

Doktorantide sügiskool “Dialogid tervisega” /

Autumn school “Dialogues with Health”

19-20 November, 2020, Värskä (<https://spavarska.ee/>)

Program

19 November

9.30 Joint start in bus from Estonian Literary Museum (Vanemuise 42, Tartu) towards Värskä

10.45-11.45 Dialogues with health and vernacular culture live: visit to Värskä farm museum

(<https://www.visitestonia.com/en/varska-farm-museum>), short lecture about Seto folk

medicine

11.55-12.15 Arrival in Värskä resort, coffee in seminar area

Session I – moderated by Reet Hiimäe

12.15-12.30 **Reet Hiimäe**. *Introduction: Dialogues with Health*

12.30-13.30 **Linda Annunen & Terhi Utriainen**. *Learning in and from CAM and Spirituality: LeNeRe Project and the Case of Sound Healing*

13.30-14.30 Lunch

Session II – moderated by Jonathan Roper

14.30-15.15 **Angelina Ilieva**. *The General and His Fandom: Observations on a Participatory Pandemic*

15.15-15.45 **Anastasiya Fiadotava**. *The Virology of Humour: Spreading Fun via Contemporary Media*

15.45-16.15 **Danila Rygovskiy**. *The Reasoning of Ritual Purity Practice in Old Belief: Vernacular Theology and Medical Discourse*

16.15-16.30 Coffee break

Session III

16.30-17.30 **Virginia García-Acosta**. *Epidemics, Disasters and Religious Interpretations in Latin American History*

17.30-18.30 **Kristel Kartau**. *Dialogue with the Semiosphere of Buddhistic Manual Medicine in Estonia*

18.30-19.30 Dinner

19.30- Socializing, networking and leisure

Poster presentation: Mila Bankova. *Etiological legends about the creation of the womb, the menstruation and the process of giving birth in Bulgarian folklore*

20 November

Session I

8.30-9.30 Breakfast

9.30-10.30 **Thomas Ndaluka**. *Faith and Pandemic in East Africa: Prevention Measures against COVID-19*

10.30-11.15 **Kadri Simm**. *Epidemics and Ethics*

11.15-11.30 Coffee break

Session II

11.30-12.00 **Saswati Bordoloi**. *Traditional Healing Rituals: A Case Study from Assam, India*

12.00-12.30 **Michele Tita**. *Historical and Contemporary Examples of Disease Narratives and Hoaxes in Italy and the West*

12.30-13.00 **Kadri Vider**. *From Coronavirus to Cyborg Communication: Language Data as Resource for Digital Research Methods*

13.00-13.30 **Tõnno Jonuks**. *Materia Magica – Magical Healing Artefacts in Estonian Museums*

13.30-14.30 Lunch

Session III

14.30-15.30 **Mare Kõiva**. *An Approach to the Study on Healing Magic Focusing on Persons*

15.30-16.00 **Alexandra Chereches**. *Folk Narratives on Health and Disease in Romanian Oral Literature*

16.00-16.45 **Aimar Ventsel**. *Alcoholism, Masculinity, health, and Resistance in Punk*

16.45-17.10 Conclusions, good-bye-coffee

17.15 Bus back to Tartu (arrival in Tartu appr. 18.30 pm).

The event will be organized with the support of European Union, European Regional Development Fund (ASTRA project of Estonian Literary Museum, EKMDHUM), Estonian Research Council (PUTJD962) and Estonian Literary Museum



Abstracts

Learning in and from CAM and Spirituality: LeNeRe Project and the Case of Sound Healing

Linda Annunen,

postdoctoral researcher, Study of Religion, University of Turku, Finland

Terhi Utriainen,

professor, Study of Religion, University of Turku, Finland

Learning is one of the most esteemed and supported values of contemporary society. The ethos and rhetoric of continuous and life-long learning has lately also pervaded the sphere of religion and spirituality as well as many often intersecting health and wellbeing practices. In today's busy and demanding societies, people often turn to alternative and complementary therapies to learn different techniques for improving and achieving holistic wellbeing. One such practice is singing bowl sound healing in which metallic or crystal bowls are played, listened to and bodily felt for the purposes of enhancing physical and mental health. The research project *Learning from New Religion and Spirituality (LeNeRe, Academy of Finland 325148)* examines contemporary religious and spiritual milieus as sites of learning and particularly investigates processes through which people transfer and integrate their religious and spiritual learning to other spheres of life. We will discuss aspects of learning in and from CAM and contemporary spirituality through ethnographic research material gathered by participant observation, interviews and thematic writings on singing bowl sound healing in present day Finland. Sound bowl healing is the first of four case studies to be conducted in our project.

Traditional Healing Rituals: A Case Study from Assam, India

Saswati Bordoloi,

visiting PhD student of Estonian and comparative folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia

My paper concentrates on traditional healing rituals in the state of Assam in Northeast India, taking into consideration the healing practices of Assamese, Boro, Karbi, and Tea-garden communities. The paper will present some topical case analyses, for example the worship of goddess *Shitala* who is viewed as protector of children and able to cure fever and smallpox, and the ‘*Aai*’ cult that involves ritual possession and is one of the major religious healing practices among Assamese communities. Additionally, the Karbi rituals of ‘*Chujun*’ and ‘*Charak Puja*’ for removing the harmful powers from a village are described.

Folk Narratives on Health and Disease in Romanian Oral Literature

Alexandra Chereshes,

PhD student of Spanish Philology, University of Jáen, Spain

In my PhD thesis, I am presenting 25 interviews of Romanian immigrants who live in Madrid, Spain. I want to show that their oral traditions, legends, tales and songs have an enormous importance not only because they tie them to their native country, but also because this heritage is inevitably disappearing in the urban context. Beliefs in the evil eye, for example, are still strong amongst people who came from rural areas: they have explained that this can happen to everyone, from little children to adults. Therefore, they start feeling ill, the cause being allegedly someone who looked at them and magically made them sick. This can happen intentionally or not, and in this autumn school I will examine these stories in order to point out, on the one hand, their folkloric value and, on the other, the personal and spiritual meanings evil eye exhibits.

The Virology of Humour: Spreading Fun via Contemporary Media

Anastasiya Fiadotava,

*junior research fellow, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu,
Estonia*

The attractiveness of humorous forms of communication combined with the wide accessibility of internet and social media contribute to the extreme quickness of their spread. The limitations of the predigital era are no longer relevant in contemporary society, and the most popular humorous content quickly turns into memes.

In many respects the spread of humorous memes is similar to the spread of viruses. Researchers have compared memes to the viruses of mind that infect people irrespectively of their will (Brodie, 1996) and sometimes without any concern for the well-being of their host (Heylighen, 1995). As viruses differ in terms of their host range, so do humorous items, because the appreciation of a particular humorous item depends on a wide range of personal and social factors. The spread of viruses is often accompanied with their mutations; similarly, digital sharing of folklore (including its humorous part) implies its adaptation to the specific context (Blank, 2009: 33). Moreover, humorous memes have certain limitations in the spatial and temporal dimensions of their spread, some of which are defined by the “immune system” of human mind.

The parallels between humour and viruses by no means suggest that the comparison could be extended up to the point when virus is regarded as a biological model of humour, or vice versa, humour is a direct social and communicative analogue of virus. Rather, the idea behind this paper is to show that not only the content of humour should be considered in the discussion of the current pandemic reflection in the popular communication, but also the very mechanisms of humour contribute to our understanding of the interrelations between social and natural phenomena.

References:

- Blank, Trevor J. 2009. *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Brodie, Richard. 1996. *Virus of the mind: The new science of the meme*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House, Inc.
- Heylighen, Francis. 1995. “Memetic selection criteria”. *Principia Cybernetica Web*. available at: <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/MEMSELC.html>

Epidemics, Disasters and Religious Interpretations in Latin American History

Virginia García-Acosta,

professor, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Mexico

Throughout history, superhuman, supernatural and divine forces have been considered as the origin of natural phenomena and biological threats. And, at the end, the ultimate cause of disasters associated with them. Regardless the variety of geographies and historical moments, the way human societies through their culture have responded to them, prefigures the multiple interpretations and relationships they have established with nature and to the divinity. From a historical and anthropological perspective, in this presentation I will examine several cases coming from analysis of disasters linked to natural and biological phenomena, mainly earthquakes, droughts and epidemics, emphasizing Latin America, with some comparisons at other latitudes.

The General and His Fandom: Observations on a Participatory Pandemic

Angelina Ilieva,

assistant professor, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum), Bulgaria

On February 24th the Bulgarian government announced the formation of the National Operational Headquarters to coordinate fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Bulgaria. As the head of the new formation general Ventsislav Mutafchiyski, a military doctor and professor at the Military Medical Academy in Sofia, was appointed. The general started holding daily media briefings where he was presenting statistical updates and was answering questions about the crisis development. Quickly he became extremely popular as the public figure most strongly associated with the fight against the pandemic in the country.

The presentation discusses the media image of general Mutafchiyski and its readings and interpretations by the audience. I study the most distinctive features of his media persona shaped in the public imagination as a wartime leader. *The General*, as this new hero is usually called, inspired a large fan following and various manifestations of affect: from declarations of love to death threats. As a fictional character, he appeared in many forms of vernacular creativity: poems, songs, jokes, memes, fake news, conspiracy theories, material objects. In this way *The General* became the main character of Bulgarian pandemic folklore.

Materia Magica – Magical Healing Artefacts in Estonian Museums

Tõnno Jonuks,

senior researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia

Healing purposes are widely represented in collections of magical objects in Estonian museums. Majority of objects are dedicated to cure some particular disease or distress. This presentation will analyse the connection between the material object and the disease to find intuitive associations. I will particularly focus on the concept of specificity in discussing magical objects for medical purposes – how the concept of specificity appears in the context where most of the magical objects are everyday utensils or natural rocks? Finally, the magical curing objects will be contextualised in the broader tradition of *materia magica* in Estonia to study why this is the most represented field of magic.

Dialogue with the Semiosphere of Buddhistic Manual Medicine in Estonia

Age Kristel Kartau,

PhD student of theology/study of religion, University of Tartu, Estonia; massage practitioner

This workshop-presentation will give an overview of the dynamics of Buddhistic manual medicine discourse in Estonia. The presenter will describe how buddhistically grounded forms of manual medicine as well as related cultural ideas, religious concepts, memes and meanings travel from one culture to the other and – depending on the observer group – can be integrated into the target culture under various sociocultural categories and with various connotations. For example, in Estonia, Thai massage and the Shindo massage and stretching system are generally viewed as belonging to new spirituality by theologians, cultural researchers and general public although the ways of participation in these techniques can highly vary based on a particular individual. The author points out that nobody of the manual medicine practitioners whom she interviewed considered themselves as members of New Age movement or as promoting teachings of new spirituality, however, many of them told life history narratives of „lifechanging“ experiences or dramatic health events that had brought

them to manual therapies, and these narratives often resemble religious conversion narratives. Thus, the preliminary conclusion of the presenter is that a personal crisis can lead to various outputs and it may depend on rather random circumstances if this output expresses itself in a religious conversion, spiritual awakening, becoming a yoga teacher or masseuse. Respective lifehistorical narratives can be viewed as a tool for legitimating the given choice and confirming its rightness in the eyes of the practitioner himself and other people. The theoretical part of the presentation will be illustrated by practical examples of Buddhist manual medicine techniques.

An Approach to the Study of Healing Magic Focusing on Persons

Mare Kõiva,

*senior researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia;
head of Center of Excellence in Estonian Studies*

When studying the tradition of witch doctors, witchcraft and miracle cure practitioners, or healers, the focus has usually been on their skills, magical abilities, medical knowledge, herbalism, or spells. Finnish and Estonian researchers have considered the social and cultural circumstances of the historical period, but the healer's presumed knowledge and position in the village / urban society, the position of their recorded practices in folklore and their wider framework in comparison with the traditions of other nations have still prevailed. Leaving aside taxonomies and categories, such an approach offers the external observer's vision and beliefs about healing, sometimes also information about the personality of the healer. Often, that type of observation lacks the healer's own view and experience. Although the healer's worldviews have been recorded less frequently, they are still present, especially of modern healers, but we also find them in older tradition. The presentation examines the resemblances between the famous village doctor (witch doctor) Ell Savisikk, a well-known healer from Kolga-Jaani (Serva Ell, 1837-1927), a traveling healer from Tallinn and a representative of natural healing; Aleksei Lesk (Tiitsu Seiu, 1873-1952) from Saaremaa, and a modern practitioner or healer. What is their view of supernaturalism, magic, and what experience do they have with these? Are they influenced by the more general views of their time? What is the impact of pop culture?

Faith and Pandemic in East Africa: Prevention Measures against COVID-19

Thomas Ndaluka,

coordinator and senior lecturer, Society and Religion Research Center (SORRECE),

University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most adverse public health calamities of the 21st century and the greatest concern of humankind, policymakers, the international community, and governments alike. Several preventive measures against COVID-19 have been proposed by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) and adopted by different countries, East African Countries inclusive (MoHCDGEC, 2020). In the face of these developments, WHO and the governments introduced preventive measures such as closure of schools/Colleges and religious institutions (Churches or Mosques), social distancing, wearing of masks, hand sanitisation, frequent hand-washing a, lock down and travel restriction. The rate and level of compliance with these measures varied based on the country's context. Moreover, as the fight against the pandemic requires a multi-sectoral/multidimensional approach, the role of faith and faith institutions cannot be underestimated.

In this lecture, we will interrogate some of the speeches by religious leaders uttered at the peak of the pandemic in East Africa. These speeches will also be corroborated with utterances of political leaders in the region who either supported or were against the involvement of or opening of religious institutions during COVID – 19 pandemic. And therefore, we will discuss the contribution of religious institutions and belief in reducing/increasing incidence of COVID – 19 in this part of Africa. At the end it is expected that the participants will gain an understanding of the role of faith in the fight against COVID-19 in East Africa. To be able to achieve the above, we will use different case studies to have an active discussion and interaction.

The Reasoning of Ritual Purity Practice in Old Belief: Vernacular Theology and Medical Discourse

Danila Rygovskiy,

PhD student of Estonian and comparative folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia

This paper is focused on communities of Estonian and Siberian Old Believers, both of which have or used to have specific ritual purity practices: dietary restrictions, proscription of praying with strangers, and prevention of eating from the same table and tableware with them due to symbolic contagiousity of those actions. Mainly, I am going to talk about the bowl rule, which requires separation of tableware between the Old Believer and the stranger. This rule has different vernacular interpretations, including a medical one – that this practice helps to prevent spreading the diseases. Addressing this issue, I am going to show why and in what circumstances this medicalization of reasoning appears in local communities.

Epidemics and Ethics

Kadri Simm,

associate professor in practical philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia

No abstract yet

Historical and Contemporary Examples of Disease Narratives and Hoaxes in Italy and the West

Michele Tita,

PhD student of Estonian and comparative folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia

This paper includes examples of oral narratives and fake stories associated with diseases and epidemics in Italy and the West, in an attempt to highlight their similarities and differences in history. I will start from few ancient Italian and European cases, such as the 17th century plague mass hysteria reported in Alessandro Manzoni's *Storia della colonna infame* (1840) or the medieval beliefs about the wells-poisoning Jews and the *Cagots* transmitting leprosy.

I will show how similar stories have arisen in recent times, too, and spread through the new media. Above all, the internet has been having a dramatic impact on narratives about illness in Western countries. Hoaxes and false information about Ebola virus, allegedly brought to Europe with the migrations from Sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the most recent and significant

examples. Some forms of non-conventional medicine, such as anti-vaccination and scientifically inaccurate therapies against cancer, are also part of the current narrative landscape on the internet.

All the provided examples (and few others) show how these stories have transformed, though keeping their cautionary function against diseases and epidemic. On the other hand, the efficacy of these narratives is questioned nowadays, due to their distance from scientific knowledge and their association with discriminatory practices towards minorities.

Alcoholism, Masculinity, Health, and Resistance in Punk

Aimar Ventsel,

senior researcher, Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, Estonia

Alcohol use and overuse is in certain segment of punk seen as an act of rebellion. Heavy drinking is a proof of masculinity and toughness. In a paradoxical way, ability to drink a lot and excessively is in punk culture also a sign for a good health and physical form. In my talk I show how clichés about the working class and 'improper' behaviour are subversively turned to the act of rebellion and how punk music is one medium that creates and carries that trickster story.

From Coronavirus to Cyborg Communication: Language Data as Resource for Digital Research Methods

Kadri Vider,

research fellow in language technology, Faculty of Science and Technology, Institute of Computer Science, University of Tartu, Estonia;

executive manager of Center of Estonian Language Resources

The presentation will give an overview of the possibilities of the network of CLARIN (Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure) for PhD students, for example, of research that has already been conducted in order to find out how is Covid-19 reflected in the language use and what is its impact on the humanities more generally.

Additional reading and other resources

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2. Salmenniemi, Suvi; Bergroth, Harley; Nurmi, Johanna; Perheentupa, Inna 2019. From culture to assemblages. An introduction. *Assembling Therapeutics: Cultures, Politics and Materiality*, edited by Salmenniemi, Suvi; Bergroth, Harley; Nurmi, Johanna; Perheentupa, Inna. Routledge, 1–19.
3. Briggs, Charles L. 2005. Communicability, Racial Discourse, and Disease. *The Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 269–291.
4. Weeks, Laura C.; Strudsholm, Tina 2008. A scoping review of research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and the mass media: Looking back, moving forward. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 8:43, 1–9.
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7. Leone, Massimo 2020. The Semiotics of the Medical Face Mask: East and West. *Signs & Media*, 1, 40–70.
8. Saad, Julian M.; Prochaska, James O. 2020. A philosophy of health: life as reality, health as a universal value. *Palgrave Communications*, 6:45, 1–11.
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10. Adolphs, Svenja; Brown, Brian; Carter, Ronald; Crawford, Paul; Sahota, Opinder 2004. Applying corpus linguistics in a health care context. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1:1, 9–28.