeer left his hunting grounds and he felt guilty because, according to him, it was not the proper way to kill the wild reindeer. He described the case:

“With one hand I was steering the snow machine and in the other I had a hatchet. The reindeer hit me with his antlers. He was jumping over the snow machine and never even scratched it. He did that three times. On the fourth try he miscalculated something, and smashed into the front glass. But I grabbed his leg. The hatchet was thrown clear, naturally. The snow machine kept going by itself for some thirty meters and then stopped. We fell into the snow and I kept holding the reindeer by his leg. I was thinking: how can I kill this reindeer? He was big; he started struggling. I

thought: how can I kill him? The reindeer reared up on his hind legs... So I started pretending that I was weak. I lay on my back and just held his leg lightly, as if I was weak. The reindeer felt this and immediately started to push me. At the same time I kept rolling. The hatchet was some twenty or thirty meters away. The snow crust was strong. He kept pushing me with his antlers. But during the winter you dress warmly, so I was wearing a *bushlat*⁶. I didn't feel a thing. I didn't even get a scratch. And so he pushed me to the hatchet. After that I killed him with the hatchet. It was dangerous!

I do not hunt reindeer any more. Earlier there were herds. I saw herds of five and three hundred heads. There were such huge groups in the forest. So many. Nobody shot them, only me. But after that they all left. I ran them down with a snow machine three times. And after that they all gathered together into one big herd and left. I should not have run them down with a snow machine. If I would not have run them down, they would not have left" (FM 2003).⁷

In fact, Zhenya follows hunting rules quite seriously. The other local Komi hunters also consider him to be "a real hunter", who catches a lot and follows the necessary forest rules. But these things still happen sometimes.

There is another possible view on this issue. Kerrie Ann Shannon challenges the attempt to connect Inuit hunting practices with the idea of animals simply "offering" themselves (as if the Inuit live in a 'giving environment'). She writes:

"I suggest that in order to understand hunter-gatherers in general and Inuit specifically, one must also explore their

⁶ *Bushlat* – wadding coat (in Russian).

⁷ Next year, 2004, a friend of Zhenya, Volodya (b. 1965) told me that reindeer didn't left that area in fact.

sense of readiness, or the skill involved in seizing an opportunity” (Shannon 2004: 97).

So, in regards to Zhenya’s case, we can see that in some situations seizing an opportunity supercedes ideal hunting rules. It was only later when Zhenya started to think things over that he interpreted his behavior in the framework of “hunting law”. At the time he did not care about this much.

And the last thing – the unwillingness of the Forest Nenets Yuri and Tatva to talk about the Kazym uprising of the 1930s during their visit to Tartu, Estonia in November, 2000. I have confronted this kind of unwillingness many times among the Khantys as well. My primary interpretation of this has been the fact that the uprising causes still painful memories because it was ended so brutally by the Soviets, and many natives (even those who did not participate in these events) were repressed and are still officially considered criminals in present day Russia (their rights have not been officially restored). It means that people are afraid of talking about this for several reasons. The American scholar Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer has also mentioned that during her entire career as a fieldworker she has not met any people more closed and unwilling to talk as the Kazym River Khantys. Balzer connected this uncooperativeness to the painful experience of the Kazym War (personal communication).

But, of course, the Khantys and Forest Nenets may also have contradictory feelings about this uprising. Usually they believe that they did the right thing by making an offering of Russians who desecrated the most important sacred island of the local Khantys and Forest Nenets. But it also may be that some of them have doubts as to whether this decision of their fathers and grandfathers was the correct one, because it is not so simple to fit these events into the ordinary ideological framework of the Khanty and Forest Nenets variant of indigenous customary law.

Collin: In regards to your quote of Ann Fienup-Riordan I do not think it was taken out of context and as you say her conclusions are

very likely accurate. She has likely spent more time there observing than I ever will. My assertion of her being somewhat idealistic (she has done some very substantial work and made some really excellent things available) was actually based on some other things that she wrote, and some of her interpretations of certain events and the conclusions that she drew. I kind of went to the extreme to prove a point in terms of native hunting practices, and although I know that this stuff does go on, I do not know if it is the norm. Also I work for Fish and Game⁸ now, so that may be a factor too (I am kidding).

I did in fact come across something connected with this subject from Frederica DeLaguna who talked about the same belief phenomenon occurring among the Tanaina. She mentions a young man named Alex Mishikoff who explained the sudden appearance of moose in the area as being a result of people mistreating the animals where they had lived before. However, in this case, it is considered mistreatment when the remains of the animals are not taken care of in the proper way. So, in the same manner, animals will let themselves be killed for food and furs when necessary, but must be honored after death (DeLaguna 1993: 275).

But returning to what you talked about before regarding the importance of women following behavioral customs, Slezkine (1994) also noted that, in their search for social cleavages, the Soviets of the 1920s focused on the role of women in native societies, and attempted to rectify it accordingly. Quite a few native women took advantage of this, and used the influence of the Russian courts to find efficacious outcomes to problematic situations. As your article mentioned native sacred laws and their connection to some of the prohibitions associated with women, I wondered then, if these laws were sustained by the role and behavior of women, and if it could be said that women enacted and embodied the laws? If so, could it also be said that the Soviets'

⁸ The Alaska Department of Fish and Game studies, recommends and often implements management practices for the wildlife resources of Alaska.

attempt to change the status of native women constituted an attempt to reorder native laws as well? And did these laws actually change as a result?

Art: I think a feminist approach might be applicable to this issue. On the one hand it can be argued that the attempt by the Soviets to “liberate” women was just an additional reform intended to alter the indigenous societal structure and bring Northern people under greater control of the State, and, accordingly, change the “discriminative” folk law practices, as well. This is true, of course. But we cannot limit ourselves to only one perspective, and idealize a set of gender roles of indigenous societies, particularly, in Western Siberia, without thinking about it a little bit more.

For example, an ambivalent attitude towards the link between gender roles and customary law is evident in the stories told by Anne Konkova, an elderly Mansi woman that I wrote about briefly in my previous article (Leete 2003: 32). I would like to quote her statement, again:

“Only women are able to mess things up. Despite there was the Mother of Mothers⁹. But men were very strict. So a court was held. And men could beat at home, also. If a wife heard something and talked to someone else... Master could beat for this. The laws were very strict but nobody felt them. These rules did not make people feel depressed. These laws [just existed] somehow... If the laws were provided, they were there” (Leete 2003: 32; EA 234, Leete 1991: 85).

But a few minutes prior to this, Auntie Anne had also given another perspective on Mansi law and the issue of gender roles. She stated:

⁹ More about the role of the leader of women in the Konda River Mansis' communities and her relationship to the customary law, see Leete 2002.

“You see, what kind of bastards the men were! You know, I can tell you, even nowadays, I give you my word of honor, my word of honor, I’m telling the truth: the women were much wiser than men, much wiser... I give you my word, I’ve lived for a long time – wiser, wiser! And also – hard-working. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I don’t know, how it is in your country, I don’t know how it is among the Russians, I don’t know, I don’t know. I’m talking about our women. [They are] wiser, more hard-working. A woman can be a hunter, she can also go fishing, she has to take care about kids. But a husband comes home from hunting, the wife prepares some food for him. He lays down for a rest. The wife must dry and check everything that her husband was wearing. [---] She must dry, wring everything out. And in the morning she must bring to her husband all things and those must be warm and folded. You see, who the husband is – a monster of cruelty... A wife must bring firewood. We had such a law – the man doesn’t touch firewood. If a man goes to bring water, it can kill him! He feels insulted. Think about it – those were awful laws, ah? Everything [must be done by a] wife, all her, all her, all her, all her... all her. And because of that we had a saying: What is a man? Nothing more than a stray dog. Indeed – he just comes, stays overnight, he comes to have a rest. Just like a dog – always outside. Such is a man – sometimes he goes fishing, then hunting, there for a while, then off somewhere else. And sometimes it also happens that... he gets drunk... you see, and so he goes and hangs around somewhere, again” (EA 234, Leete 1991: 64–66).

Auntie Anne concluded the discussion on Mansi customary law issues with the following statement:

“You see, what kind of laws were there. I can tell you that these laws were awful” (EA 234, Leete 1991: 64).

It is evident that Anne somehow considered Mansi customary law to be normal yet at the same time complains about some tendencies that allow men more freedom in behavior and the right to interpret and apply the law. This simultaneous-attitude of women towards traditional gender roles also appears in Kristiina Ehin's article in the same volume. According to Ehin, Estonian runo-singer Kadri Kukk has expressed her seemingly unquestioned loyalty to certain set of rules shaping women's and men's behavior but then was also sometimes critical of a number of limitations placed on women in their everyday lives.

It leads us to conclude that women's feelings concerning the issues of customary law and multiple behavioral rules inside a traditional society have been ambivalent. The perspective also becomes more problematic if the Soviet reforms that dealt with the role of women in the communities of the northern peoples are also considered. There was, perhaps, a kind of incentive for accepting at least part of changes offered (or, in fact, applied in compulsory way) by the Soviet power.

We must also consider that Auntie Anne was not an "ideal" representative of traditional Mansi society. She studied at the Khanty-Mansiysk Pedagogical College in the early 1930s and had been employed as a teacher in several parts of Western Siberia, and later, as a radio journalist. So, perhaps, she must have been influenced considerably by Soviet discourse on gender issues, and by extension, her stories about life in Ivyr village in the 1920s might also be influenced by this official approach.

Another question might be: what really happened in the field of "liberating women" from a role they had in traditional indigenous societies before the Soviet reforms? This question is too large to answer in two words. But, mainly, on the surface the changes were quick and successful for the Soviets. However, in reality changes in gender roles have been much slower and even nowadays a lot of things continue to be done in the traditional way. For example, my friend Liivo Niglas has done research on the role of women in one Tundra Nenets community on Yamal Peninsula. His work demonstrates that multiple rules exist, restricting female

behavior in this Nenets group and yet there is no resentment toward these “discriminative” rules. Perhaps, the situation is quite similar in many other places as well (Niglas 1997).

Collin: I am not really a scholar and as you can see my method is not so rigorous or restrained. Your article was interesting for me because you phrased out some things that I had sort of been thinking about and I kind of just wanted to let you know about or add to it some of the things I had come across that might have been related.

Mainly though I think there is a lot more to be explored in terms of this dynamic between sacred, customary, and modern common laws. To a good extent there seems to be a pronounced division between whites and natives in Alaska and I think Alan Boraas’ characterization of the relationship between natives and non natives in towns like Kenai, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as consisting of a dual social structure is well put and still somewhat valid (Boraas 93: 193). We still kind of live parallel lives and although they intersect in many ways and although there is overlap and understanding, I wouldn’t say that it is the norm, so I guess the way they stay strangers, or become assimilated is still pretty interesting and worth further inquiry.

Art: Thank you for your comments. They are certainly valuable for me, indeed. An understanding of northern cultures (as a whole or some aspects of those) is still a tricky issue for us, “the westerners”, even if we somehow have closer contacts with those groups (you, as somebody who lives in Alaska and me as a regular visitor of northern regions). Any of our possible conclusions on northern peoples’ lives has its limits, and although those may be formulated correctly through the use of certain scientific methods, a mental world is not easily fixed in any discourse, especially, if we are talking about a culture that is so profoundly different from ours. We just cannot comprehend it in its totality (or fragmentariness). But in the end I think our attempt to discuss the problem of folk law of northern peoples was not a bad thing.

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The Case of “A Cat and a Dog in a Well”: Motifs, Folk Inquiry and Metafolkloristic Interpretation (on Udmurtian Folk Beliefs)

Tatyana Minniyakhmetova

I would like to offer an examination of one quite disturbing incident, from 1984, when a dead cat and a dead dog were thrown into a well, in the Udmurtian village of Bayshady in Bashkiria (Russian Federation). The methodological basis which I employ for this research might be termed the “non scientific method” or “non scientific approach”; I do this, however, with the absolute faithfulness and deference to the carriers of that culture. I have based my study on their explanations and interpretations of this case. While using this method or approach, thus defined and proposed by me, I wish to note that I did not have any special interest in this case from a scientific perspective, and I had not planned to analyse this theme, hence it didn't make sense to use any academic methods to research such a “trifling” case.

This incident occurred in a village of more than 200 Udmurt inhabitants who are pagans¹. Living side by side with the Udmurts,

¹ Most of Udmurts are Christians. Udmurts of Trans-Kama Diaspora, to which belong the Bayshady villagers, name themselves “*mi chyn udmurtyes*” – “we are genuine Udmurts” (Атаманов М. Г., Владыкин В. Е. Погребальный ритуал южных удмуртов. In: *Материалы средневековых памятников Удмуртии*. Устинов, 1985: 132; Христолюбова Л., Миннихметова Т. *Удмурты Башкортостана (история, культура, современность)*. Уфа, 1994: 3).

are some Bashkirian-Tatarian families who are Muslims. Consequently, there are two cemeteries: *ukmort shay* – “the Udmurtian cemetery”, and *bashkyrt shay* – “the Bashkirian cemetery”. In the neighbouring monoethnic villages there are settlements of Bashkirs, Tatars, Russians, Udmurts, and Maris. By extension, the majority of the inhabitants of the Udmurt village speak the languages of their neighbours.

In this paper I attempt to analyse this troubling case that disrupted the lives of two neighbouring families who used water from the well. As was mentioned before, in this investigation I use only the interpretations of the villagers connected with this case, and what they have discussed over the years as well as what has recently taken place. I would argue that the interpretations of the villagers reveal motives. The actions and decisions are explained enough to give an understanding of this case.

On one farmstead at the southern end of the village, a dead cat and a dead dog were thrown into a well. This well was in a garden, and its depth is of more than 12 m. At that time, water from this well was used by two families: the first family which owned the well, and another that lived in the last farmstead across the street. In 1985, at the end of February, a dead cat was found floating in the well. It was taken out and thrown away. Almost none of the families paid any mind to this incident or suspected anything, although it seemed quite odd and unusual. It was considered that cats do not fall into wells by themselves. Nevertheless, it was suggested, it might have been a very old cat, or a stray, or maybe it was frightened by somebody or something, and in its attempt to escape, jumped into the well. Afterwards, when this cat was thrown away, the water from this well was not used for drinking or eating for one month. Instead the families brought water from a spring that was 1 km away from their houses. Water from the contaminated well, however, was used for other housekeeping chores, as well as for cattle, washing of clothes, cleaning the house, and bathing in the sauna.

After this incident, some new playful verbal expressions about the water from that well came into use. It was called *kochysh lym* – “cat’s broth/catlike broth”. And all the time when they used this water, this favourite expression was repeated. For example, when children watered the cattle, they said “*zuä, zuä, kochysh lym zuämdy öy val dyr äy*” – “please, drink, you have never drunk cat’s broth before”. After cleaning the floors, another joke was spoken “*kochysh lymen mis’kem korka pishtysa kylle*” – “the floor cleaned by cat’s broth is shining”. While washing in the sauna, people felt squeamish about using the water even though it had been boiled. On frequent occasions, it was jokingly asked: “Will we not be covered by cat’s hair after washing ourselves with cat’s broth?”

But time passed, and the incident with the cat, and the jokes of cat’s broth, settled into the background. Life returned to normal. But nevertheless, before getting water from the well, everyone would peer attentively into the well, checking as to whether anything suspicious had appeared there. Unpleasant feelings of that case lingered, and haunted others.

Spring came, and in April everyone waited and prepared themselves for a very important event in the village – *Bydzyнал* – “the Great Day”, which is traditionally a significant day in the year². The main activities of the Great Day are carried out on a Sunday. But on Saturday, in the early evening, a dead dog was found floating in the water of the same well. This time, the appearance of the dead dog deeply disturbed and alarmed the members of these families. It was clear that the dead cat and this dead dog were connected. It was decided that the water should not be used for anything and the well would be emptied and cleaned. Almost at that moment a neighbour came to get some water and identified the dog as having belonged to his mother. It turned out that the dog had died the autumn before. The neighbour quickly went back

² Look in detail: Миннихметова Т. Г. *Календарные обряды закамских удмуртов*. Ижевск, 2000: 21–34; Миннихметова Т. *Традиционные обряды закамских удмуртов: Структура. Семантика. Фольклор*. Тарту, 2003: 83–153.

home without water. To get a more accurate explanation of the situation, he sent his wife. When she returned, they discussed the incident, and decided on what to do.

As it was decided by the well's owners that it was necessary the well be cleaned, this became most pressing problem for the next day. Near the well, some women discussed and confirmed the connection between the dead cat and dead dog. Usually a kind of word combination is used to explain frustration in relationships or among family members such as: "*pynyen kochysh kad' kuspazy teryäk med ulozy shuysa*" – "they get along together like a cat and a dog". The Udmurts believe that it is possible to get rid of curses by means of some expressions, therefore the women said these words to get rid of bad spirits.

In such cases, people can also say: "*kin ke zuri karem ke tae, as zyraz med luoz, aslyz med beryktis'koz*" – "if somebody purposely did this, let himself/herself suffer from this, let himself/herself get it back in return".

The next day, as was mentioned above, was a holy day, and it is well-known that in the morning small children go round the village and "bring *Bydzyal*" to every family. From each family they receive coloured eggs. At noon, relatives go to somebody's family for a ritual lunch, where usually they eat gruel and an offered goose. In general, this day is distinguished from others in the village by the visible activity of its inhabitants going from one house to another. In exact accordance with tradition, the grandmother of neighbours who used water from that well, and whose dog had been thrown into the well came to visit. Soon after finding out about the incident, she came to the place where the dead dog had been thrown after the well had been cleaned out earlier. When the old woman saw her dead dog she almost burst into tears. The grandmother told that someone must have found its grave and dug it out. It turned out that the autumn before a woman, upon finding out that the dog had died, asked the old woman where she had buried it. At first the old woman did not suspect anything and said where the dog's grave was. Her dog was like a family member. After this conversation, she suspected something bad and went to

see if the dog's grave was intact and whether it had been touched. She found that everything was fine. Time passed and she forgot her anxiety.

In the village everyone knows one another, and it is known, who is capable of what. The woman who had thrown the dog and cat into the well, was "famous" for unkind deeds. Although it was thought that she, as well as her relatives, were not witches by profession, or well-versed in witchcraft, nonetheless she frequently practiced "black deeds". For example, she would pour dirty water on the fresh footprints of someone who had just passed by her house. This meant that she had put a curse on the person who had just passed by. She would also face North and say a curse so that it would follow someone. She would mix some tainted food that had been contrived by an actual witch with a meal. For someone she had singled out, she would sprinkle dirt from a cemetery on a path that they would have to use. She mixed water that was used for washing the deceased with an alcoholic drink and would then serve it to someone she intended to harm, and etc. She was considered a spiteful woman, and she had never been married, nor did she have any children. In general, people thought she possessed many unpleasant characteristics.

As a result of the circumstances connected to the celebration of the Great Day, when villagers walk the streets and visit each other, the news of the incident regarding the cat and dog spread very quickly throughout the village. A representative of the local authority, a deputy of the rural Soviet, came to the well when he learned of the incident. He was an inhabitant of the same village, and an Udmurt by origin, but as a village teacher and a communist, he could not express his actual opinions aloud, such as whether or not he believed in miracles. He suggested that it would be possible, and would be in accord with the law, if a complaint were lodged against the woman for injury, even though he himself recognized what the real circumstances of this case were. But the well's owners thought that it unnecessary to resort to legal proceedings, as it would likely lead to other negative consequences. This wo-

man, with her numerous relatives, could undertake other bad things. In general, it was decided to let the gods judge her actions.

By the afternoon the well was cleaned out. It was only necessary to wait until the well filled up again with fresh water. After some time the well returned to normal. But still at first, they brought water from the same spring that had been used during the cat incident.

On the one hand, they felt that the Great Day had been sullied, on the other hand, everybody agreed that it was a good sign that the dead bodies had floated up before the holy day, otherwise they might have used "spoiled" water, although nobody really knew. This discovery of the dead dog before the Great Day was thought of as a saving act of the Gods, who did not allow the families to use spoiled water for religious purposes.

After the removal of the dog, no new jokes were made as had been done after the discovery of the cat. The users of the well realized the gravity of the case. It became clear that bad things could come from anywhere, and one never knows what to expect from others. This situation kept all of the families in psychological tension.

Meanwhile, the villagers gossiped about the case in more depth, while trying not to let it be known to the well's owners and their relatives too. The sympathy of some villagers lay with the victims. Nevertheless, new facts connected with this case gradually emerged, and it was widely acknowledged that this had not happened accidentally, but, on the contrary, had been a deliberate and intentional attempt by the old woman to bring harm.

Upon further discussion it was realized that the cat had been owned by the old woman who had asked about where the dog was buried. Her cat had died the autumn before. Judging from the descriptions of the cat, it was indeed the same one. This created an ideal situation for the performing of various "black deeds".

However, discussion of the problem did not end there. Besides examining the above questions, the villagers also speculated on the connection of the date and what time of the year is most suitable for the performing of a black deed. When could the dead cat and

dog have been thrown into the well? According to folk belief, the effect of witchcraft intensifies at certain times of the year. It is a widespread and common belief that phenomenon related to dark forces possess greater potential in the spring and autumn, and when it is dark. In addition to this, the effects of black deeds intensify during the period following the winter solstice, when the days become longer. But then a question arose: if those dead bodies were thrown into the well at that time, then where had the woman kept them for such a long time? If she had kept them in a warm place, the animals would rot. If she had frozen them, they would not sink in the water. These questions were discussed and argued among the people at length. A corpse of a recently deceased animal will first sink to the bottom, and it is only after some time, that they float to the surface of the water. The longer the water is frozen, the longer they are at the bottom. In this case, it was thought, the situation had occurred precisely as follows: the water was very cold in that well, and the incident had taken place during the winter. For these reasons it was deduced that the dead animals had to have been thrown to the well in the autumn.

Gradually life in these two families normalized, although everybody still lived in fear of undesirable consequences. In both families, relations between husband and wife were not good. Now the psychological stress increased. After the occurrence of this incident, changes in relations between the husbands and wives were not noticed. Later, both of the husbands, the old woman, and the grandmother died, all of them in a strange and unusual manner. However, the worst death was that of the old woman, who had thrown the cat and dog into the well. Early one morning, neighbours of the old woman noticed that the lights inside her house had not been turned off. They had not noticed any unknown people entering the house, or anything else unusual that would have indicated that something had occurred. The neighbours contacted the old woman's relatives in the village so that they would go and check on the old woman.

The relatives and neighbours went inside the house, which was locked, and found the old woman completely covered in mud lying

behind the oven. They quickly found that she was still alive, and cleaned her body. When they washed her, they saw that she had bruises all over her body. They wrapped the old woman in a blanket, took the corners of it, and moved the blanket in such a way that would warm her. She tried to say something, but couldn't, and gave a loud final breath. She was set on the ground, and the relatives and neighbours knew that she had died.

From this, four things remained unexplained. First, if someone had put the woman behind the oven, then the doors and windows could not have been locked from the inside. Second, the house was free of mud, except for the old woman. Thirdly, it was not known from where she had received the bruises. The last thing had to do with footprints, of which none were found in the house.

After her death, many people remembered her bad deeds and sinister dealings, including those involving the carcasses in the well. The case of the cat and the dog in the well has not been forgotten. Nowadays, very seldom, water from that well is called *pyny lym* – “dog’s broth”, or *pynyen kochysh lym* – “dog’s and cat’s broth”. Sometimes unpleasant days of April 1985 recur in memory.

The “characters” of our examined case – a cat and a dog – are kept on almost in every farmstead in this Udmurt village and it is no secret that for the most part they hate one another. Therefore, if somebody wants to characterize the relationship between two people as being negative, he says *pynyen kochysh kad'* – “as a dog with a cat”. The people explain it as such: if a cat and a dog inhabit the same farmstead and are fed from the same hands, but do not get along, or even cannot stand one another, the relationship between them never changes. It is thought that if a wife occupies a significant position in the family, the cat will not be afraid of the dog, or the opposite – the dog isn't afraid of the cat. Therefore, using both a cat and a dog for witchcraft is considered efficacious.

In witchcraft the practice of using the hair of a cat and a dog, or the mixing of food from a dog's bowl and cat's bowl, or the use of their excrement, is common. These are especially useful when one wishes to destroy the relationship between a wife and a

husband. It is also important to employ precautionary measures against "black deeds" during wedding ceremonies.

Why would a witch use a well for such purposes? A well contains standing water and as such is very conducive for "black deeds".

Although witchcraft is condemned by people, it nevertheless remains, and its practices have thus far been retained.

The Heritage of Estonian Folk Singer Kadri Kukk from Karksi Parish in the light of Feminist Research: the Ache and Authority of One's Gender.

Questions and not only Answers. Feminist Folklore Research and the Interviews Conducted by Folklorists with Kadri Kukk from the Point of View of an "Armchair Scientist"

Kristiina Ehin

*I still haven't visited Kadri Kukk
Who sings "Mother, dear mom, I lay blame on thee..."
Before it's too late*

(Jaan Kaplinski)

Kadri Kukk (1893–1976), the famous runo-singer from Karksi parish, is a remarkable folk singer, especially so considering the fact that information about her goes beyond the lyrics of her songs. We know some of her life-story, how she learned her songs and what the context of usage of those songs was.¹ We can listen to recordings of her voice, see pictures of her and there is even a fragment of film of her made several decades ago. But who mediates the heritage of Kadri Kukk to us?

¹ See Särg 1996: 161–170.

The interviews with Kadri Kukk carry the spirit of an age, signify an era in Estonian folkloristics and manage to carry out the tasks of their contemporary paradigm. The great merit of folkloristics from that age was that singers such as Kadri Kukk were found, their valuable heritage recognised, systematically recorded and written down. This work was done by Lilia Briedis, Regina Praakli, Herbert Tampere, Helgi Sirmais, Vaike Rööp, Ingrid Rüütel and Kristi Salve (Särg 2000: 36). The quote from Jaan Kaplinski at the beginning of this article could be corrected, by saying that the folklorists did visit Kadri Kukk before it was “too late”. Although making a good contact with the informant was considered very important for folkloristics in the Soviet era, the questions remained reserved and official. The third print of “Fieldwork in Folkloristics” issued in 1984 (first and second printing 1963 and 1969) stresses: “Collecting folklore is scientific work. It requires knowledge of what and how to collect, whom to choose for a subject of study, what to ask the person and what to write down...” /---/ “The collector must discover each song’s origin (from whom or where it originates), function (in what cases was it sung, was it directly related to a specific activity or tradition and if so, in what way?) and the synchronic side (how it has been performed – alone or in chorus, is it accompanied by choreography or a game and if so, which one?)” (Kolk & Laugaste 1984: 3–4, 25–26).

Questions regarding the context of those songs have undoubtedly provided us with valuable information; however, from the point of view of today’s researcher it seems odd that the whole variety of questions of the fieldwork guide concerning runo-songs are in the past tense and do not address the singer herself or the singer’s own attitude towards the songs (Ibid: 36–52). Interest is aimed only toward the so-called ideal runo-song era and the imperative is to write down every tiny memory, “...even the negative answers given should be registered” (Ibid: 26).

Kadri Kukk’s interviewers tended to follow these instructions well: where did you learn this song? From whom? Do you remember more? Where was it sung? Was there any repetition of the

lines? etc. Kadri Kukk's answers tend to be wearily laconic. It seems that she was perhaps more interested in more personal associations. But the 'personal' is a border that the inquirer's questions do not cross. The dialogue usually stops in the middle. Another song is taken up and the official *whose, if* and *where* questions start once again. It seems that the singer was relatively open to sharing her life-experience and ready for more personal questions as well. But asking about personal attitudes towards the songs must have been inappropriate, although there is an interesting paradox – when it comes to the topics of folk medicine, the collecting canon founded by “Fieldwork in Folkloristics” allows and even encourages the asking of questions that concern women's health disorders such as: “...bloodflow from female genitals; the anomalies and diseases of female outer genitals; the inversion of nipples; lack of or underdevelopment of the mammary gland; lack of mother's milk”, etc. Men's health disorders are not of interest. However, pregnancy and childbirth are listed among “diseases” (Ibid: 83). I envy neither the folklorists who had to resolve this paradox while doing their fieldwork nor the female informants, to whom these “personal” questions were placed (although in reality this probably did not happen very often).

According to the scientific practice of these times, questions such as: What does this song mean to you? How do you understand this or that part of the song? What does “men's authority” mean? What does “he was a good husband” mean? Couldn't husbands look after the children at all? were not posed. There is nobody that a contemporary researcher can ask these questions of today. However, it is still possible to retrieve interesting and substantial information. Today, I would also like to ask Kadri Kukk questions such as how many songs she has created herself and whether she added verses of her own. And how did she choose the melodies? Of course it is easy for me to make these proposals as an armchair

researcher², decades after the paradigm of folkloristics have gone through some changes.³

I am far from condemning the folklorists who interviewed Kadri Kukk – I believe they did their work with great dedication and accuracy. Sometimes one can sense moving cordiality as is the case with Lilia Briedis' and Regina Praakli's fieldwork diaries. The questions of Kristi Salve, Ingrid Rüütel and Herbert Tampere reflect a deep interest and thorough preparation. From the perspective of my research, it is excellent that Kadri Kukk turned out to be a person who also spoke of things she was not asked about. Taive Särg has written: "On the basis of the conversations and songs on the recordings, one could say that Kadri Kukk is almost naively sincere" (Särg 2000: 36). Luckily, this sincerity was considered important enough to be recorded and written down. Its absence would render my work impossible.

Thus, the picture of the folk-singer that reaches me is inevitably mediated and produced by an objectivist-positivist paradigm in folkloristics. This paradigm was not concerned with any personal connections or associations that the singer might have with the songs, and rather sought out the traces of collective creation. I, however, interpret the songs sung by Kadri Kukk as "her own", even though there are multiple variants of these songs in Karksi parish, as well as other parts of Estonia, and in neighbouring countries too. How to justify such an approach? Kadri Kukk is a marginal runo-singer, because she remembered and used many songs in her own way even after the runo-song tradition had become extinct. All her songs were collected in the 1960s and 1970s, when the village-based rural society had lost its traditions, different

² I use the term 'armchair researcher' to characterize myself in a humorous sense. Writing this, I am not sitting in a comfortable armchair and am not alien to the "pains and pleasures" of fieldwork. I used material collected by others only for the reason that there are no more archaic runo-singers in today's mainland Estonia. I did come upon runo-songs in Karula National Park in 2002, but these were just occasional fragments.

³ On the problem of the existence of specific fieldwork methods in ethnology see Leete 2001.

songs were in fashion and the runo-song was of value only to folklorists. Thus the fact that Kadri, in such solitude, saw these songs as worth remembering, makes them relevant also from her personal point of view, hence they can be regarded as the songs of Kadri Kukk. Considering her background, as well as the context in which she performed, it becomes important to look for personal connections to the songs in addition to collective meanings. This approach is relevant especially when considering that this study interprets her personal comments connected to the songs.

In the present study I experiment with runo-song interpretation via a few theories and concepts that originated from feminist research. My theoretical framework is based on the oppression scheme (Michèle Barrett, first wave of feminism), the concept of the gender contract (Yvonne Hirdman, second wave feminism) and the theory of nomadic subject (Rosi Braidotti, third wave feminism).

The most important theoretical foundation of feminism is the concept of gender as a social construct, resulting in conscious criticism and avoidance of essentialism as well as gender-blindness. The Finnish folklorist Aili Nenola has stressed the fact that folklore material is thoroughly gendered (1986; 1993; 1998). Folklore undoubtedly reflects the gender systems the disregard of which can influence the results of research. The critical "perception" of gender systems should belong to the mainstream paradigm of folkloristics. Folklore studies and folklore have their own particular and important role in the research and understanding of the multiple causes and conditions of these constructions (Stark-Arola 1998: 16–22). The presence of social and historical-cultural constructedness does not imply an illusory nature of human experience – in folklore in particular, "what feels real" becomes manifest. Folklore research contributes to the understanding of how genders function in an actual gender system; women's studies help deconstruct the positivistic belief in the existence of positivist-objectivist truth in folkloristics. By making gender manifest, we can more accurately study socio-economic systems and how power-hierarchies function in terms of the complex aspects of gender, class, race and politics (Mills 1993: 184–186).

Men's authority and women's authority. Runo-song as a gender contract

There is a part of a recording in the archive that became for me a key to understanding Kadri Kukk's songs from the gender perspective. Kadri comments on a certain runo-song that is about the practice of drowning newborn daughters. She terms the era when this was done "the time of men's authority":

Kadri Kukk: This song is also about that, the way it used to be in the old days, well, more like the time of men's authority or I don't know how to say...
(RKM Mgn II 0391-b)

Proceeding from her words, I researched whether, and how much, "women's authority" is reflected in the runo-songs sung by Kadri Kukk. Though not often, I nevertheless had begun taking notice of it as well. As my goal in gender-specific analysis of runo-songs, is interpretation, understanding, and not just description, it seemed appropriate to view Kadri Kukk's songs as being part of a continuous and complex process that looks for counter-effect and balance between "men's authority" and "women's authority". The key concept leading to this approach came from the gender contract theory of the Swedish feminist historian Yvonne Hirdman.⁴

According to Hirdman, the gender contract (*genuskontrakt*) is a concept used for researching the continuity of the gender system. It means that the parties of the contract have already decided/agreed on certain views about the possibilities of act/scope, no matter how general or specific these may be:

⁴ Tiiu Jaago has implicitly used a similar concept when interpreting *Toomalaul*, and talks about a contract between the woman and the man, according to which the woman has the obligation to subordinate herself to the man's will, even though she knows she is walking to her death. The man is wrong and the woman dies (Jaago 2000: 222).

“...how men/man and women/woman act together: at work (which instruments belong to whom), in love (who seduces whom), in language (how should one express oneself, what vocabulary is allowed), the looks (what kind of dresses etc are allowed) (Hirdman cit. Liljeström 2003: 125).

In Hirdman's model, the gender contract is 'written' by the contractor who enacts the power to define the other contractor. The gender contract is the driving force behind the gender system. Gender contracts help deepen the beliefs that produce and retain the supremacy of masculine power as well as understand how it has been tolerated in different eras. First and foremost, the gender contract is an oral, silent, unwritten agreement (Liljeström 2003: 126, Stark-Arola 1998: 18).

Hirdman later elaborated on the concept by reflecting upon the three levels of this invisible, culturally inherited relation. The first level is an abstract level that contains the archetypal mythological, religious and scientific beliefs of Man and Woman in different societies. The next and more specific level includes the fields of work, politics and culture where the self-evident stereotypes of the gendered society become manifest. The third is the personal level where the gender contract of the actual two partners is acted out, and becomes valid (Liljeström 2003: 125–126).

Looking at the developments of Swedish society in the 20th century, Hirdman has explained how the gender contract has been adjusted. She calls the gender contract of the 1930s–1960s “the housewife contract”. The one valid in 1965–1980 was the gender equality contract, and from 1975/1980 on, the gender contract approaches genders from an equal value perspective.

As mentioned before, the gender contract is drawn up by the contractor who has the power of defining the other contractor. But the contract also includes a zone of conflict that Hirdman calls the grey zone. Developing Hirdman's concept further and adjusting it to runo-song research, I would then differentiate the gradations

between the black and white zones without necessarily using a value judgement (e.g. black – bad, white – good) for those metaphorical concepts. However, it is difficult to deny that when applying feminist methods a value judgement is introduced. My reason for using colour metaphors is mainly practical. Mixing black and white results in different tones of grey. Grey can also be mixed with other primary colours, which can metaphorically refer to the complex social, cultural and political aspects in the conflicts engendered by the gender contract.

The black zone could refer to that part of the gender contract that represents the hierarchical gender system that is ‘self-evident’, and where conflict is not manifest. Among folk-songs, those that deal with work could be a good example. As people of today we can see, in retrospect, conflict in the black zone, but in the context of that era, it was not thematised. In Kadri Kukk’s heritage, songs reflecting the black zone were not my direct object of interest.

In contrast to the black zone, **the white zone** is a true contract from the feminist perspective. The gender conflicts are settled here on the basis of equality and the solutions provided do not oppress either side. The contract is actualised instead of remaining just rhetoric.⁵ The distribution of roles in the white zone takes into account a particular person, not a gender. In other words: choices are made by an independent subject, not a ‘woman’ or a ‘man’ who have been subjugated by predetermined gender roles. It is rather hard, if not impossible, to find examples of the white zone in the runo-song.

My primary goal is to show how the **grey zone** is expressed in selected songs and the personal comments of Kadri Kukk. Metaphorically speaking, the grey zone lies between the black and white zone and it is here that conflict shows itself, and resolution is sought. The parties in the conflict are the previously mentioned men’s and women’s authority. On the basis of runo-song material,

⁵ See for example Katriina Honkanen’s (2003) discussion about the gap between rhetoric and reality in contemporary Finnish society in terms of the equivalence of the genders.

it seems appropriate to divide the grey zone into **dark grey** and **light grey zones**, in order to demonstrate more accurately the dynamics of the gender contract, which seems to move towards a contract that encompasses more and more of the white zone, i.e. the contract based on the equivalence of the sexes.

In the **dark grey zone**, conflict will appear, but the questionable nature of the gender system is not seen in it and it rather becomes used for the reinforcement of the gender system itself, with the conflict then reduced to a utopia or simply a catharsis of psychological tensions (i.e. ritual revolt, for example, the wedding songs and bridal laments in runo-song tradition). Several songs and memories of Kadri Kukk reflect bits of this kind of conflict but are quickly suppressed. These will be analysed in the second chapter.

In the **light grey zone**, the conflict is not settled by a distinct resolution and is not reducible to a simple catharsis of psychological tensions. The conflict sustains and thus undermines the gender system as is apparent in runo-songs such as *Maiden Sold*, *Golden Woman*, *Bold Kiss*, *Maiden's Town*. There are actually few examples of this zone in Kadri Kukk's repertoire, but these few will be discussed later on.

Symbolic-material oppression

This chapter discusses the aspects of Kadri Kukk's story that cause anguish for me as a human being. This anguish could be related to a sense of "oppression", the term itself belongs mainly to the rhetoric of the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, but still highlights the power relations that divide, discriminate, subjugate and exploit human beings on the basis of sex, sexuality, class or race (Koivunen 2003: 35–36). Although problems of oppression have been raised mostly by first wave feminism, contemporary women's studies keeps returning to the concept as well. And in Estonia, as oppression is not yet an out-of-date topic and, as feminism and

Estonian folkloristics have only recently become acquainted, discussion of the issue of oppression is justified.

Oppression is a quite pretentious concept and it encompasses very different notions of subjugation of women. These do not exclude one another, but rather express the complicated nature of the questions of domination and oppression, power structures and the differences between different aspects of oppression of different women in different circumstances (Koivunen 2003: 68–69). Although Kadri Kukk could well have been my grandmother, whole eras and different social conditions separate us from one another. We are classified into the same nationality, race and sex, but it is inevitable that I view her from the position of a “civilised, educated and emancipated inhabitant of town”. Perhaps that is one of the reasons that it was so hard, in the beginning, to comprehend that the anguishing topics of Kadri Kukk’s songs are not only the result of the fact that the hero of those songs is usually a woman, but also her often being the subjugated one. It is important to stress that Kadri Kukk was of lower socioeconomic status. As a member of a cottager family she worked as a servant. By virtue of her birth, she was not to become the landlord’s daughter, but a female servant instead. She speaks of how, until the end of her life, she will be grateful to the farmwife at the Muriku farm for being exacting and even harsh, because, when working later on other farms, the masters were always content with her. One housewife even told her that she had never seen such a maid who never talked back to her mistress (RKM Mgn II-0383-d). It should also be noted that Kadri Kukk did not really conform to a mainstream political ideology either. She was rather a dissident, who was against joining the collective farm and the mother of sons who served in the German army during the Second World War (Särg 2000: 42–43). Obviously she would not say anything regarding these issues to the folklorists during the Soviet era, nor would they appear in her songs. We do find songs in her repertoire regarding the feudal times, where the hero of the song is a non-German serf, “little slave”. It shouldn’t be forgotten that social and political oppression and subordination could have amplified gender oppression. The experiences of such a

“slave” could perhaps be compared with the experience of African-American women, not only oppressed as blacks but also as *black women* and women (Smith, cit. Kosonen 2003: 166).

Oppression in Kadri Kukk’s songs does not refer to simple physical violence. The power hierarchies reflected there belong mainly to the symbolic sphere and can be understood as symptoms of symbolic oppression. However, the connections between the symbolic and material sphere are obvious, especially in the light of Kadri’s own commentaries. It is possible that from today’s perspective we can easily underestimate the significance of the symbolic sphere and separate the spheres in a too positivistic manner.

Michèle Barrett, a feminist researcher of Marxist background has highlighted four methods of oppression, or how the notions of gender are traditionally used, on the basis of the written culture. The first is **stereotyping**, which falls into two categories: the stereotyping of the essence of genders (e.g. that women are born to be gentle and caring); and the stereotyping of gender roles (a woman’s place is the kitchen). Stereotypes equip people with blinkers – reducing the range of sight and possibilities of action, but on the other hand give a sense of safety and support.

Compensation means that the followers of the traditional stereotypes have been promised ‘compensation’ or ‘prizes’ for conforming. This enables one to avoid discontent with the gender system as such. Example of this are Women’s Day, Teacher’s Day, Mother’s Day etc, which for a moment puts the otherwise subjugated group in a privileged position.

Collusion: the belief that women are guilty of their own subjugated position, the best known example is the biblical myth of Eve, who picked the forbidden fruit; her sisters must make up for her deeds with their suffering.

Recuperation: ignoring resistance to stereotypes, ridiculing and/or condemning all kinds of revolting difference (lively and courageous girl accused of being ‘like a boy’ etc) (Nenola 1986: 99–114)

According to Aili Nenola, Barrett’s model can be applied to the analysis of oral culture as well, despite its having been deve-

loped for the analysis of written culture. How much explanatory power can it demonstrate when applied to Kadri Kukk's heritage?

The self-denying heroine of Kadri Kukk's songs

Kadri Kukk does not remember the words of the puppet-game played during the St. George's Night very well. She remarked that in her entire life she took part in perhaps no more than two St. George's Night festivities. By the age of 21 she already had two children and her first husband had perished in the war. "Life was such then, that I did not want to be anywhere or go anywhere" (RKM, Mgn. II 2022 a). But the other young women of the village came and took her to a St. George's Night bonfire. Kadri soon remarried.

"My second husband didn't want me to go anywhere and the children were small, so I never could go. In such cases [When I wanted to go] he became so angry with me. He would go himself, but I could not. Well, someone had to stay home" (Ibid.).

It seems that there is a sense of guilt in Kadri's comments and responses concerning the puppet-play, or a need to justify why she does not know much about the singing-game that characterized the St. George's Night bonfires in Karksi parish. We are used to thinking: what self-realisation could a village-woman want? She probably was not even able to dream of it.⁶ And yet in her bitter comment we can see a dream too. She would have liked to take part in the village community events, perhaps not for the entertainment but to learn new songs. A young and talented Kadri probably had the prerequisites of becoming a recognised runo-singer like her

⁶ This kind of belief seems to be common even today. In her article "Why Women Do Not Create Great Art" Barbi Pilvre discusses the widespread opinion that it is more suitable for women to become muses than creators. A woman who leaves her family and sells all her property in order to realize herself is called "a raven-mother". Nobody calls the numerous male adventurers "raven fathers" (Pilvre 2002: 107-108).

foremothers had been. But she became Kadri Kukk, mother of 10 children, a modest farmwife of Saare farm no. 119, who gained her reputation as a singer decades later, and in a way that was probably unexpected for her – from the folklorists, not from the village community.⁷

In Barret's model this would be called stereotyping. Kadri executes the most common stereotype: she is a woman and thus has to stay at home. There was no reasonable alternative to this stereotype; it is only an illusory possibility that the one staying at home could have been the husband. The following of this pre-determined stereotype "helped" Kadri to raise 10 children, but restricted her possibilities of becoming a recognised singer. In some ways, this could be viewed as a black zone of the gender contract and it is we, the people of today's world, who are able to recognise the conflict.

In several of Kadri Kukk's songs, the older woman teaches the younger how to cope with life, how to put up with humiliation and injustice. A good example of this practice common to Karksi parish and also others is described in the following:

K. Kukk: At the time of the wedding, the bride was approached and was hit twice on the head with a man's underpants or whatever happened to be at hand, this way, and then they said: "Sleep without sleeping and eat without chewing, don't forget the husband's rags."

K. Salve: Who did the hitting then?

K. Kukk: Well, people from the husband's side of course, the husband's mother, saying: sleep without sleeping and eat without chewing, keep the husband's rags well in mind.

⁷ Taive Särg has claimed that it is debatable as to whether Kadri Kukk would have become a great runo-singer had the traditional village-based society endured. Her greatness in the eyes of folklorists lay in her family devotion and individualism, through which she remembered archaic runo-songs even when the canon had changed to contemporary folk songs (Särg 1996: 167).

RKM, Mgn. II 2411 k < S-Jaani, Viljandi raj., Sürgavere < Karksi – K-Salve < Kadri Kukk, 79. a (1973). Lit. E.Tampere, 1991.

Obviously this was a part of the wedding rite and was probably connected with the enhancement of fertility too. But let's look at the meaning of the saying. A rather great portent of change is manifest in that one short sentence – from now on, a young woman should be able to do two impossible things: to rest without sleeping and to eat without wasting time on chewing.⁸

From now on, a woman's main concern should not be herself and her own needs but to take care of her husband and fulfil his needs. From today's perspective, the symbolic act of hitting the bride's head with the husband's underwear is rather humiliating. It might mean that from now on, it is her duty to bow to her husband's needs, to surrender herself to men's authority. It is also symbolic that the act is performed by the husband's mother, who up to that point had been the only female to have taken care of him. Presuming that this act was humiliating for the woman of that era too, it could be asked: why does one woman humiliate another in such a way? Is the mother-in-law to be seen as a phallogocentric woman who teaches the social lesson to the younger one – that only a woman who denies her femininity, and defines herself through a man is able to manage.⁹

⁸ Of course, in the Estonian language, the saying (*uneta uni, mäleta mälu, pea mehekaltsad meeles*) can be interpreted in several ways. In my opinion the interpretation provided here is the most likely. Also possible are "forgetting [to] sleep" (*uneta – unohta*) and "remembering the memory".

⁹ Phallogocentric and gynocentric are terms used by feminist researchers to refer to the symbolic fields of meaning connected to the male and female genitals. The phallus has long been considered the cornerstone of patriarchal power and phallogocentrism, allowing women to be defined only through the lack of a phallus. Theories defining women and their reproductive organs positively have not yet been written (Honkanen 2003: 144–146).

Perhaps this might be a too quick and radical feminist interpretation, leaving little room for the ritual context and the origins of the act. The saying could have been complicated and archaic even for the brides and mother-in-laws of Kadri Kukk's time. It could be a remnant of an earlier and longer ritual that in its vague and mystic form served its purpose – subjugating the maiden to the present order. As we saw, Kadri Kukk herself does not make her own interpretation to the first part of the saying, and the folklorist does not ask about it either; it remains as sort of a riddle, or paradox.

One could call this ritual oppression. In Barrett's model this corresponds to two types of oppression. First is stereotyping: a married woman should be able to take care of the household even when it leaves her little time to take care of her own needs. Secondly, it is a collusion-type of oppression. The ritual makes the bride feel a kind of mythical guilt to which she has to conform and redeem herself by a hardworking life. The irrationality and incomprehensibility might make it even more effective. The performer is an older woman, already colluding. The necessity of the ritual shows that this is a zone of conflict and could be best classified as a dark grey zone: the conflict is suppressed through a ritual.

It would seem that keeping awake is a skill that a woman must master:

Sleep comes upon us,
 Where should we put our sleep,
 Frail sleepiness presses down [on us]
 Sleep into the forest to the wolf,
 Laziness on a wide stone,
 Frail sleepiness on Mare's road

K. Salve: When was this kind of song sung or...?

K. Kukk: Well, when sleep came or when someone nodded off while doing some kind of work, whether she was knitting or just dozing then they sang that, because sleep just comes upon us and frail sleepiness presses down. I heard this song

from my mother who probably sang it when she was about to fall asleep. Then she would sing it again because then it would make the sleepiness goes away. It's shameful, you cannot – sleep cannot overcome you. You shouldn't sleep. You must always be alert like this, be ready quickly and never fall asleep or nod off. Sometimes the knitting needle would even drop from your hand.

RKM, Mgn. II 2411 a < S-Jaani, Viljandi raj., Sürgavere < Karksi – K. Salve < Kadri Kukk, 79 a. (1973). Lit. E. Tampere 1991.

Falling asleep was associated with shame, and this kind of nodding off was considered humiliating for a woman. Once again we see sleep and humiliation connected with each other. The folklorist asks one more question:

K. Salve: But why this frail sleepiness, Mare's road and all that and what kind of...

K. Kukk: That's because my husband's mother's name was Maret, that's why. But later I thought that there is a Maret's Day in summer as well. Maret's Day is during the hay-making time, when it's dry then it's a good time for hay-making. But when it's rainy on that day then it will be wet for weeks and it is impossible to make hay. So I thought like this, but otherwise I just thought that I don't want to say that my mother was Maret. (Ibid.)

This answer given by the folk singer shows how much a singer can ponder the meanings of her song. Kadri offers us two possibilities of interpretation. It seems that she excludes the possibility that the Mare in the song is the Virgin Mary who in runo-songs is often asleep (e.g Mary sleeps in heaven). Both of her interpretations are associated with the woman's name Maret. For a runo song researcher, Maret is first and foremost associated with the song "Mareta's baby". That song was collected mainly in the north-central parts of Estonia and in those, Mareta's guilt lies in the fact

that she let Annus, a son of people of rank, sleep with her. This secret results in a baby being born, which Maret hides in the forest. It is found, however, and brought to the village. Both parents are ashamed and swear that the baby is not theirs. In spite of this, their parenthood is discovered (Erl II 1932: 110–131). Consequently, in this song as well, Maret is associated with sleeping and sleeping, respectively, with shame. “Frail sleepiness” is a word with sexual undertones, but a woman should be just as ashamed of normal sleep. Parallels tie them into an indivisible relationship.

Interestingly, in Kadri Kukk’s comment it appears that there is a connection between Maret and shame too. Kadri admits that it was hard for her to admit that the name of her husband’s mother was Maret. There have been no “Mareta’s Baby” songs collected in Karksi parish, though. Still, the association of Mare and “frail sleepiness” is shameful enough to make a woman ashamed of the name of her own mother-in-law.

In Barrett’s model, this is an example of stereotyping when a woman’s gender role seems to include the suppression of one’s own sexual desires. The space of being a subject narrows even more and is not far from total acquiescence, self-denial and emptiness (Lundgren, cit. Koivunen 2003: 104). The singer so skilfully intertwines the song with her own life (her mother-in-law) that it becomes difficult to distinguish between symbolic and material oppression. Again, the dark-grey zone of the gender contract becomes manifest, but it is still certain that the conflict itself is not completely hidden. However, it is expressed through feelings of shame and guilt, as the following example shows too.

In the runo song, women have the authority to lull people to sleep (numerous lullabies), as well as the responsibility to wake from sleep. To manage both, a woman needs to be awake herself. The next song to be discussed speaks of such a lesson¹⁰ that a mother gives her daughter before her own death, where the first thing mentioned is sleep:

¹⁰ About traditional ‘teaching words’ see also Grigori Kaljuvee 1960 “Teaching Diligence to Children in the Estonian Folk Tradition”.

/.../

Don't you listen to the rooster
Rooster's sing when they want,
Sometimes early, sometimes late,
Sometimes before dawn.
When you open your eyes, get up,
When you hear something, get up.
The moon is over the house already
The dawn is over the outbuilding already,
The Pleiads are in the edge of the south sky
RKM II 95 437/560 (25).

According to this runo song, a woman is to keep herself awake as much as she can, doing hard work all day long in addition to cutting short the necessary night rest. Two other lessons follow. One stresses that apart from such renunciation, a woman should also cultivate her looks, which in this particular song seem to be equated with keeping oneself clean. The mother reminds her daughter that a poor girl has to keep her clothes clean and if she cannot manage to do that, she needs to make use of the time when others are sleeping – in “the sparkle of dawn” and “moonlight”. But the song ends with an admonition not to demean herself. She shouldn't make the slave's bed or wash the pillows of the hind, because the “slave invites into bed” and the hind “to sleep between the pillows”.¹¹

The girl will be deceived soon. Such an end again associates normal sleep with the word “sleeping” which has a sexual undertone. Shame is added to make it a whole that is hard to take apart.

¹¹ The fact that the song talks about a slave and a hind should not be considered as too significant. In another of Kadri Kukk's songs, the mother and father warn their daughter about people of rank, saying:

Once the noble people of rank will deceive you
Grey coats will mock you,
Long shirts will humiliate you.

RKM II 95 437/560, (37)

In those songs, sleep is often connected with “frail sleepiness” and, in several other songs, with the “lazy whore”. These “self-evident” connections create hidden associations with sleep and shame. A so-called pure sleep without such associations rarely occurs in Kadri Kukk’s songs. The saying “Sleep without sleeping and eat without chewing” and the rituals that accompanied it make a good summary of such asceticism. The songs never accuse men of sleeping too much. The distinction in its feminine irrationality makes it the woman’s duty to take care of her husband, even when it means lack of sleep and little well-being for herself.

In general, one could compare this aspect in Kadri Kukk’s songs with the postulated “archaic tasks” of men to protect the family, give healthy offspring and work towards self-realization, while those of women would have been to give birth to and provide care for their children, and love their husband (Annuk 1999: 17). A runo song should be the most archaic source in which these tasks should then manifest itself. However, none of the songs stress the importance of giving birth to children, and the emphasis is rather on the ways to avoid pregnancy. As to taking care of children, Kadri Kukk’s songs give contradictory attitudes (e.g. “Daughter into the Water”). Last but not least, there are no references to love in her songs, unless “remembering the husband’s rags” is an especially “archaic” synonym for love. And the “archaic” nature of a woman, who is ashamed of her sexual desires and the need to sleep and eat, is questionable.

Heroic mother, absent father and the superman Lenin

The song about drowning the daughters is one of the longest runo songs collected from Kadri Kukk. Taking a look on the synonyms used for “daughter” we find terms like “little slave”, “wrecker”, “culprit”, and “field’s child”. In the song, the daughter herself says how to recognise a baby girl:

You felt me being born into your lap
Carried me on your arms
Recognised the slave sign on my forehead
Sign of deserts on my face
Scars of toil on my arms
Then you should have taken me to the water
Thrown me into the Mother River
Taken me to the Blue water
Carried me to the village well.
(RKM II 95 98/169, 5)

In poetic language, it is the scars of toil, signs of a slave and signs of deserts that form a baby girl into a creature who deserves to be drowned. Refracted through Barrett's model, this can be seen as an example of essentialist stereotyping. A girl is marked by birth, although the mark is a distinguishing feature in another sense too: it is the lower-class, "little slave" girl who has no right to life according to the rhetoric of the song. That she is referred to as "A culprit" seems to suggest that she is the mythical Eve's daughter, which is the reason her right to life is less than that of a boy. Mythological guilt belongs to the third kind of oppression in Barrett's model. Guilt is so stained in the daughter's skin that even when her mother has explained to her that she just could not throw her own flesh and blood, her warm and dear daughter into the cold water, the daughter keeps scolding her.

Daughter listened, and replied:
Mother, dear mom,
/.../
What worth was I to you
What did you get from taking care of me
Taking care, carrying,
Crying eyes, sad mind,
Tears from breastfeeding
Wet eyes from swathing
Cold hands from carrying.
(Ibid)

The guilt put on the mother seems inhuman – the one she has shown mercy upon, and gifted with life through hardship makes her feel guilty. The origins of conflict that are manifest in this dialogue of accusations, belongs to the dark-grey zone of the gender contract. The mother’s final comment is interesting:

Mother listened and replied:
 “Girl you little bird,
 What did the fire get from water,
 Ladle from the boiling pot,
 That’s what I got from you
 From taking care of you
 A support for those who don’t sense
 Help for those that do not walk
 Support for the windmill of the world
 Help for the tall trees of the shire.
 (Ibid)

The mother considers it right that although the child is guilty of being a girl, it is good for her to do all the women’s work when she grows up, as all the women before her have done. She has to take care of those who don’t walk any more (the elderly) and those who do not yet walk (babies). The stereotype of a woman as a caretaker, and the so-called pillar of the world, is put on her shoulders. In terms of the continuation of the human population it is of course inevitable that someone does this work, but should that “someone” inevitably be a woman? It is the myth of womanhood that is very common even today, and it is common to justify this myth with biological arguments. In “The Second Sex”, Simone de Beauvoir classified motherhood as oppression. Her case was further developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The home-centered culture and the tradition of admiring motherhood of the late 19th and 20th century helps to understand the reasons behind such a mentality, according to which even women’s sexuality was considered to be a passive drive for submission, and related to the “passion for motherly joy” (Lappalainen 2003: 215–216).

But what about fatherhood – can any traces of that be found in Kadri Kukk’s runo song? It seems that the value of fatherhood has appeared in our cultural environment only recently. In the following, I will take a look at some of Kadri Kukk’s songs and comments that reflect the characteristics of an ideal husband, if not an ideal father.

Kadri Kukk comments on the song “Marry a Black Man”:

K. Kukk: That’s how it goes. So, marry a black man. That was an old song. They used to sing this, it doesn’t really matter – one is good for this, but bad because of something else. But it was said more often that these black men, they keep things in better order. Who knows, who knows, there’s trouble either way.

(RKM, Mgn. II 2410 f < S-Jaani, Viljandi raj., Sürgavere < Karksi – K. Salve < Kadri Kukk, 79 a. (1973). Lit.: E. Tampere 1991.)

It seems that the song is a bit confusing and complicated in its ambivalence for Kadri Kukk as well. Some mythical black man, keeps better order and is tidier than other men:

Young maidens,
Marry a black man!
When a man is black, his mind is clever,
Man is black, builds a house,
His mind fixing the roofs
Concern fixing other buildings.
(RKM II 95, 437/560, 24)

The confusing and paradoxical lesson in this song somewhat reminds one of the saying analysed earlier “Sleep without sleeping, ...”, and I seriously doubt whether the previous generations of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws had a reasonable understanding of these lines. The image of a black man could have functioned

ned ritually as well and does not presuppose an applicability, in fact it could even be said that the image defies any practical application. The song does not ask honestly and directly what kind of husband we would want, or recommend a type to others, but the listener is confronted with a complex paradox about a black, but clean man, that in its ambivalence creates a feeling of significance and diverts attention away from the power hierarchies of the actual gender system, just as pain and fear turn a person's attention toward pain and fear, and away from the oppressive scheme causing it. According to Barrett's model, the mysterious black man would be a compensation, "a carrot" promised to those who agree to play along.

There is only one song where a mother tells her daughter about a caring and good husband – a character that does not lead to such confusion. The mother recommends that her daughter not marry a rich man, but rather a poor man instead. Why? Because the poor man will not beat his wife awake when he comes home from the tavern. There is no problem with a poor man visiting the tavern, because when he arrives home, he is peaceful as a dove and covers his wife with a furcoat, saying "Sleep, sleep young woman, you are exhausted from work!" (RKM II 95 437/560, 23). This is a rare example of a song where a woman is allowed to get a good night's sleep. This song teaches the value of a husband who takes notice of wife's toil and properly respects it. However, there is an ambivalence in this song too: why does the husband have to be poor? In any case, because of its warning and recommending function this song is more concrete about this particular issue, thus allowing more distinct application possibilities. The power relation reflected here makes it appear as if a woman can change things to her advantage if she makes an intelligent choice. However, such a female character is far from stepping out of the actual power scheme and the status of a subaltern.

Kadri Kukk claims that she has met Lenin, and moreover, according to her, their family even spent two weeks living with Lenin's family. That time in Kadri's life is not insignificant, but in her story it brings together several ideals of men, that Kadri

otherwise does not talk or sing about. (In 1913 Kadri lived in Tver province, Russia, together with her husband, first child and mother. On New Year's Eve their house burned down.)

Kadri Kukk: Yes, and then they gave us an apartment in that village. Yes, they gave us one apartment, and the family of that Lenin was staying there too where they gave us the apartment. For two weeks, until they fixed that other house which was unheated, and then, then there was ... but I didn't know that it was him... afterwards, when my husband went to war, he said that it was Lenin.

And then how he made us laugh... and his wife Tessa was there, and her children. We were all together in the same house in one room and wasn't it life and joy that I saw with him there! My husband was a big musician. But that Lenin did not drink alcohol. And my husband was a drinking man, but he did not drink much then either. And then he did there... took my son, he was then five months old, took the child and... then I was afraid – began to throw him up, almost flying. Into the air and then caught him and threw him up again (laughs). Until he threw him back into my lap.

H. Tampere: How far in Russia was it then?

K. Kukk: It was in the Tver province, 200 kilometres from Moscow. What else can I say, I did not speak much Russian... That is why I could not converse with him much... My husband spoke it. He was Russian. There was so much there, there were sort of two rooms and the other one was sort of like a kitchen. And I wanted to be in the first room – being in somebody else's apartment – how do you go to that back room. But he insisted! He said you will now go to sleep in the back room with your little child. His children were already older then. Then I said that no, I will not go, but my mother went. My mother went to that bed, had a good night sleep – my mother was also there – and then the next day he made me go to sleep in the bed there in the back room. But he was very decent in his family life, every day he left in the

morning and came back in the evening. Sometimes he wore a uniform, sometimes he did not wear it. And how he took care of his children. And that woman, Tessa, she was also very nice, a very nice person. I cannot believe there are such people among Russians. I don't know more about him so I cannot say more about him. Because I could not speak with him.

(RKM Mgn II-0393-g. Lit. K. Ehin)

Although she could not say more about Lenin, it is still the longest comment about any man that has been collected from Kadri Kukk. She is very laconic about her first husband saying only that he was a good husband. She says nothing directly about her second husband. The autobiography she gives includes one short sentence about him: "and then came Kukk". From the few hints she gives one might conclude that he might have had volatile traits that made Kadri's life hard. She would not say more about this.

If Kadri's account of Lenin were true, this would contradict the official biography, claiming that he was in Krakow, Poland at that time. It seems though, that in the light of her biography, this meeting with "Lenin" was very important, because it reflects both a young woman's imagination about an ideal husband and an old woman's memory of it. In time, the ideal has become fixed, possibly enhanced by the Soviet propaganda that romanticised Lenin. A well-known song about Lenin telling of how he would "take us children on his lap and stroke our hair" seems to carry the same stereotype of a godly head of state who would at the same time be an ideal father and friend of children. Lenin is depicted by Kadri Kukk as a superman who goes to work and earns money, but still finds time for his family and even for the children of others.¹² He is

¹² In the seminar paper by Anneli Aavastik "Woman's roles in the magazine "Estonian woman" from 1945-1950" it is shown that the father was missing from Soviet propaganda about childcare. The joy and happiness of being a mother were often emphasised, but contained no such words in regards to fathers. There were no "heroic father" medals available (Aavastik 2003: 31) and a mother's duty was to provide the state with right-minded subjects. Thus, the actual parents were the state and mother.

a man who can find happiness in life without the need for alcohol and whose family life is a great happy party where everyone takes care of each other. Lenin and his heavenly wife Tessa live in simple conditions, but are nevertheless hospitable and helpful towards people living in the neighborhood. From Kadri's description, one can almost picture an ideal man. He is hard-working, decent, faithful, does not drink, cares for his family, is hospitable, insists that Kadri and her baby sleep in his family bed. All this is not far from covering Kadri with a blanket and whispering: "Sleep, sleep, young woman, you are exhausted from work". Kadri's desire for such an ideal man is further reflected by the fact that the figure of Lenin in her narrative exists as if separately from the state and the deeds of the real Lenin. No doubt that Kadri, who suffered under the collective farming system, could easily have associated the great leader Lenin with all the hardships the Soviet system had caused to her, her family and her home village. She did not even want to do that. The "Lenin" whom Kadri met in 1913, exists outside the state and revolution. He is a superman, an ideal father of the family who stands somewhere between the crossroads of Soviet propaganda, the heights of runo song and Kadri's own life experience. It is good that the folklorists did not undermine Kadri's belief that she had met Lenin.

In this case, the conflict in the gender contract is shown by the fact that there is a lack of fatherhood – both in relation to the women and children. Implicitly, Kadri Kukk's idealised memories tell us, that a father is as necessary a condition in a nuclear family as a caring mother is. In the metaphorical color-model, there are already lighter colors of the gender contract visible here.

Songs manifesting "Women's authority"

The songs expressing the strength of one's gender are, for me, the most interesting of the repertoire of Kadri Kukk. Although they do lead to the question of whether the praise of one's gender is in a

way the same as humiliating one's gender – within both is the danger of defining oneself as “second”, “the other”, or a deviation from norm. Or was the village society based on the reproduction of this “secondariness”, and “otherness”, by the women themselves, as the lack such hierarchies would cause a collapse of the system?

In a way, using the concept of “women's authority” (*naiste voli*) presupposes a radical emphasis on the difference of one's gender. In her research, Laura Stark-Arola uses the concept of “women's might” (*väki*), and defines it as a dynamic force located in the female genitals. In Finnish folklore, it has both a positive and a negative meaning. Stark-Arola explains that the term should refer to mainly mythological, transcendental meanings, and when it is related to women's magic rituals (Stark-Arola 1998). Kadri Kukk's notion of “the time of men's authority” inspired me to phrase the concept “women's authority”, the meaning of which is not restricted only to the mythical, ritual and secret (from men). It has neither a direct relationship with the physical peculiarities of a female, nor does it stand for the power women had in reality. When speaking about the heritage of Kadri Kukk, the concept of “women's authority” stands for the femininity that is exposed in her songs. As it turns out, the positive and negative aspects of this are deeply intertwined.

The radical emphasis on the difference of one's gender differs from the humanist branch of feminism, which stresses that a woman is first and foremost a human being. It is interesting that in today's world we can choose between the humanist and antihumanist approach to the problem of gender difference (Rojola 2003). In a village-based society this kind of choice was probably not available. It was not possible to be equal with men by defining oneself as a human being. To feel equal, it was necessary to stress one's femininity, or “women's authority”, to find ways of praising oneself as a woman, to express one's “authority” and even draw attention to the superior side of one's gender. From today's perspective, it is interesting to follow, what exactly women considered superior, or worth praising in their gender. Of course, they did not praise femininity as such, but certain aspects of it.

By employing more feminist theoretical frameworks, the search for “women’s authority” could also mean looking for women’s subjectness. Subject is a concept we are used to seeing in the fields of linguistics, logic and philosophy, but a woman subject is hard to come upon. However, the history of feminist research can also be seen as an attempt to claim the women’s right to subjectness. The origins of this notion lie in enlightenment thought, which has defined the subject as an autonomous individual, equipped with reason and consciousness, who is free to organise his or her own activities (Kosonen 2003: 179, 182, 201).

Feminists have emphasised that a subject need not be a sexless *human*, but it can also differ according to sex – both men and women are subjects. The enlightenment thought has laid the foundation of defining men as subjects, leading to further objectivisation, oppression and subjugating women into a secondary role. Today’s feminists have difficult problems to solve. In the post-modern discourse it is common to talk about the diffusion, and deconstruction of the subject, but on the other hand it is a felt need to help women out of the objectivising categories and prove their actual right to subjectivisation (Ibid.)

Obviously, there have been runo singers, whose repertoire includes more examples of “women’s authority” than that of Kadri Kukk. As previously mentioned, in Kadri’s songs, praising attitudes are intertwined with humiliation. Let’s take a look at a few more songs that stand out in the perspective of this study.

Many mats’s did i sleep with ... in favor of one’s gender?

The first song that I will analyse comprises two distinct parts, and though Kadri Kukk has sung it more than once, I will here use the first version, recorded by Lilia Briedis and Regina Praakli. According to Kadri Kukk, the song was sung when the field-workers became hungry. In the first half (see chapter two), the farmwife is

humiliated because she has not yet arrived with the food. Then there is a gap, as if to mark the lunch-break, followed by word that the food has been eaten, but the song itself has not yet been sung. Perhaps this can be taken to mean that the real song is only beginning. This hypothesis gains more ground, if we take notice of the fact that Kadri forgot or consciously left out the first part of the song (RKM, Mgn. II 2409 1).

What follows is rather stunning, considering the usual topics that Kadri Kukk sings about. One could even say that it is the only song in her repertoire that expresses “women’s authority” so directly and vigorously:

I will strike down Mats’ liver,
 Into the headland Peetre’s spleen,
 Into the fallow Jüri’s heart.
 Many Peeters I kept
 Many Mats’ did I sleep with
 Many Märts I played with
 Many Ants’ made love to –
 Yet healthy as a titmouse,
 Clean as a cagebird.
 (RKM II 95, 437/560, 35)

The connection between the two parts of the song is ambiguous. In the first part, the farmwife, who is late with food preparation, was called a lay whore, but the “women’s authority” manifested in the second half is, in comparison, of a completely other world. A woman here is in control – a strong and powerful female with the authority to take and leave men as she wills. She is a vigorous predator, a female Don Juan, antagonising the Christian morale, which sees virginity the ultimate value of a woman.¹³ This is in

¹³ Aili Nenola analyzes a Finnish song about Mary Magdalene (in Estonia known as “The Sufferings and Death of Jesus”). There Jesus tells Mary, who does not give him food, that he has seen her sleeping in her mother’s bed, and in the bed of her godfather and godfather’s son. Nenola

opposition to many Kadri Kukk's songs that idealise the life of a maiden. For example, in the following it is done by a grown-up woman:

Now I have grown up to be strong
Now I have grown up to be upright
Have started living in evil ways
Have sinned much in this world
Now they don't want me to heaven
Will not be taken to the white city.
(RKM Mgn II 0543 a)

This "work song" expresses a woman's sexual capacity, this time it is she who initiates sleeping, playing and making love. She is not an object, but an active subject. Contrary to the first half of the song, it seems that all that which makes a woman into a despised whore in real life, is now allowed.¹⁴

The song vigorously contradicts the belief that this kind of behavior would somehow cast aspersion on her or have a negative effect on her health. One does not have to be particularly intelligent in order to notice that in those rhymes, we can see the beginnings of the emancipated attitude of today's women – all that is allowed to men, should be allowed to women as well. However, a comparison with today's world seems superficial and even inappropriate.

stresses that in the song it is not the adult men who have sinned, but the woman, Mary, who was probably forced to do it. She becomes a victim of the misogynic patriarchal society, who must ask for forgiveness from Jesus (Nenola 1998: 272). About Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary and the stereotypes of sinful and pure, sexual and asexual women see Löfström 1998: 244.

¹⁴ See Balthazar Russow about the customs in his day at the 16th century: "And all those shameful creatures were not called whores, but everybody called them family madams and entertainers. The vice became so common, that many did not regard it a sin or a shame any more" (Russow 1993: 79).

A contemporary woman behaving like this would risk much less of her social respectability and physical security. The runo song's message seems revolutionary even today, especially coming from the discreet Kadri Kukk.

This leads to the question of whether the heroine of this song, as a subject, aspires to a position already taken by men? In the desire to free oneself from the status of an object, her attitude reinforces the subject-object relationship even more. The roles have changed, though. And doesn't such a man-eater in fact meet the expectations of the patriarchy as well? Some feminist researchers have asked whether women, in order to become subjects, turn into men first, because men are the foundation of the idea of a subject. In that case, a woman will in any case remain "non-subject", secondary (Kosonen 2003: 193) – even when she takes over the behavior models and attitudes of a male subject or tries to imitate them.

The singer's own comment would be of great help here. In 1973 she is asked to give comments to this song:

K. Salve: It was sung in the field then?

K. Kukk: It was sung, I don't know, where they sang it. I cannot tell you where they sang it, but I heard it from my mother and learned it by heart. Probably during work, I think, yes, it was at work, yes. Do you already have one like this?

(RKM, Mgn. II 2409 1)

The comment shows that the singer herself is not very certain about the song's context of usage. It is possible that in the time of Kadri Kukk's mother and grandmother, this song was a work song, but in earlier times it might well have been a longer song that was a part of women's rituals. There are examples of such ritual songs turning into work songs, such as: "gather, gather, little cream". This was generally known as a song that accompanied butter-making, but it is known that it was also used during the secret rites

of women, to initiate young married women who had given birth to their first child, and thus recognize them as adult women.

Of course, it is possible to see this as purely a work song. In addition to all other duties, work in the fields was yet another task for women, so the song was sung in order to gain strength. There is another song like that in Kadri's repertoire:

K. Kukk: while flax-pulling, they used to sing like this:

Kõrgemäe women they are smart,
Tindi women are strong,
Tauli women they are clever
Pilli women they are soft
Farmwives clever ones,
Housewives slim ones
Cottager's wives are half mad,
Townwomen outright whores.
(RKM II 95, 437/560, 49)

The song illustrates the social mentality behind this. It is not all women who should be praised while working in the field. Townwomen are especially insulted, as though the townwomen need to be mocked about how little strength they have.¹⁵ This creates a contrast between humiliation and praise. Kadri Kukk's songs seem to maintain a pattern in that women can be praised only if they are insulted at the same time, or just before or after. In other words, women's subjectness appears only in connection with oppression. Such contrast does not always have to be based on gender opposition, humiliation can well relate to social status too.

Kadri Kukk remembers a whole cycle of wedding songs, where the bride's relatives mock the groom's relatives, because they are poorer. The latter's reply is very gender-centered, emphasising their femininity:

¹⁵ About the opposing mentalities of farmwives and townwomen in a folk song see Ehin 2003: 166–167.

Quiet, quiet, relatives by marriage,

/.../

We are perfect aunts,

We are proud uncle's wives

We are able brother's wives

We are upright sisters,

We are rich godmothers.

(RKM II 95, 437/560, 6)

“Women’s authority” is validated in this song by the relatives on groom’s side, although twice it is done indirectly, by someone’s wives (the uncle’s and the brother’s wives). The previously discussed “Many Mats’s Did I Sleep With” frees women from the possibility of any humiliation, but in reality this kind of behaviour was not possible or desired by most village women. Yet it is somehow justified to sing about it, whether during some ancient rite, while working in the field, resting after eating, in solitude or in front of a microphone, as a favour to the folklorists. At the same time it is interesting that in Kadri Kukk’s repertoire this song remains a rather unique representative of the light grey of the gender contract, associated only with a few other fragmentary songs of women praising themselves.

**“I walk, walk, and also exist...”
the song’s heroine as “a nomadic subject”**

In the last song I analyse, “women’s authority” is complicated in several ways. Here, there is neither the radical praising of the female gender, nor the desire to reorganise the gender system, but there still is a manifestation of the will to establish oneself as a woman – to make room for oneself as a woman in this life.

I have come across this topic “Maiden’s town” often; it is especially widespread in the Setu area, but in comparison to all the others, the performance by Kadri Kukk remains unique for me. The

unusual refrain “penny-henny on the ground I walk, walk, and also exist” takes me along at a peaceful walking pace. Suddenly I am together with a girl who dares to walk her own path, find a place to live and even to “make it herself”, despite the fact that her family does not think very highly of her idea.

Father despised me, mother despised me,
Penny-henny on the ground walk, walk I also exist,
Father chased me away from his knee
Penny-henny...
Mother chased me away from her apron,
Brother chased me away from whisking
Sister chased me away from making a steam in the sauna
Aunt chased me away from bringing water,
Uncle chased me away from washing
Where should I be going,
Or should I poor disappear?
Went across father's meadow
Went across mother's meadow
Across brother's woolfield
Across sister's oatfield
I picked strawberries from the ground
Blackberries beside the road
Blueberries from the hill of sorrow
Raspberries from the side of the village
Started to make a house then
To build a place for living.
Made a town from blackberries,
A town wall from cloudberry
A town mound from raspberries
A fence from blueberries.
I put a moon for a chimney,
I put a dawn for windows,
Sun at the top for a roof.
(RKM II 95, 437/560, 13)

Of course, one could interpret the song as being escapist, a utopian dream of leaving reality and the oppressive system in order to create something truly of one's own and personal.¹⁶ A more interesting interpretation would be to see a similarity between the heroine of this song and the desire of Virginia Woolf to have a room of her own. But here I would analyse the song on the basis of Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic subject, which attempts to create a notion of subject that would include the women's original differences too. She is trying to merge the feminist approach of emphasizing the subjectness of women and the postmodern theory of the diffusion of subject. The concept is developed for the analysis of a contemporary postindustrial society that is in the process of constant change (Parente-Capková 2002: 44). Braidotti's "nomadic subject" signifies an individualist woman who follows her own advice, who does not need to belong to a women's movement in order to become realised but who can nevertheless effectively undermine conventions. She resists and, at least on a micro-level, changes conditions that are oppressive.¹⁷ Such a nomadic subject exercises critical thinking and will not take for granted the thinking- and behaviour models regulated by society (Kosonen 2003: 198). It suddenly appears that in this old runo song we meet something similar to what Braidotti has put forward – a nomadic subject, a woman wanderer who dares to live the odyssey of her life, to stand up against conventions (building her own town) and who possesses a critical consciousness (she does not despise or humiliate herself, even when everyone else does so, and is independent and does not rely on anyone else). The berries, plants and the celestial bodies the girl uses to build her own town could, metaphorically, refer to the micro-level that the subject is reorganising.

¹⁶ For example, see Kalkun 2003 about women's wish to escape from oppressive reality into a utopian dream.

¹⁷ In the history of feminism, there appears to have been a movement of three stages, from a collective and global view on women (Beauvoir) towards a single individual heroine (de Lauretis, Braidotti) (Kosonen 2003: 192–199).

There is more to this, and as though following Braidotti's rules, the town turns out to be popular and mighty. It is a true town full of life, despite its individualistic and peculiar origin:

Entering silk ships
Departing knife ships
More of those apple ships
Followed by scarf ships
Right next were hat ships
Rich nobles came by
Nobles from Riga every Friday,
Shopkeepers every midday
Asking, wanting to know,
What town is this supposed to be?
Is it a big salt town,
Or is it little knife town?
(RKM II 95, 437/560, 13)

The woman in Kadri Kukk's song has enough authority to contrast her town to the common towns, and it seems as if she emphasises the special and unique nature of her town:

This is not a big salt town,
And not a little knife town,
This is a maiden's place of living,
orphan's shelter.
Riga is a big salt room,
Võru is a little knife town,
Tallinn is a town for making locks,
Võnnu a town for making keys.
(Ibid)

What is stressed here is the femininity of the town: the heroine of the song creates an opposition between the known towns, where many live (Riga, Võru, Tallinn, Võnnu) and her town, where she is the only inhabitant – a maiden; an orphan; a nomadic subject. With

such enforcement of femininity, Kadri Kukk finished her performance for Herbert Tampere and Regiina Praakli in 1960. The light-grey zone of the gender contract is manifest here.

But the same year, she recorded a longer version of this song, and in that, it can be said, an idealised individualism emerges – the negative side of Braidotti’s theory. Braidotti’s theory has been criticised for its making a metaphor of power and for its being founded on the premises of interpreting every individual act as being a “nomadic gesture” which renders a collective feminist policy impossible (Kosonen 2003: 199). The maiden’s answer to the rich nobles can be viewed as just such a “nomadic gesture” – she refuses to define her town as a collective phenomenon and thereby emphasises too much her difference and uniqueness as a woman. Metaphorically speaking, she forgot who holds the real power: the towns built by men that actually produce salt, knives, keys and locks. In her mind, she turned power into a metaphor, but even in the reality of the song, this did not prevail. The Maiden’s town is pillaged and burned to the ground by the end of the song by the same people who considered her unworthy, made her leave and forced her to become a “nomad”. From today’s perspective, the tearing down of the maiden’s town could be compared to the impossibility of uniting the postmodern and feminist subject as Braidotti has attempted to do.

Mother came up and took the scarf
 Father came close and took the hat,
 Sister came in and she took the silk,
 Brother went out and he took the knife,
 Uncle came on and took the apples,
 Aunt took everything that was left.
 (Ibid)

There is no falling back on the scale of conflict in the gender contract, the injustice is not covered up but escalates instead. The vigorous, *I walk, walk...* echoes on, the wandering continues, and ... is there light ahead?

Conclusion

In the selected songs of Kadri Kukk, there is a constant conflict between women's authority and men's authority, in which, quite expectedly, it is the woman who is pushed into the oppressed status. The distinction made between black, dark grey, light grey and white zones in the gender contract seeks to emphasise woman's subjectness. The grey zone of the gender contract manifest in the runo songs speaks about the conflicts that cannot be denied or underestimated, especially today, in the light of the law of gender equality recently passed in the Estonian parliament.

On the other hand, there is no unified "woman's voice" in those songs that would express a certain message or compare a field of meaning that could be uniformly interpreted. There are indeed many different voices to be heard: that of a wife, daughter, maid, dissident, hermit, subaltern, rebel, etc. They signify the complex and complicated status of women, and add many nuances of meaning to Kadri Kukk's songs and thus enable us to look at the songs from not only the gender perspective.

What we see in her songs is at the same time very personal, related to that particular Karksi singer, and collective, general and thus in several aspects comparable to the heritage of other Estonian or foreign runo singers. In this regard, Kadri Kukk's heritage seems to be an appropriate source for such study, although it needs to be pointed out that looking at it through feminist theories was not an easy task, with all the delicate ideological problems stemming from the nature of the theory.

This feminist research adventure into Kadri Kukk's heritage looked at both her songs and some of her comments, using theoretical frameworks that have not yet been applied to Estonian folk song research. For me as a researcher of women's studies, it was a good opportunity to look more closely at feminist theories and in general, relate my research to it. Interestingly enough, it was possible to apply a few relatively new theoretical frameworks and concepts (Braidotti, Hirdman). This might provide good evidence

for showing the relevance of the runo song and the need for researching it today in the light of, for example, contemporary problems of gender equality. The difficult aspect of applying feminist theories is that no matter whether they belong to the first, second or third wave of feminism, they have been created with a socio-political goal to make explicit and then change the oppression schemes and power hierarchies. At the same time, this is what makes the theories vigorous and relevant for contemporary people. Why not also use this to make relevant the runo songs otherwise slipping deeper and deeper into the far corners of the archives?

And last but not least – by the end of this research exploration, I probably have not visited *Kadri Kukk*, as Jaan Kaplinski confessed in his poem at the beginning of this article, but I think that now I understand better, why she sang *mother, dear mom, I lay blame on thee* – I see in it, as in other songs that were analysed, the manifestation of the complex relationship between the ache, multiple oppression, authority and woman's subjectness.

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ARCHIVAL SOURCES

- RKM Collections of the Estonian State Literary Museum.
- RKM, Mgn Tape collections of the Estonian State Literary Museum.

Cultural Differences in Life-Story Narration¹

Merili Metsvahi

Introduction

Investigating life stories has recently become increasingly popular in various fields. Over the last few decades sociologists have partially abandoned positivistic methods and taken interest in life stories in an attempt to find answers to different macro-sociological questions (see Bertaux 1981). Scholars of oral history have looked at life stories first and foremost in order to analyze how historical events have been depicted in narratives (e.g. Niethammer 1980; Jaago 2001). My approach differs in that I strive to investigate the processes of the production of reality in life stories and the variation of these processes from culture to culture.

Folklorists have, thus far, not paid very much attention to how a person's life is conceptualized and how the expression of this conceptualization differs from culture to culture. In cases where the life and life story of the informant has been of interest to folkloristic research, the focus has been on certain aspects of repertoire and certain features of personality visible through the ways of narration (e.g. Ortutay 1940; Kaivola-Bregenhoj 1996) as well as the religious world-view of the informant (e.g. Pentikäinen 1987). Beginning in the 1970s, folkloristic material related to the informant's life has been placed into the genre of personal narrative

¹ The article is dedicated to the memory of Ksenia Mürsepp (18.01.1911–17.08.2004).

(Stahl 1977), which is considered to be the most meaningful genre for the narrator (Gwyndaf 1984: 219; Stahl 1989). However, the interest of folklorists in personal narrative has been limited to its adherence to cultural tradition (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989: 134) and has neither considered what the personal narrative might mean to the narrator nor how personal narratives vary from culture to culture.

The aim of the present article is to, first and foremost, pose questions. In order to do so, I will describe and analyze two examples from my own experience. The first example has been taken from the context of everyday life, when a woman who happened to sit next to me on an airplane spontaneously told me her life-story.

The second example comes from the context of folkloristic fieldwork and is based on my interviews with my primary informant Ksenia Määrsepp, whom I frequently visited and interviewed between February, 2001 and November, 2003.

Ludmilla's Story

The material that constitutes my first example does not exist in a recorded form. In addition to my fragmentary personal recollections of the episode, I have included entries from my travelogue that I made in the early morning of July 27, 2001 in the Vienna-Schwechat airport while waiting for my flight. I had just arrived from Melbourne, and was on the flight back to Europe when I happened to sit next to a 71-year old Slovenian woman named Ludmilla, who was carrying the ashes of her husband who had passed away three weeks earlier. Ludmilla was on her way to Slovenia, to bury her husband's remains in the native soil. She began telling her story at night when everyone around us was asleep. As I was also quite tired, I, at first, thought of how I would rather sleep than develop this conversation in English – a foreign language for us both. Initially, I probably did not leave the impression of being a very communicative person. Without further introduction, how-

ever, she set out to tell her life-story. The following extract has been taken from my travelogue:

“It was so good to listen to this old woman. In her native village there were no real teachers or an actual school (as it was a poor village) and so her grandfather, her father, and herself, were taught by the local priest. The priest’s cook taught handicrafts. In 1941, when she was 11 years old, she had to quit school. The communists killed her cousin as well as some other relatives. They had been taken to (...) a DP camp in Austria where they were told that they would be moved to Italy by train and from there to the USA, but were, in actuality, taken to a place where they were executed. Her father and her husband (when he was a boy) traded goods in Italy and smuggled various goods back to Slovenia. Their village was about 50 kilometers from Ljubljana, near the border of Italy and Austria. The mountains there are ravishingly beautiful. Next year Ludmilla will return home. She has five sisters and a brother still living there. The brother is a drunkard and a lot of trouble for his family. Her family must have a talent for making money. Well, what’s the point of suffering want in a poor village when there are such excellent possibilities for making money so close by? Ludmilla’s grandparents worked in an East German coal mine and her mother was born there. When they returned to Slovenia, the First World War had started and the money that they had gathered for four years lost all its value. Ludmilla worked in Austria with her husband, who worked in the construction industry. In 1969 they took a plane to Melbourne where they had some Slovenian friends. Of all the passengers on the plane they were the only ones who did not end up in the DP camp in Sydney. With the help of their friends they got past the authorities and found work in a local factory on their very first week in Australia.

For the first five weeks, Ludmilla’s husband worked without any days off. But they made a lot of money, took out a mortgage to buy a house, and went back to Slovenia for a holiday in 1971, and then again a couple of years later. First they wanted to stay for two years (in the beginning Ludmilla’s husband wanted to return after six weeks, but Ludmilla managed to convince him that it would not

be a good idea as they would have had to pay a huge sum of money then). After two years, however, the political situation in Slovenia had changed so much that their Slovenian relatives agreed it would be best for them to stay in Australia. Now she has lived over 30 years in this friendly multicultural country together with her canaries, a cat, two hens and two doves – but her husband had since died, and she now referred to her sisters in Slovenia as ‘my family’. A lovely story. In Australia they once went on a five-day holiday trip and had also quite recently been to Sydney. She had not been to Slovenia for over 15 years. A few of the place names that appeared on the screen in front of us were familiar to her, one from a romance that she had read in her youth, a place in India or near India, where their plane had made the first stopover in 1969. She knew of Lithuania and Estonia through her Australian friends. She also said that a week ago she thought she was going to die. She had probably gotten rid of most of her grief during her sickness that week. “You are [a] strong [person]”, I told her towards the beginning of our conversation. “Everyone says I’m strong, but I am not,” she answered. Perhaps she is just not aware of this. Women who follow their inner voice, who do not struggle against it, are strong.

She cried when she sold and gave away her canaries (a total of 35 in one spring). She told her cat the situation and asked him to guard the house well, saying she would return.”

The section of Ludmilla’s story where she talked about her cat truly touched my heart. When I thought about Ludmilla’s story, I realized once more, how exciting life was, how it brought me together with an old woman I had never met before, and who needed to tell her story to someone, and how lucky I was to be the person to whom she addressed it. Ludmilla was in the middle of a transition, her widowhood and separation from her longtime partner with whom she had shared various experiences, had just begun. Since Ludmilla could not be with her husband any more, her strongest communal attachments were with her sisters who were the closest surviving relatives. She planned to live with them. Preparations had already been started and she was to move back in

about six months' time. Ludmilla was certain of her decision to leave the place that for over thirty years had been the home of her and her husband. It was only when she told me about her canaries and cat that I realized that this was not an easy decision to make.

Robert A. Georges has said: "It is not a set of abstract 'cultural rules' that determines who tells what to whom and when, but rather the judgments made by individual beings" (1987: 120). As a researcher of culture, my focus is not the question of why the woman told me her story in that situation. I will continue with my next example so that I can compare the examples and then draw conclusions about phenomena, broader than the psychology of an individual person only.

Ksenia's Stories

In 2001 I visited an elderly Setu woman named Ksenia with my colleague Risto Järv. She was 90 years old at the time. Six years earlier she had moved from Petseri to Tartu to stay with her granddaughter Tatjana Kodas and her family. Ksenia was born in 1911 in Kuuakõstõ village near Pankjavitsa. After her husband's death in 1966 she moved to Petseri to stay with her daughter and lived there for almost thirty years. She took care of her daughter's children, including Tatjana, as her daughter Manni Gulova had to work. Ksenia moved to Tartu because of her declining health, and so that she could be taken care by someone should the need arise. Ksenia's daughter Manni lived in Petseri until 2000 and has since also moved to Tartu where she lives in a separate apartment with her husband.

During the period of February 8, 2001 to November 4, 2003 I conducted seven interviews with Ksenia, together with my colleagues. Ksenia was extremely talented linguistically, and I cannot think of anyone from my earlier fieldwork experience who would be her equal. Ksenia was always very eager to talk and all her interviews also contain sections where she focuses on her own life. At first Ksenia thought that she was expected to tell fairy tales. As

with every new interview the range of topics covered by our questions widened with time, and Ksenia started to feel more at ease and began developing topics more freely and to change from one subject to another according to how topics were related in her consciousness. For example, after finishing a legend concerning one saint, Ksenia continued to relate a personal narrative of how she herself was once helped by that saint. After telling about Easter customs, Ksenia started a story of how on one Easter morning she once saw God throw Easter eggs from the skies (a certain atmospheric phenomenon that occurs in the spring during clear weather at sunrise). As not all stories that Ksenia told were narratives of personal experience, they will not be touched upon here.

Narratives of personal experience contain many memories, as do stories that do not contain supernatural elements. As Ksenia had a fine sense of humor, she told many humorous stories. One story was about how Ksenia, at the age of 16, did not know how children were conceived. When she asked her mother how one girl from their village had become pregnant, her mother answered: “[The baby was] blown into her ass by the wind” (11.03.2001, MD-0104-17). After that Ksenia would fix her skirt between her legs with a pin when walking to keep the wind out (underwear was not used at that time). Historical events also come up but are of rarer occurrence. Once Ksenia told a story of how she wanted to rake together piles of hay that someone had scattered, but then it turned out that it had been soldiers who had scattered the hay as part of a military operation and she could very well have been shot (11.04.2001 MD-0105-24). Ksenia’s stories also include some episodes of her encounters with young German soldiers (11.03.2001, MD-0102-15).

It is noteworthy that the recorded material of more than 17 hours contains very few episodes concerning Ksenia’s husband. The most emotionally charged story concerning Ksenia’s married life is one that includes an old dream: “Well, I was dreaming. I put on ... such a dark gray ... dark gray coat and went somewhere across a field. And I kept the coat on. And it was less than a year before I was left without a husband. And a lot to worry about: two kids to bring up and take care of. But no husband. There was a coat

that was left as well, such a gray, dark gray [coat] down to my heels". As Ksenia did not wish to marry again, she remained a widow: "I didn't want to please others, I didn't marry, I didn't marry anyone – didn't want to! And so I took care [of my children alone] (11.04.2001, MD-0106-28).

The only story that features Ksenia and her husband as central characters is an episode from the past where Ksenia's husband asked her why she was doing such a lousy job mowing the hay and Ksenia, who was pregnant then, made a huge effort to mow better. As a result, the fetus was turned in a difficult position and Ksenia had a very hard delivery (11.05.2002, MD-0107-16). The story sheds some light on the fact that of Ksenia's six childbirths, five were very difficult. Four of her children died in infancy. Ksenia mentions several times that other women had more healthy babies who survived but never comments on this further. I remember thinking during one interview that Ksenia may relate such bad luck to witchcraft. I, however, could only infer this by 'reading between the lines', as Ksenia never mentioned it directly.

The stories of Ksenia's lives

I would now like to turn to the central issues of the current article: how Ksenia's narration was influenced by my request of her to tell about her life. Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, when conducting fieldwork in Ingria claimed that the most natural way to start an interview was by asking the informant to tell about his/her life. Taisto Raudalainen has told me how Ingrian Finnish women would talk about their life for hours without any need for the interviewer to interfere. It was due to such preparation that I was somewhat surprised by Ksenia's reaction. I had the impression that Ksenia had no need for a longer linear narrative of her life. Having started to narrate an episode of her life using first person singular narration, she would soon focus on the ethnographic context. Before continuing with a description of the interview situation on May 11, 2001 when I had planned to record Ksenia's life-story, I would like

to emphasize that Ksenia was always eager to provide thorough answers to all our questions and seldom asked specifying questions nor did she need preparation time to gather her thoughts. It was surprisingly quickly that Ksenia recalled knowledge and stories that provided answers to our questions.

I asked Ksenia to tell about her life during our fifth visit: "Talk about your life ... how it was from the beginning to the end ... well, not the end but until today." Ksenia was probably not expecting such a general question. As typical of her, she answered without a long pause, saying: "Everything from the beginning? First I was at a village. (Manni: we were herding cattle). This I remember well. Mother and father went to work in the fields and we stayed home with the older sister. That older sister, she was 7 years older than me. There was a bed and a cradle. And the younger child was in the cradle. I guess we were left home as baby-sitters. The baby cried every now and then. I sat there. I was – I'm not sure how old I was; when my father died I was seven years old, but father was still alive then. I was on the bed and the older sister was sitting on the edge of the bed, her feet were out and she rocked the cradle when the baby cried. Well, a lot of time went by and still no one came home. What happened to mother and father? The wolf has eaten them! And we started crying. I don't know for how long. And then I told to my older sister: "Klaara, let's not cry any more. Our tears have already gone sour." Well, this I remember. And when parents finally came, I don't remember – when they came home, I was so glad that they had not been eaten by a wolf" (11.05.2002, MD-0107-08). At the end of the story of personal reflection Ksenia explains that at that time children were afraid of wolves as parents warned children against wolves in order to keep them from running too far away from the house.

Ksenia then continued, using the first person singular voice: "When I grew a little bit, I went to school. [Everyone] went to school at that time, not just me but everyone who was ten years old. At that time they didn't take eight-year-olds. Some were ... knew how to read already, but was not done, [it was thought] that they had a child's mind, were stupid, didn't understand things. The

ten-year-olds, they can already understand. And can remember what there was [what they have read]". At that time there was no Estonian school in Pankjavitsa and all children went to the Russian school. After Christmas, the Setus were separated from the Russians and different classes were formed. The Setus got an Estonian teacher who used Estonian schoolbooks: "Well, we had to read in Estonian. The Setu people read like "üts, kats, kolq", but the Estonians said "üks, kaks, kolm". I don't know, there was one girl who wanted to read in Estonian, wanted to show off and she read like that: "üks, kaks, koks, niks, viks, säks..." (Ksenia chuckles). Ksenia mentioned that she went to school for two years: more education was not considered necessary. One had to know how to write and to have some handicraft skills. "I had those skills all right. I was good at handicrafts; I could use the loom, and knew how to knit and crochet and ..."

Doing handicrafts and preparing the bridal chest had an important role in the life of a Setu girl, and Ksenia considered it necessary to touch upon this topic in more detail: "This is how I was raised. I grew up and then I needed to make my bridal chest. Now this is no longer necessary but it was back then! Back then you had to already knit socks for the (future) husband and mittens too. And then you had to ... well, you couldn't buy things from the store at that time. No, you could buy things but nobody did it, everyone, no matter whether rich or poor, did everything themselves, they did handicrafts, spinning and knitting themselves. For shirts and pants, underpants. You already had to have these items in your bridal chest. The girl didn't have to make outdoor clothes for her groom. But underwear and bed sheets – these, you had to have. And these had to be made. Yes, and your were also taught to sing while doing needlework, to sing songs like:

Six fleas on one's side,
Seven fleas on one's back,
She could not get to sleep while lying,
Could not fall asleep while thinking big [thoughts]:
Sheets have not been made,
Blankets have not been woven. (Ksenia smiles.)

The life of young people was like this in the older days, in my youth. We all did handicrafts. Some had more means, some had less" (11.05.2002, MD-0107-08).

Ksenia continued with an example from the life of a girl from a wealthy family whose mother had passed away. "When the father told her daughter that she should marry, the girl said: "How will I marry when even rats die when they fall into my (bridal) chest?" The chest was still empty, and should a rat fall into it, it would therefore die," Ksenia explained. The turn in Ksenia's narrative toward more general cultural topics can here also be attributed to the fact that I asked her when the process of preparing the bridal chest would begin. This was my first question after I had asked Ksenia to tell about her life. Ksenia answered that it differed but usually the preparations were started for a girl of the age of Kristiina Kodas (Ksenia's great-granddaughter, born in 1989, present at the interview). For some girls, mothers started making preparations at a very early age and there was a saying about that: "The girl is knee high, the chest shoulder high" (11.05.2002, MD-0107-09).

Ksenia continued to present ethnographic data and described the customs: the preparations for the bridal chest had to be started first for the older daughters; when the young wife moved to the husband's homestead, she had to have yarn with her but not the needle; the mother-in-law was the female head of the homestead as long as she could manage the work; the son who lived with his mother was the richest of all brothers because the mother took her property with her; some men wanted their mothers to live with them, some didn't. Then Ksenia compared some of the contemporary customs with those of the older days and included a proverbial saying that she had heard from her mother's godmother. "Nowadays no one wants to live with his/her parents, neither the daughter, nor the son. Right? But back then people lived together, good or bad, until the ends of their lives. My godmother once said to me – she was my mother's godmother, she often called on us and so we called her godmother although she wasn't, for us – she said, "Children, learn to suffer. Sufferers are watched over by two. One has to suffer!" To my question "Who watches over?", Ksenia

provided an answer partially in regular Estonian: "Well, you have to suffer! And then two will see that you suffer. Who those two are, I don't know, whether they are both gods or both mortals, I don't know either. But this is how it was" (MD-0107-10).

Wishing to return to a chronological description of Ksenia's life, I asked her if she prepared her own bridal chest or whether her mother had prepared it for her. It turns out that Ksenia's mother had only managed to do a little. She had also wanted to leave her Setu costume to Ksenia, but like other girls in her village, Ksenia did not wear the costume. She only wore her Setu costume once when she went to a *kirmask* (Setu village feast) in Luhamaa with another Setu girl (MD-0107-11). Ksenia also participated in Russian *gulyanka* (Russian village feast) for several times as it was closer than the Setu *kirmask*. At *gulyanka* Ksenia sang Russian songs (MD-0107-12). Another folklorist, Mari Sarv, who was also interviewing Ksenia on this occasion, asked a question about how often the Setu costume was worn and Ksenia answered that her mother wore it all the time and there is even a photograph of her mother in Setu costume at Manni's place. In Ksenia's time, women started to wear 'Estonian costumes', but in the Väraska region, Setu costumes were worn for a longer time. In response to the next question asked by Mari Sarv, Ksenia described the Setu costumes and the materials that were used for making them. Festive clothes were very expensive. Then Ksenia continued with a story about how her mother's *tsäposkad* (a set of heavy silver necklaces particular to the Setu national costume) were stolen (MD-0107-12, MD-0107-13).

As I still wanted to hear Ksenia's life-story I asked: "Can you tell me more about your life?" Ksenia responded: "What else ...?" I inquired: "How did you get married?" Ksenia: "The marriage? Well, it happened like this. When I received the first proposal, I was still very young. Well, they came ... came to propose and said: "Hello, hello, *langu, langukesed-langukesed!*" But I did not know what the word '*langu*'² meant! I was already asleep and my

² Husband's relatives in Setu dialect.

brother was too. I don't know where my older sister was, I don't know. My father was not with us any more; he had passed away, a long time ago. Well, they said this: "Our young cow ran away, and the tracks pointed this direction. Our young cow ran away, the tracks were pointing this direction and we followed them." It was already fall. The earth was a bit frozen, well, like it is when it's cold – there was hoarfrost on the ground. And those tracks, well, they could not be seen so well. So I said: "This was not your cow!" How could it have been their cow when it had walked to us? But they had sheep and cows outside, and they were walking around.

My mother came and hit me over the head. I shut up then and realized I shouldn't speak like this. My mother came to me and said: "Come on!" And she brought me a dress and a scarf: "Put these better clothes on! Or else..." Then she woke my brother and said: "Go get uncle and his wife too!" Well, he went over to Targa to fetch them. And got them to come back here. I put on my clothes. But he [my brother] didn't know why he had to fetch them. He went there and said: "Come uncle and aunt, let's go to our place! People have come from Magoma to look for their young cow and yarn"³. First he said: "Yarn doesn't get stolen around here, but the Illonas got their yarn stolen all right."

But my uncle understood. He said: "I'm coming, I'm coming. We'll come, you go ahead!" The uncle later told us: Vassil, Vasso came over and said, let's go now..." (chuckles).

Well, my mother laid the table then. We sat at the table with the suitor, the bottle was opened and people started to drink. The first cup was for us, for the bride and her suitor. I had never even smelled vodka before. I had never drunken before. I thought: "No, it's so bitter!" But no, the bride had to drink up. The bride ... But the glass was a small one, such small one like a dram. In the older days they said that this is a dram on a stork's foot. Well, finally I drank it all /.../.

³ The word *languq* (husband's relatives) and *languq* ('lōngad', yarn) sound very similar in Setu dialect; that must have caused the confusion.

Then Sunday came. I don't know what day it was when they came to propose. I went for a walk in the village. My mother said to me: "Put on your good dress and wear this new white scarf as well – you are now a bride!" Well, a bride's a bride. I went to the village then. Everyone was sitting outside. I joined them. All the girls were sitting. I was thinking, just thinking by myself, I didn't say a word: "Well, I'm going to marry but you'll have to stay home because no one wants you!" I was sitting there and was very proud of myself.

I would even have married, but Hilivili had this ... they were stove-makers, building a new oven for their new house. And he said: "Don't [let your family] give [you in marriage]. Those are very envious people." He said that she [=Ksenia] could drown in manure in their cattle barn and no one would help her. When he was building the oven, he received nothing to eat except pancakes and fresh milk.

But my uncle who is such a wisecracker said: "Well, this is fine!" He said that they always threw hot pancakes with fresh milk on the table for him. And when he went to build the oven – the place was not very far from our village – he had breakfast at home and came home in the evening and ate there. Those people had six or seven milking cows but did not feed the oven-makers well. My uncle said to me that I shouldn't marry into that family. And I didn't know if I liked the man or ... Then my uncle Timmo's wife came over (I have five uncles) and asked: "Well, how're things? Do you plan to marry?" And I said: "I could try. If it's good, I'll stay there, but if I don't like it, I'll come back home." Yes, that's how it was...

"How did you decline the proposal then?" I asked Ksenia.

"Well, it was killed," said Ksenia and translated it into Estonian: "The proposal was declined."

Ksenia then continued her life story: "But the man I married, he was... My brother was in the army then. I was alone with my mother. My mother, well, she didn't want this [marriage], my brother also didn't want it. We had a small wedding, and got mar-

ried after all. Some people had a big wedding, some had a small wedding” (MD-0107-14).

“And what happened then, after the wedding?”, I asked. “After the wedding? What else – work! In the village there’s nothing else, when you get up in the morning, you start working. First, you milk the cows – that comes first, and then... then you go to work in the fields. Then there was the field. You had to plough, and to sow grain, all the time you had to... You spent very little in the house, all the time you had to work outside. Sometimes until it got dark. Now people live by the clock, they leave home at a certain time and return at a certain time, but back then – early in the morning, before sunrise you were already up and getting ready to work.

And in the evening you sometimes got back when it was already dark. Yes, that’s what work was like back then.

Once I came [home]. We had been gathering flax and there was lots of it. We were pulling flax and my husband was carrying it from the field to our farmstead. Then we hackled and piled them up. And it was raining. Everything was wet, not a dry spot on my body. And we worked in the rain.

I came home. The feet were all muddy. I was wearing *pastlad*⁴ (*tsuvva*), *jalarätid*⁵ and socks. What to do with all that muddy stuff? Well, my husband took off his footwear and I did as well. There was a little stream of water by our house, not a river, but a stream. And there was a little footbridge across it. I went to rinse the mud off my feet and rags (back then feet were wrapped in them). And there was another woman there – the stream was next to her house. She had heated the barn kiln, and the rye was being prepared for thrashing in the drying barn. She said: “I came to see who is splashing around here, is it a human being or a devil?” I said: “A human being, a human being.” “When do you folks sleep,” she asked. You leave early in the morning and in the evening as well, when everyone is already asleep you are still (Me: “You’re still working”). That’s how it was” (MD 0107-15).

⁴ A soft heelless shoe of leather worn by peasants.

⁵ A rag of cloth for wrapping around the foot instead of socks.

Ksenia then continued with the story (as was already mentioned before) of how she was mowing the hay when she was pregnant. Mari Sarv asked if the story was related to Ksenia's first child. Ksenia answered affirmatively and said that all her other deliveries were difficult as well, so that the doctor had to be present. To my question about the number of deliveries, Ksenia answered that she had had six deliveries but only two daughters survived, two sons and two daughters died. I commented that probably this is the way it was in the older days, with other people as well. Ksenia then took a moment to think and said she knew of one farm where seven children survived and only one died. She now continued and reflected on how people in the old days were generally in better health, and how much weaker they are nowadays. "That's why in the older days people were more robust: they were born and ... whoever had a defect or something like that... just died. Only those who were born strong remained." "Is that's why they lived so long?" I asked. "May be. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know," Ksenia responded, chuckling and returned from the more general question to her own life: "I have lived longer than anyone else in my family!" She compared her own advanced age with the lives of her relatives and said that her mother didn't live to a very old age, but her aunt, who died when she was 84, did (MD-0107-17).

"You have seen all kinds of times," I told Ksenia, trying to link her life and history. Ksenia now told me of how she had lived in the times of Mikolaaya, [Russian Tsar Nikolai II] of the "krasnyi's" [the time of the reds], the times of Estonian [independence], and the times of the Russian government [the Soviet time]. She spent a little more time talking about the time of Estonian independence when honest and diligent people had led a good life but thieves and drunkards had had a hard time. Ksenia said that in her native village as well as in the village of Pennovä, only good people had lived. She stated: "We didn't have anything to do with any government. /.../ Didn't tell on anybody." Those who had given other people away had always had hard time; when the Russians came, some people tried to give others away, when the Germans came, it

was the other way round. Neither the Germans, nor the Russians touched us. Well, the Russians started state farms and took everything away from the people. That was not so nice!" Ksenia described one episode when her daughters had gone to stand in line for bread in Pankjavitsa and had had to wait until evening for the bread truck. Although they had become hungry by that time, they had only taken a very small piece of bread from one loaf. (MD-0107-18; MD-0107-20)

This is where the part of the interview in which I managed to obtain a life story from Ksenia that corresponds to my expectations and is in accordance with my preliminary knowledge of the genre, concludes. "What else?" Ksenia asked. I now wanted to know about the more important holidays. My question demonstrated that due to my previous interview experience with Ksenia, I knew the topics that she always liked to talk about. Ksenia told me that the three biggest holidays were Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide and continued to describe them in a fluent manner, hence there was no need for me to ask any further questions. As holidays formed an inseparable part of Ksenia's identity, it was in some sense impossible to draw a strict line between holidays and Ksenia's life (see Metsvahi 2004). As the objective of the current article is a comparison between Ksenia's life story and a typical life story or autobiography characterized by Western individualism, I will limit my analysis to the narrative outlined above.

Autobiographies and life stories in culture

Life story is not a genre for which there exists one inclusive definition. Different cultures use different genres for the verbal mediation of one's life. Not all of these formats adhere to the typical characteristic features of autobiography. Using a more flexible concept of life story⁶ with an emphasis on narrative, however,

⁶ Laura Aro has also used the term *identity narrative* within the same framework (1996: 51–52).

makes possible the facilitation of all formats discussed in the current article.

According to Jerome Bruner, a narratologist with a background in psychology, “one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of life” (Bruner 1987: 15). Peter Niedermüller is among the ethnographers who have fore-grounded the role of life stories in the study of culture. He is of the opinion that investigating life stories provides cultural data not to be found anywhere else and that life stories make visible the strategies and mechanisms through which an individual places him/herself into social space and historical time (Niedermüller 1988: 463)⁷. Although the scholars investigating life stories have focused mostly on the content of life stories, the form should be considered just as important as the facts that the story contains (Niedermüller 1988: 461). The form of a life story is not a mere means through which the content can be mediated, the form determines the possibilities for creating content (Kohli 1981: 68) and therefore it is impossible to fully separate the form and content of a life-story from each other.

Life stories in different formats are a rather familiar and popular genre in Estonian culture. In a special program of Kuku radio, various prominent Estonian public figures tell their life stories from childhood to the present day. Such presentation of one’s life story is oral and, within the framework of the program, largely structured by the host/hostess of the program. Several volumes of Estonian life-stories – collections of the autobiographies of Estonians who have sent their life stories to the Estonian Cultural History Archives in response to various invitations for life stories – have been published in Estonia. The authors have predominantly determined the structure of those stories. Every one of us has come across the biography of an artist or a writer either in a book format or in a shorter encyclopedic version. Such a narrative of one’s life

⁷ I would like to thank Ilona Nagy who, in April 2004 in Budapest referred to me the book *Life History as Cultural Construction/Performance* (1988).

has not been influenced by the subject of the narrative. When looking for a job, we customarily present a CV that has a firmly set structure, on the basis of which our potential employer expects to extract necessary information for him/herself about our past. In our everyday life, the need to tell the story of our life orally in chronological and detailed manner does not arise very often. Psychological necessity for such narrative can arise, first and foremost, during times of crisis.

Taking as his starting point the fact that a life story told of one's own initiative is a phenomenon that occurs very infrequently in the context of everyday life, the folklorist Hermann Bausinger has claimed that biography is a more 'natural' genre than autobiography (1988: 481). In addition to the dichotomy of biography versus autobiography, two other binaries concerning life stories have emerged: written narration versus oral narration, and the narration structured by the narrator versus the narration structured by the interviewer. The last distinction has been defined in English by the use of the dichotomous concepts of 'autobiography' and 'life history'. The first concept can be defined as "any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or part, in written or oral form", and the second as a life story that "has been elicited or prompted by another person" (Apte 1988: 53).

According to this distinction, Ludmilla's story would then be defined as autobiography and Ksenia's story as a life history. It is clear that my two examples exemplify two different ways of representing one's life. Ludmilla presented her life story, of her own initiative all the way through the narrative and needed no prompting or clarifying questions from me. I did not listen to her as an anthropologist or folklorist but as a co-traveler who happened to sit next to her on our way back from Melbourne. If I remember correctly, I did not mention to Ludmilla anything about my field, although I did tell her that in Melbourne I lived with the local Estonians. Ludmilla's decision to articulate her life in narrative format was not prompted by the fact that I was sitting next to her, but was rather due to the period of transition in her life that I by chance came to witness. During the interviews, Ksenia never told

the story of her life from the beginning to the moment of narration. Nor did she provide a full narrative when I specifically asked her to do so, although she usually provided very detailed and thorough answers to all questions. She told about her life through fragments of memory, personal narratives and even anecdotes and jokes. If I compiled one conclusive narrative of that material, it would seem artificial as Ksenia never related one episode to another in much detail, nor did she provide any evaluations of the events of her life within the framework of her life as a whole.

What could explain the differences in Ludmilla's and Ksnea's ways of telling about their life? Both women come from a traditional patriarchal society and have gone to school (where they were both taught by a priest) for only a couple of years?⁸ In my opinion, the differences do not come from individual features of personality or differences in situation⁹ but are rather based on important cultural differences. For over 30 years, the most vital period of her life, Ludmilla lived in more modern type of society in Australia. The seven years that Ksenia has spent in Tartu can in no way be compared to Ludmilla's thirty years in Australia. Ksenia spent most of the seven in her apartment, socializing mainly with her relatives. Toward the beginning of her Tartu period when she was able to go out, her communicative and flexible personality found expression even in a section of the city with big apartment buildings. "I went," she told me, "when I had the strength, I went and sat on a bench, I could then handle the young ones... people younger than me, a lot younger, I talked to them as well as to the older people. There was one older person, maybe she saw that I went to sit there, she quickly joined me and then we could talk" (11.05.2002; MD-0109-10). Ksenia sometimes looked through

⁸ There's also similarity in the fact that handicraft skills were considered to be an important part of education for both girls.

⁹ I would not consider it impossible that if, in my next interviews, I were to ask Ksenia to tell her life story, the final result would be a linear narrative. Several times, I have noticed the impact of the interviewer on Ksenia's self-conception (See, for example, Metsvahi 2003: 1929–1930).

newspapers (reading the headlines) and watched TV. However, as far as acquiring new cultural models is concerned, Ksenia's Tartu-period had very little impact when compared to the earlier periods of her life.

The environments that have shaped the worldview of Ksenia and Ludmilla differ greatly; a big Western city is completely different from Setumaa and a small town on the Russian-Estonian border where Ksenia spent the most important years of her life. Social scientists view individualism as one of the defining features of the Western mode of thinking (Meyer 1986: 216). Charles Taylor, who has studied the modern worldview distinguishes three aspects of individualism: appreciation of the autonomy of the individual, attributing significance to learning to know oneself¹⁰ and relating good life with individual commitment (Taylor 1989: 305). My own observations made during the two weeks I spent in Melbourne also confirm that Australian society is more individualistic than, for example, Estonia.

Individualism has flourished in modern society. Nation states, the characteristic type of state in modern society, look upon society as something that functions for the benefit of people and as rooted in the behavior and choices of its members (Meyer 1986: 209). Such a type of society, foregrounding personality, and realizing that the integrity and success of society depends on the competence and obedience of its members, in turn emphasizes the socialization processes of its members. Socialization can, however, be successful only when an individual is believed to have acted in accordance with certain general norms or rules. Only in such case is an individual looked upon as coherent and continuous (Meyer 1986: 212–213). From the point of view of the individual, it means that the process of creating his/her self has become reflective. An

¹⁰ The possibility to learn to know oneself requires recognition of the concept an "inner self". Social psychologist John D. Greenwood has written about "introverted concern with ourselves and our emotions" as a characteristic feature of an individual living in the contemporary Western society (see Greenwood 1994).

individual does not simply have a life story but s/he experiences it reflectively, every day making various choices between different models of behavior that are characteristic of different life styles (Giddens 1991: 14). According to Giddens, “a person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*” (Giddens 1991: 54).

The differences in the identity of people living in modern and traditional societies that have been pointed out by Giddens as well as other researchers¹¹, have also emerged in studies that have focused on the self-concept and the processes of thought of people living in an oral and a written type of culture. According to Walter Ong, it is difficult for individuals who belong to a written culture to imagine the models of thought of people who belong to oral culture (Ong 1982: 31). In order to provide some overview of the differences of the two ways of thought, Ong refers to the observations based on a series of interviews made by the psychologist A. R. Luria. Illiterate people who are interviewed think in a situative manner, whereas literate people have acquired analytic models of thought. Illiterate people did not provide the kinds of answers to Luria’s questions that he expected, nor were they able to even comprehend questions that required the capacity for abstract categorization. Thus, making formal logical conclusions, formulating definitions and analyzing one’s self, as mental processes grounded in text-based models of thought, was alien to them (Ong 1982: 54–55; Luria 1979: 58–80).

Ksenia’s habitual environment did not require reflective self-analysis and making choices between different life styles. She had

¹¹ According to Pataki, identity problems arise with the possibility of making choices. In tribal society, which lacks such cultural diversity, problems of this kind do not occur. (1988: 361). Referring to Erikson, Giddens points out, that if the main problem of today’s typical psychoanalytic patient is who s/he should be or become, then in the past, the typical psychoanalytic patient felt that s/he was being kept from being whoever s/he felt him/herself to be. (Giddens 1991: 69)

relatively little contact with modern institutions and their representatives such as, for example psychologists, teachers, lawyers and administrators¹², who contribute to the integration of an individual into the modern society. Ludmilla had probably more contacts with state institutions and a closer contact with written culture in general. If Ludmilla read romances in her youth, Ksenia was influenced by different kinds of narratives, and the majority of stories that she told at interviews came from an oral tradition. An important source for the stories Ksenia told us was an old man named Vassil whom Ksenia often visited in her childhood with other children in order to listen to fairy tales. Several of Ksenia's stories come from records of children's fairy tales in Russian that Ksenia listened to with her grandchildren while living in Petseri (information provided by Tatjana Kodas). The fact itself that Ksenia translated the fairy tales into the Setu dialect in such a fluent manner, to the point that I could not distinguish between fairy tales of Russian origin and those of Setu origin, indicates the extent to which Ksenia's self-conception was shaped by oral culture. According to Ksenia's granddaughter Tatjana Kodas, Ksenia had read none of the fairy tales she knew from a book.

The fact that Ludmilla presented a linear and coherent life narrative, shows that her self-conception has been influenced by a reflectivity characteristic of the Western type of society as well as a characteristic feature typical of written culture. According to Walter Ong, oral culture has no need for long linear stories built on narrative turns. Oral culture values most the narrators who are capable of leading the listener to the middle of events (*in medias res*) and keeping him/her there (Ong 1989: 144). Ksenia has excellent narrative skills of this type. According to Ong, oral culture does not value the linear continuity of the elements of narrative that would provide a chronological record of the events. Chronological aspects emerge and acquire value only in written culture (Ong 1989: 147; see also Foley 2000). It is therefore safe to claim that my attempts to record Ksenia's life story in linear form reflect

¹² See Meyer 1986: 212–213.

ted the extent to which my expectations were molded by written culture.

The field work situation that opposes an interviewer coming from written culture to a representative of oral culture has been doubtless familiar to a great number of other anthropologists and folklorists. Despite this problem, they have published the life stories of interviewed people narrated in the first person singular (e.g., Shostak 1997). How do such narratives emerge? According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in such cases the narrative often contains the life story of a fictive or real person that the anthropologist has created him/herself on the basis of his/her fieldwork experience. American anthropologists already realized a relatively long time ago that their research results left a more coherent and deeper impression if they were presented in the format of an autobiographical narrative of the representative of the culture they were investigating. Using a first person singular narration creates an illusion that there is nothing or no one between the reader and the subject and that the other culture can be observed from the smallest possible distance. Another possibility for the anthropologist was to structure his/her interview in such manner that the informant had to structure his/her story according to the characteristic features of the Western type of life narrative. When doing this, the interviewer imposed his/her own worldview on a culture that mediated experience in a different manner (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989: 128–130). The interviewer has the power to make the informants think and talk about things in a manner that they have never thought of or talked about before. If the interview has been structured such that after the questions of the interviewer are removed, there remains a narrative that resembles a life story, then the material is actually a collaboration between the interviewer and the informant, and the role of the interviewer should certainly be taken into account. (Pekkala & Vasenkari 2000: 562)

Autobiography is therefore not a universal genre but a phenomenon that has been developed and defined in the context of Western individualism. The tradition to view experience as centered on one's self and to perceive oneself as a subject goes back to

St. Augustine whose *Confessions* presented the first written self-conception of an individual who is both the object and the subject of the narrative. This text that was so influential during the Renaissance as well as during the modern times, where St. Augustine tells the story of his conversion into Christianity, is considered to have founded the genre of written confession or autobiography (Luhmann 1986: 319; Heller & Wellbery 1986: 3; Freccero 1986: 16–17).

Ksenia did not present a confessional self-narrative to her interviewers, nor did she reveal the secrets of her soul, or dwell at any length on specific features of her personality; nor did she praise or reprimand herself for the choices she made in life. The reason for this lies in the fact that she does not perceive herself and her life through such criteria. When asked about her life, she either narrated episodes that are easy for the listener to imagine, or described customs and ethnographic features of her rural context. She did not emphasize how her life differed from that of others or what the significance of a certain event or phenomenon was for her. In my opinion, in addition to minimal contact with written culture and Western mentality, the reason for this can also be seen in the fact that Ksenia's life was not interrupted by major historic changes. Her environment remained relatively stable for her, so there never arose a need to look for a source of existential security outside her cultural traditions. Such a need certainly characterizes Ingrian Finns, who, caught as they were, in the whirlwinds of history, were repeatedly forced to change their cultural environment.

The folklorist Vilmos Voigt has noted that life stories start to interest folklorists during periods when large displacements of populations have occurred both in geographical and social frameworks. After the Second World War, for example, the telling of life stories allowed Hungarians who had immigrated to the US to communicate to their relatives how different their life on the other side of the ocean had been. Those stories also helped them to preserve their Hungarian identity in their new homeland (Voigt 1988: 216–217). Another reason why a culturally heterogeneous

life environment characteristic of the contemporary world contributes to the popularity of life stores, lies in the fact that people with different backgrounds, do not have many things in common that they can talk about (Voigt 1988: 220).

Conclusion

In my article, I looked at different strategies of the production of reality by comparing the processes by which two women of different cultural backgrounds formed their identity. I fore-grounded the culturally specific characteristics of life stories and how they are interrelated with culture and identity. In an individualist society, where a person's environment or cultural community does not determine the identity of an individual, as is the case in a traditional type of society, the processes of formation of subjectivity acquire an important role. In this type of society an individual forms their self-conception through narratives focused on his/her self that are linked together with a linear life story, as well as certain fore-grounded traits of personality or causal frameworks related to the individual's psychology. The identity of a member of a traditional type of society, who does not undergo major changes in his/her life, is more stable and less problematic, and it makes thereby unnecessary the need to articulate the story of his/her life in a confessional format. The sense of security of such a person does not originate from the perception of themselves as being the center or the world (a clearly distinguishable psychological entity foregrounding its uniqueness) but from the awareness that their life is guided by norms, customs and traditions inherited from their predecessors.

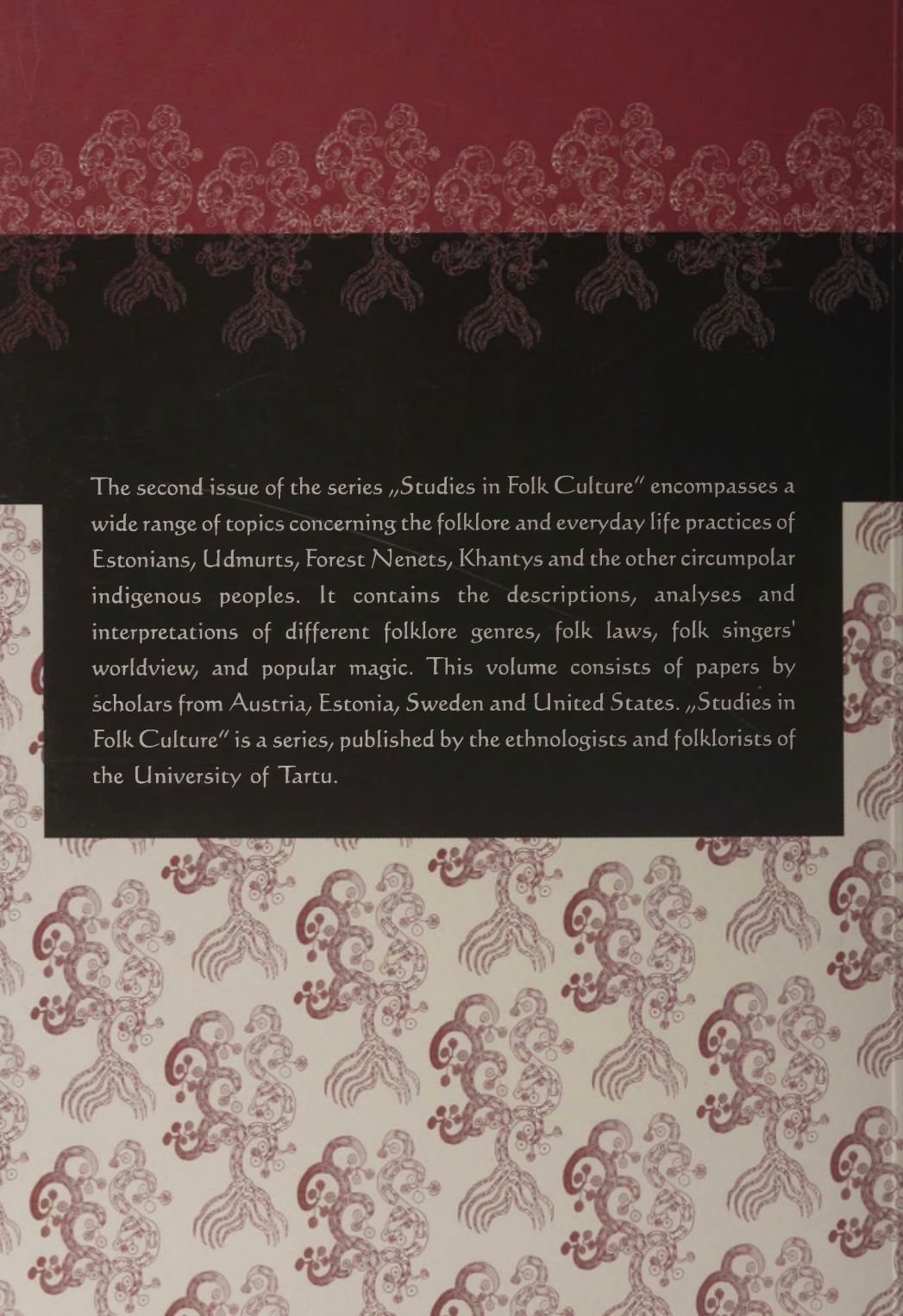
Translated by Leena Kurvet-Käosaar

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