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INTRODUCTION: EARLIER EXPERIENCE OF COLLECTING AND RESEARCHING SCHOOL LORE IN ESTONIA AND SLOVENIA

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The current issue of the journal *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* was created as a collaboration between Estonian and Slovenian folklorists and ethnologists within the joint bilateral project, "Slovenian and Estonian Contemporary School Lore". The main objective of the project was to analyse and compare the contemporary school lore, its collecting, use, and dynamics in two European countries with different geographical positions and characteristics, with a similar history, and no direct contact. The project focused on tradition and transformations of the folklore material, playfulness, and creativity in (new) formats, and on how they reflect the social reality that produces them. The project aimed to apply a new dynamic comparative approach from an intercultural as well as diachronic and synchronic point of view, which offers a unique and innovative perspective in folklore studies of Slovenia and Estonia.

School lore is folklore material that circles among schoolchildren mainly on the school (indoor and outdoor) premises, as well as folklore material that thematises school life. This material reflects the lifestyle, worldviews, and everyday issues of schoolchildren. It also shows what material transfers from one generation to another and has a potential to continue in time. Knowing that

schoolchildren are important informants for folklorists (see Stanonik 1984; Sutton-Smith 1999), it is not surprising that there have been many attempts, collecting campaigns, and interviews with the aim to get the material that circles in the relatively closed social group, i.e., among schoolchildren. However, an insight into two different countries also shows different traditions and successes. School lore collecting traditions are extremely different in Estonia and Slovenia: the former has been successful and therefore Estonians have a rich archive of school lore, while people in Slovenia have not been so collaborative in the collecting actions (for more detail see the article by S. Babič). Consequently, the school-lore archive of the Estonian Literary Museum (ELM) is quantitatively and qualitatively considerably better, more varied, and referential for school-lore studies.

In the Estonian case we can speak about more than 100 years of experience in collecting and researching school lore. Children appeared in the sphere of interest of Estonian folklorists already in the 1920s, when Walter Anderson, folklore professor at the University of Tartu, initiated a collection of children's songs (58,832 pages). In the 1930s, the Estonian Folklore Archives started to also collect material about children's fears (e.g., information of the beings with which adults used to frighten children; 16 volumes, 12,000 pages; see also Västrik 1997). In 1934–1935, the Estonian Folklore Archives started to collect children's games (22 volumes, 15,000 descriptions); the questionnaires were drawn up by folklorist Richard Viidalepp. In the 1930s, Matthias Johann Eisen collected data from schoolchildren on calendar holidays, family heritage, games, etc. The Soviet period was also important: some collecting actions were organised. Even after World War II, a number of surveys targeted at schoolchildren were carried out, using, for example, the children's magazine *Pioneer* (1958); local heritage, short forms of folklore, etc., were collected.

Unlike the Estonian collecting harvest, we cannot see that in the Slovenian case. There were some attempts in the 1950s though not successful. The emphasis was laid on children's games (collected by Slovenian folklorist Niko Kuret from 1945 to the 1980s). The questionnaires were sent to schools, but the number of returned answers was low. The conclusion of these attempts at that time, written down in annual reports, was just that optimism had to be strong and the work had to continue, but later results (from the 1970s onwards) do not report school lore collecting or any attempt to do it until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

On the other hand, Estonia continued the very successful path in collecting school lore. Significant cooperation with Finnish colleagues started in the

1970s. In the past 30 years we have had three collection campaigns in schools and a major one in kindergartens all over Estonia.

In 1992 a joint campaign of collecting school lore was launched in Estonia and Finland, which resulted in over 21,255 pages of diverse and valuable school lore material from the total of 1,797 respondents from 26 schools (see Kõiva 1995). Fifteen years later, in 2007, another campaign of collecting school lore was organised all over Estonia (Voolaid 2007); nearly 2,800 schoolchildren from 71 schools (grades 4–12) answered the questionnaire, the collection resulting in 15,600 pages of material. The third all-Estonian school lore collecting action took place in 2018 (see Hiiemäe 2018), with a record number of participants: answers to questionnaires were sent by 3,717 respondents and answers were expected from the pupils of the 4th to 12th grades (incl. those from vocational schools); most of them answered electronically. Besides, an all-Estonian competition for nursery school lore collection was organised in 2011 (Voolaid 2012) and nearly one hundred teachers participated in this action.

The ELM still continues the tradition of school lore collecting and has even extended it to also involve diaspora communities. In 2021 a school lore collection competition for Canadian Estonians was organised in cooperation between the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian Museum Canada (VEMU) (see Voolaid & Noorhani 2022).

In Slovenia the collecting of school lore was suspended for some time. Only in 2015 another smaller school lore collection campaign was run; it was carried out to supplement the collection of riddles and therefore focused only on school jokes and riddles. A bigger one was launched in 2018, when the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU under the mentorship of the ELM sent e-questionnaires[1] to schools and families, though the result was quite poor (71 completed questionnaires). Although the answers were not many (which seems as a continuation of previous low contacts of educational institutions with the research ones), they were important and reflected differences and changes in material as well as indicated that times were different and needed different approaches.

In Estonia research into school lore has already produced impressive results: many research articles and collections of the material from different perspectives (e.g., Kõiva 1995, 1996, 2014; Kalmre 2010; Vissel 2004) and a large number of popular publications and collections have been published, whereas Slovenian school lore research has been more modest. Precisely for that reason bilateral projects are extremely advantageous: on the one hand researchers can share their knowledge, on the other the experiences and difficulties are discussed.

Therefore, the current issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* encompasses different materials, approaches, topics of school and even children's lore. The issue discusses methodologies as well as the material itself. The material under discussion is both old and contemporary, which gives us an opportunity to see the shifts in topics and forms as well as worldviews of schoolchildren.

The issue starts with a comprehensive article by **Saša Babič** about school lore collecting in Slovenia, which was diametrically different from the Estonian case, being anything but fruitful. Contemporary collecting methods provided new opportunities but along with them also new thoughts on the material as well as new ways for reaching schoolchildren.

The issue continues with three articles discussing humour, creativity, and play in folklore among and about (school)children.

The article by **Barbara Turk Niskač** and **Katarina Šrimpf Vendramin**, "Play and Folklore in Children's Peer Cultures", examines children's creative production of and participation in a shared peer culture. Focusing on material on children's use of counting-out rhymes, faecal humour, and word play, gathered through participant observation and video ethnography in two Slovenian kindergartens, the article demonstrates the importance of social participation in peer groups from an early age and the alliances, conflicts, and power hierarchies involved.

Anastasiya Fiadotava touches on the topic of family folklore in the article "Children as Agents, Targets, and Intermediaries of Family Humour". Many humorous family memes are generated by children either consciously or unconsciously: humorous utterances, unexpected behaviour and funny mistakes are just a few examples. Many of children's idiosyncratic words and idioms that provoke laughter when they are originally uttered can go on to form long-standing parts of family folklore, inevitably losing some of their humorous flavour but still cherished by parents or other adult relatives as children grow up and stop using them. Plenty of family humour is also generated at children's expense. This aspect of family humour highlights the different status dynamics between children and their parents, many of whom tend to playfully tease their children to a greater extent than they do each other.

Piret Voolaid's article, "Representations of Distance Learning in the Memes of the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Humour as a Coping and Self-defence Strategy", presents creativity as a consequence of the pandemic crisis. The author shows that students who are the main creators of memes regard the humorous memes about distance learning as a form of communication which offers an alternative and multifaceted perspective on this important method of learning during lockdown.

The following two articles constitute a different section: they emphasise the role of the media, fear and adaptation to panic and its mirroring in games and tales.

Astrid Tuisk's article, "Children as Consumers and Co-creators of Cultural Products: The Impact of Foreign Films on Estonian Children's Culture in the 1950s", examines how the post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in terms of their themes, ideas, presentation, and setting, became box-office hits and one of the sources on which the post-war generation built their gender identity. The films showed different perceptions and ideas, such as personal freedom and responsibility.

Reet Hiiemäe and **Andrus Tins** present the contemporary material of school lore in the article "Suicide Games, Abandoned Houses, and Thirst for Danger: The Youth's Personal Experience Narratives and the Media's Moral Panics about Semi-Supernatural Challenges in Estonia". The article discusses the material that is not widely known in the general public, and even more difficult to approach: the dynamics of the media and real life in relation to the so-called dangerous folklore of teenagers, which includes, for example, contacts with aggressive (semi-)supernatural fear creatures, frightening experiences in abandoned houses, and notions of so-called suicide games.

The issue finishes with the article titled "Slovenian Folk Lullabies: Analysis of the Lullaby Texts and Their Functions" by **Vanja Huzjan**. The author analyses folk lullabies through the psychoanalytic view as the archaic form of calming down with rhythm and begging.

The aim of this issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* is not only to bring to the reader new analyses of the material but also a reconsideration of how to reach the material and the creative methods to incorporate the heritage into schools, into the creative and learning processes. The discussion is never-ending, especially with the contemporary fast evolution of the digital world and rapid changes. On the one hand, the reconsideration of traditional archival material slowly disappearing from live circulation and on the other reconsideration of the very quick appearance of new topics and forms also give an opportunity to search for function-constants (lullabies) and methods for reading universal anthropological topics.

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NOTE

[1] See https://www.folklore.ee/kp/2017_18/slovenian/index.html, last accessed on 17 June 2022.

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COLLECTING SLOVENIAN SCHOOL LORE VIA E-QUESTIONNAIRE: ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTED MATERIAL AND REVISION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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Abstract: Although folklorists recognise the active role of children in intangible heritage, collecting and analysing children's lore and school lore has been a side issue in Slovenian folkloristics. Especially since the beginning of the new millennium, it seems that school lore has been put aside. In order to revive collecting of school lore, the Institute of Slovenian Ethology at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) organised riddle collecting in schools in 2015 and an e-collection during the 2018/2019 school year. The first collection was organised as part of interviews while the other collection was based on an e-questionnaire. This was sent to Slovenian elementary and high schools as well as to acquaintances in order to get as many responses as possible, i.e., using the snowball method. The article gives both an overview and a sketch of the results.

Keywords: collecting, folklore, pupils, school lore

Children's folklore collecting and research was usually predominantly focused on traditional stories, dances, proverbs, riddles, poetry, material culture, and customs, passed on orally from generation to generation (Sutton-Smith 1999: 4), as well as through activity (dance, games, material culture, etc.). Children's folklore was often seen as a pedagogical tool to help them learn social skills and values, and was traditionally considered to come from three sources: (1) texts written by adults for children; (2) activities that have lost their primary function in the world of adults and are transferred as children's lore; and (3) children's creativity (Stanonik 1984: 85). The presumption is somewhat narrow

from today's standpoint and overlooks many other sources and reasons behind complexity and creation in different children's folklore.

COLLECTING CHILDREN'S LORE IN SLOVENIA

Looking diachronically, Slovenian folkloristics started as the most folkloristics in Europe, with Romanticism in the nineteenth century and the subsequent rise in interest in 'peasant art'. The (usually organised) collecting of material was followed by published collections and analysis of the collected material. Serious research into children's lore began in Great Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century (see Grider 1999: 11), although with the spread of collecting and studying folklore it quickly expanded across Europe. In Slovenia, the focus was mainly a part of general collecting of folklore material. Large collecting actions were pioneered by Karel Štrekelj in 1868. Here the focus was mainly on folk songs and poems, although other material was also collected, including children's folklore (Kropej 2011). The collected children's folklore texts (riddles, proverbs, songs) were published in newspapers (*Učiteljski tovariš*, *Angeljček*) during the nineteenth century. The first collection of so-called school games was published by Ivan Mercina only at the end of the nineteenth century under the heading *Igre in pesmi za otroška zabavišča in ljudske* šole (Games and Songs for Children's Amusement and Public Schools, 1893), as a handbook of children's folk games. Other collections and descriptions followed in the twentieth century, mainly during the second half, especially at the end of the 1970s when modern fieldwork on children's folklore is said to have begun (Ramšak 2007: 34), the most obvious study being Kuret's 1979 survey of children's games. The most common areas of children's folklore to be researched were games (Kuret 1942, 1959, 1979, 1989; Medveščék 1984; Ramovš 1991; Cvetko 1996, 2000; Ramšak 2003; Sereinig 2003; Ferlež 2001, 2005), oral folklore (Stanonik 1984, 1992–1993; Babič 2015, 2021; Pisk & Šrimpf Vendramin 2021), dances (Ramovš 1980), and songs (Juvančič 2006; Terseglav 2006). The Institute of Slovenian Ethnology received, among other materials, copies of high school students' collection of Janez Dolenc (Dijaški arhiv Janeza Dolenca – DAJD). For 30 years Janez Dolenc encouraged and mentored his students in collecting folklore material from the villages in the north-western part of Slovenia. But the collected material was in the manner of "the stories of our grandparents, the knowledge of our ancestors, the stories that are disappearing" (Ivančič Kutin 2017), so it cannot be researched as school lore.

The collecting and research of children's folklore in the second half of the twentieth century mainly focused on traditional material in a Romanticist

manner, i.e., the objective was to preserve folklore from our ancestors that was disappearing quickly, material that gained some romantic value and was treated as a treasure from our grandparents. Therefore, even the material that was requested was generally connected with the past and the romantic etiquette (games, songs, fairy tales with, for example, nasty jokes or swearwords excluded). To receive more children's folklore, the researchers decided to connect kindergartens and schools in 1952/1953.[1] For that year the annual report (Letopis 1954) shows that the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology sent surveys to 33 high schools. The questions focused on old rituals and good storytellers. They received answers from 15 schools, which was 45.5% of the surveys. The concluding remark in the report is that it was obvious that surveys were returned from schools where teachers of the Slovenian language implemented the survey and explained the task clearly to students. The results were positive for the researchers and so they decided to contact schools with another survey on children's games (prepared by Niko Kuret). They sent 4,000 copies of the survey to 125 kindergartens and 1,145 primary schools. However, the result was minimal with only 17 schools answering, although Kuret gave quite a few lectures on the topic in schools and on the radio at the time (Letopis 1954: 332). The commentary at the end was regretful, because the same actions brought better results in other countries. Kuret thought that perhaps persisting with the surveys would pay off in time, although there would have to be reconsideration of the survey structure.

The 1954 annual report (Letopis 1955) says that response to the surveys has practically stopped, leading to the obvious conclusion that cooperation with schools and kindergartens was poor and prompting the Institute to get in contact with children's magazines such as *Pionirski list*, which published a call for descriptions of children's games (February and March 1954). They received answers from 34 primary schools and 20 lower gymnasiums as well as individual answers, and gathered 957 games. After that, the reports on cooperating with schools stopped, but occasional cooperation with *Pionirski list* continued. Only in 1984 did Marija Stanonik publish the first scientific article generally discussing children's folklore, in which she focused mainly on verbal lore and analysed the recognition of folklore among high school children in 1995 (Stanonik 1995).

This short historical overview on collecting children's folklore material shows that cooperation with schools has not been very successful, and reveals a lack of ambition in schools on this subject.

CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS OF COLLECTING AND STUDYING CHILDREN'S LORE

Folkloristic research follows research trends of the time and highlights topics that are visible but not currently important in society. In contrast to the previous focus on collecting, which was in general children's lore and the material gained from their (grand)parents, contemporary focus changed, reflecting how children's folklore was shifting rather than disappearing in the modern world (McMahon & Sutton-Smith 1999: 295). 'School lore' became a recognised term in Slovenian folklore research with the focus shifting to new folklore, i.e., material that is not known to older generations but lives among schoolchildren.

As folklore in general is a very changeable term today (for example, folk songs vs. memes), the definition of children's folklore has also changed with time. It is almost impossible to give one single definition of children's lore. Folklorists today are more concerned with the living performance of the material, its modifications, particular settings, functional and aesthetic character (Sutton-Smith 1999: 4). However, it is possible to say that children's folklore is primarily about children, and specifically school folklore is about schoolchildren and the material that circulates among them. School is an institution with particular restrictions, but with the prevailing communication being between children. The material that they use to communicate is generally restricted to children and is not passed on to them by their grandparents (for example, nonsense joking questions, references to movies, jokes, even some stories, etc.). Therefore, for the purposes of this article, children's folklore includes all the units that are transmitted between children themselves, as material that is transmitted between members of the young generation (although we cannot exclude the important role of the adults in this process as having close relationships with children). This transmission is especially visible among schoolchildren, who transmit lore in schools: in corridors, in classrooms, in front of the school buildings, during school breaks and during classes.

An important feature of school lore is that it is not the folklore of the youngest children, it is the folklore of school-aged children. This raises the important question of age as school systems vary by country: when does schooling start, what is the continuity of the education system, what is the expected minimal level of education in society, etc. Primary school in Slovenia starts at the age of 6 and lasts 9 years; it continues with high school, which lasts from 3 to 5 years (depending on the curriculum), so youngsters generally finish high school at the age of 19. In the general perception high school is the minimum education that children should get, although only primary school is compulsory. Children are considered minors up to the age of 18. This means that if we take the emic

concept, school lore should include the period up to the end of high school and include not only children, but also teenagers.

The working definition of school lore would therefore be: material that circles among children and teenagers in (or near or around) school during study time and during leisure moments and socialising, not excluding also moments that are 'stolen' during class (chatting, writing notes, etc.).

METHODS AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK WITH CHILDREN

The ethnographic techniques usually used to approach children are quite traditional: interviews, diaries, surveys and questionnaires, observation and experiments – the most complete and richest analysis can be made using a multimethod approach (Fine 1999: 121), i.e., multimodal ethnographic study, including audio and video recording and photography.

Ethnography among children always raises many issues, and the ethics of the research techniques used must inevitably fulfil three criteria: (1) no physical, social, or psychological harm must be done to the subject; (2) the subject must not be deceived by the researcher, unless such a deception is an integral and necessary part of the research; (3) subjects must give informed consent as to the nature of their participation, with the freedom to withdraw at any point they choose (ibid.). The question of age is an ethical issue because children have not reached the age at which they can give their own consent and because of the dynamics of role relationships between adults and children (Fine 1999: 122).

Another ethical problem is that of confidentiality and attribution: when information is unique, attribution could harm the informant, while on the other hand children deserve credit and possible reward for their creations (Fine 1999: 125). Probably the most ethically justified stance is to allow the informants to choose how and where they are identified, and to have these decisions approved by their parents or guardians.

In conducting research with children, the ethical problems are more complicated because (especially small) children may not have the competence to foresee what is best for them (ibid.), while on the other hand reaching parents or guardians is often difficult. Today the vast area of ethics as it relates to the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy is regulated in Europe by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Directive 2002/58/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 July 2002,[2] and research must be approved by the state ethics committee.

CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES IN COLLECTING SCHOOL LORE IN SLOVENIA

All the above was and still is under consideration in Slovenian folklore research. The first question of method in the contemporary world is even wider, considering that the multimodal approach includes even more techniques, while schoolchildren do not have much leisure time. The question of ethics seems to be solved bearing in mind the rules, although on the other hand children are much less approachable than before: ethnographic work must be approved by parents, the school, and often even an ethical commission. In the following, the article will focus on two contemporary collecting actions of school lore, the first based on interviews, the second on an e-survey:

(1) Interviewing children is a common technique for collecting folklore. It is usually accomplished as a straightforward conversation: the children are, either individually or as a group, asked to explain their traditions, or they are given topics, genres, etc., to talk about (Fine 1999: 123).

(2) A survey "is essentially a structured interview given to a large number of individuals" (Fine 1999: 126). The predicted basic advantages of the survey are that one can collect plenty of data quickly, although as is seen from the history of Slovenian connections with schools this is not necessarily the case. Fine (ibid.) claims as one of the advantages that "depending on the circumstances, it can be done with minimal effort". Here my comments would be that this effort is relative: firstly, we must understand the possible circumstantial difficulties of the survey if we want to get proper material; secondly, the interviewees' efforts in filling in the survey might be greater than answering questions raised in 'live' communication (although structured e-surveys enable relatively easy statistical analysis).

Collecting of school lore riddles using interviews (2015)

Collecting school lore began with my research on the use of folklore riddles among schoolchildren in 2015 (it was not supported by the Ministry of Education or by the Institute of Education). At the time, I conducted limited research in three primary schools in Ljubljana. The interviewed children were from 8 to 15 years old (3rd–9th grade). The children's names were not taken, rather their ages, genders and schools were recorded, meaning that anonymity was considered total. At the time contacting parents was not necessary for such fieldwork, although a teacher was present throughout the process.

Interviews were conducted in class, with all children from that class attending. Collecting was structured as an artificially triggered folklore event. The children were seated in a kind of circle (informally on tables and chairs); my short introduction led them to understand what I would like to hear from them, and I then asked them about the riddles that they tell each other. I soon realised that asking children about riddles would not get me very far, so I asked instead about jokes that start with a question (i.e., joking questions). At that moment one riddle or joke led to another, one joke reminded other children of another. These primary school children were a very rich source of joking material and the collection gained 303 different joking questions and 3 true riddles (and even these were told as jokes, for example "What is dirty when it is white? The blackboard). The fieldwork not only produced material, but also showed the contemporary evolution of the genre, i.e., the most productive form of folklore riddle is the joking question, while the true riddle is mainly considered authorial (Babič 2021). It was also clear that younger children (somewhere up to 10 years old) mainly asked nonsense questions and told Little Johnny jokes, while older children asked joking questions either about their siblings or about physical issues (a dying brother, periods, etc.). They also told Little Johnny jokes or jokes that are also found among adults, i.e., jokes about blondes or gender in general and ethnic jokes.

One interesting joke was told by a 10-year-old boy on the topic on holocaust ("Hitler and a Jew play chess in the gas chamber – who is going to win? The Jew, because he has the home advantage"). Obviously, this joking question represents a subject from among the adult topics. It was obvious that none of the children, not even the boy telling the joke, got the punchline; the joke was heard from adults and passed on as a kind of nonsense question. Children laughed for the sake of laughing, but to them the answer was nonsensical. This case shows on the one hand the circulation of material between generations, and on the other the re-purposing of a unit in a very different context.

Collecting school lore using the e-questionnaire (2018/2019)

In the 2018/2019 school year the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU decided on a more ambitious programme of collecting school lore. The wish was to survey all Slovenian ethnic areas among different age groups from 10 (when children are supposed to be capable of independently completing a survey) to 19 (when students finish high school education). The main goal was to get as many contemporary school lore units as possible using an approach from within the students' known world, i.e., the known technology of the Internet,

using an online form. The survey was put online in as simple form as possible using Google Forms, with open questions asked such that the children could give as short an answer as possible (according to experience, longer answers discourage children from engaging with surveys). Although folklorists really appreciate long answers and descriptions, we had to acknowledge that these are more possible in live conversation, where the role of the folklorist is to guide the discussion. Surveys use fixed questions, and the structured input of the interviewee is greater in that they transcribe the answers, inevitably leading to input in order to structure, and perhaps even in some way censor the answers. Such a process might also take much more energy than a live discussion. Considering that the survey was online, there was a strong argument to make it even quicker to complete.

The Ministry of Education and Sport and the Institute of Education refused to support the collecting action, leading us to approach children using the snowball method via their parents. An e-mail with an attached link to the survey was sent to Slovenian primary and high schools with a request to forward the survey to parents, who would pass it on to children. The survey was also sent to our friends and colleagues with the request that their children complete the survey. The reason that parents were the first to receive the survey was ethical issues and the GDPR restrictions: children could not be contacted directly, only via their parents. The survey was anonymous with only gender, year of birth, residence, and school level (primary school and high school, the latter being divided into high school occupational profile and gymnasium as a general high school programme) noted. The data was used only for the analytical categorisation of the material. The ethics issue was not officially systematically solved, i.e., it was not attached to the survey. Consent related to the e-survey would be another bureaucratic step that would probably have discouraged most children. Parents were supposed to give the survey to their children if they consented to their participation.

ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

The survey produced poor results, with only 68 completed forms. The number was low, but nevertheless, every completed form was like a treasure to us. Forty (58.8%) surveys were completed by women, 28 (41.2%) by men, with most informants coming from Ljubljana and born in 2006. There were 53 (77.9%) completed surveys from primary schools, 6 (8.8%) from high schools, and 9 (13.2%) from gymnasiums.

The survey consisted of 12 questions, some of them included an illustrative example of the material. The following is a summary of the questions and responses.

1. The first question was on the knowledge of riddles and on what occasions riddles were asked. Only a few children wrote a riddle, the most given were short yes/no answers (21 answers, i.e., 31%). The time when children riddle is usually during school breaks and "when they are bored", for example, when travelling in a car. When asked about droodles, only 9 (13.2%) children answered that they know about them, although none were recorded in the survey.

2. The question on proverbs gave more answers with material. The proverbs recorded were some of the best-known in Slovenian. The most common ones recorded were: 'An apple does not fall far from the tree'; 'A donkey goes onto the ice only once'; 'He who digs a hole for another will fall into it himself'. To the question of where the children had heard these proverbs, the answers were home, school, television. The answers included some other maxims such as 'Never regret anything', and 'Expect the unexpected'.

3. Modifications to proverbs and antiproverbs were described as funny proverbs. Most are known antiproverbs, usually used in humorous situations (He who flies low, falls high; He who digs a hole for another is a gravedigger). The children also wrote some new modifications to proverbs, such as 'Better a car on the street than a bike in a garage', which follows the Slovenian proverb pattern of 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'. Among the material were also proper proverbs, such as 'He who keeps his tongue behind his teeth will starve the bread', or sayings like 'First true, second false'. Unfortunately, there is no context of use, only the written units, so it is not possible to reconstruct the humorous part of these written forms.

4. The question on jokes was the most productive in the survey. It resulted in most answers, as well as descriptions and explanations. The time for jokes was when children were bored and during school breaks, as with riddles. Most written jokes were Little Johnny, Pičme and Počme (a word game that ends with physical contact), or nonsense jokes.

5. There were joking answers to normal questions, such as 'What time is it? The same as yesterday at this time of day'. These units are a part of

everyday speech and of humorous communication. Therefore, it is not surprising that the answers included jokes (*Koliko je 100+100? – 200. – Tvoje gate grejo v mesto* (What is 100+100? – 200. – Your pants are going to town)). The written units showed diversity and creativity in the answers, but at the same time it seems that the answers were relatively fixed and therefore can be fully understood as folklore material.

6. The sixth question was on citations from movies that produce language formulas used as short forms in communication between children. The citations are from the best-known Hollywood or Slovenian movies, such as *The Lord of the Rings* (You shall not pass!), *Johnny English* (No, he is mine), *Terminator* (I'll be back), *Star Wars* (May the force be with you); *Kekec* (Good luck, Kekec) *Mi gremo po svoje* (A s' ti tud' not' padu? (Did you also fall into it?)), etc. The answers included some other famous (quasi) citations, such as 'Ta noč ni bila moj dan' (This night is not my day), which was supposed to be by Kliton Bozgo, an Albanian football player who played for Slovenian teams.

   An important note is that citations from foreign movies are usually written and spoken in English (and Bozgo's quasi citation is in Serbo-Croat). Slovenian movies are only quoted in Slovenian. One of the reasons for this is that foreign movies are subtitled rather than dubbed; in addition, foreign-language films bring added value and expressiveness in their brevity – it seems that saying it in the original adds to the theatricality.

7. The question on swearwords highlighted three different facts: 1) as a folklore genre, swearwords are still under huge (self-)censorship (12 answers, i.e., 17% said that a student does not use swearwords); 2) swearwords are mainly in three languages, i.e., English (shit, fuck), Serbo-Croat (jebem ti mater), and Slovenian (pizda) (there were also a few examples from Italian (porka madona); 3) most contemporary swearwords are from sexual lexis. The children also sued euphemisms as swearwords (jebelacesta, pipo baudo, porkiš).

8. With the question on nightmares we tried to touch upon universal children's fears. The nightmares described related to forgotten homework, freezing in front of the whole class, killers, etc. Among children's fears were spiders, snakes, witches, darkness, ghosts, demons, all of which are quite universal. The only exceptions in the collected material seem

to be clowns and serial killers, as portrayed in horror movies, i.e., from contemporary media.

9. The question on urban horror legends aimed to track urban stories. The children did not write the stories; generally, they answered that they either did not know any or they just used key words to describe the main plot: a fire starter, a person kidnapping children, two men threatening children, a neighbour who killed her husband and burned him in her stove. The question was not fruitful because of the elliptical answers: the key words gave us an idea of the stories, although they did not collect any of the stories themselves.

10. The question on superstition showed a very low rate of superstition among the children. The superstitions they did describe are quite general cultural ones (a black cat crossing the street, Friday 13th); some described their lucky objects, like necklaces, amulets, etc. Children also included some pre-bedtime rituals in their answers to this question, like going to the bathroom.

11. The answers to the question on hobbies that tried to identify the contemporary concept of hobbies showed that children today generally associate hobbies with institutional activities (music school, dances, sport, etc.). None of the children said that they had hobbies like collecting stamps, stickers, or napkins, reading, board games, etc. Although we did not receive answers about non-institutional hobbies, we still know that they exist. Nevertheless, it is obvious that hobbies are understood as structured free time activities rather than as having an intense interest in something that is realised in the child's free time.

12. The last question tried to understand festivity in the family circle and in the children's lives in general and how it influences their relationships; the answers generally spoke about birthdays, Christmas, New Year, Easter. Christmas and Easter were described as family holidays, while birthdays and New Year were also celebrated among friends. The rituals were not described in detail; rather culinary data was given, such as for birthday, Christmas, and Easter dishes.

Ultimately the survey was partly successful: not only did few answers come back, but it was also obvious that the questions were weak. Although at first sight it might seem that collecting folklore material using a survey is easier

(Fine 1999), it transpires that a survey is actually a slippery road. A survey can be sent to a wider public, but good answers are not guaranteed. Already the first question on riddles showed that participants were giving answers with as little effort as possible. In addition to that, the trend with other answers was that they were short, even elliptical. Part of the reason was probably also that completing the survey was not encouraged by teachers or other mentors, meaning that encouragement to write more and give better answers was also not present. Despite the fact that most of the material in the archive was collected as the disappearing narratives of our ancestors, only contemporary material was collected from schoolchildren in 2015 with the fieldwork on riddles in schools and with the survey mentioned above. Therefore, they both present a novelty in Slovenian folklore studies. Both methods of collecting showed some changes in the use and function(ing) of children's folklore in society. Riddling in Slovenian is not a popular activity, and therefore riddles started to change their function to become more humorous. Joking questions prevail also among the school population, with the punchline gaining an important position in this communication. This also becomes obvious in the section on joking answers, and humour is noticeable in modifications to proverbs that support more sleep or greater inactivity. Written jokes are in many cases linked with school life, such as jokes about Little Johnny, and quite often also jokes about blondes, Chuck Norris, and among younger schoolchildren nonsense jokes. These units are mainly used during school breaks or in moments when children are bored.

The question on swearwords showed that these units are still borderline obscene school lore, and the options to collect them were limited (Fine 1999: 124), although the survey was anonymous and not ethically unacceptable. The importance of self-censorship was obviously high, while on the other hand the survey showed that children know swearwords in the same manner as adults.

Citations from movies showed the importance of the media in language and folklore creation – some citations have become so generally used that they are on the way to becoming part of folklore material despite the source being known. The influence of the media is also shown through the question about fears: murderers and clowns from horror movies are feared images. Otherwise fears seem to be universal: insects, snakes, paranormal phenomena, etc. However, superstition does not seem to be very active among schoolchildren despite some adopting rituals and amulets in everyday life.

Questions about hobbies and family festivals offered some particular pictures: hobbies are conceptually linked with institutional activities and education, while free time activities were rarely mentioned (skating, reading books, collecting objects, baking, wood carving, hanging out with friends, etc.). Festivities are also an important part of schoolchildren's lore with mainly birthdays

(with friends and cake), New Year, Christmas, and Easter being celebrated. The last two are exclusively family festivals while in addition to birthdays New Year is also celebrated with friends.

Unfortunately, the response to the request to send memes and droodles to the Institute's e-mail address was very poor. We received only five memes. This can be explained by a lack of mentoring: children and youngsters by themselves will not send this material in. There was also no reward for sending this material, as in, for example, the Estonian case of collecting school lore (Voolaid 2007), meaning that motivation was extremely low. It seems that the only way to get school e-lore is to follow the children's social media accounts (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) in order to see the published memes, jokes, and responses. The amount of material there would probably be uncontrollable, although on the other hand, as these are considered public spaces, the issue of ethics would be less important.

CONCLUSION

Folklore material became of interest in the period of historical romanticism and with it also the collecting of the material stemming from the background wish to preserve folk knowledge and show the aesthetic value of folk art. The main focus was on material from elderly people – material that is being lost with the dying of the generations. With the industrial revolution, children became separated from the working world and gradually accrued more and more markers as a distinct subcultural group (Sutton-Smith 1999: 19; Turk Niskač 2021), giving rise to McMahon and Sutton-Smith's statement that childhood became more verbal as "an outcome of their own sociolinguistic training" as well as "a response also to the greater importance of these kinds of materials in modern childhood" (McMahon & Sutton-Smith 1999: 296). This is why the trend of collecting children's folklore focuses on the verbal level in general (favouring collecting texts over rituals or activities).

Contemporary collecting focuses more on the material that lives among schoolchildren today. Folklorists try to record units that circulate among schoolchildren. The material is termed school lore, a term that narrows the material down to place and age. The contemporary collecting of school lore raises many questions about the approach, as well as the limits of approach: when would we like schoolchildren to speak up; would it be better that they are in a group; is it better to work with them individually; is it better to have a personal approach and observe the situation, or would we get more and better material if the children are behind a 'wall' of anonymity provided by a survey; would

a printed survey give better results than an e-survey? Neither the Slovenian survey nor this article gives answers to these questions. For sure a multimodal approach is the best, but then folklorists should limit collecting to smaller places. Nevertheless, all approaches demand careful thought on the structure of questions, considering the age of the interviewees and acceptable ethical approaches to collecting.

In collecting school lore we must consider that the rhetoric of children is as "relatively passive experimental subjects who learn how to relate their peers and their teachers, they go through physical, emotional, intellectual growth and become adolescents" (Sutton-Smith 1999: 4). In this sense, we must acknowledge that certain material is typical for certain ages (for example, nonsense riddles among children around 8–10 years old). If we want to record this material, children should get the chance to talk about their world (Stanonik 1984), and not only about traditionally perceived folklore genres. To approach them, researchers must ensure that children understand the questions asked of them, especially if there is no mentoring when completing the survey. This problem was exposed in the Slovenian case, where a lack of encouragement resulted in short elliptical answers.

Another question that is always raised regarding collecting children's lore is ethics, which was encountered in the interviews and in giving out the survey – the question of consent to use the material as well as the use of personal data. In Slovenia the laws on this topic are strict, and the GDPR restrictions limit ethnographic work. On the other hand parents must be informed about collecting, which for e-surveys presents an extra obstacle.

Collecting such material has been successful in some countries (Voolaid 2007, 2012; Hiiemäe 2018) and has yielded plenty of units that folklorists can use to interpret the picture of their conceptualisation, although in our case we cannot talk about success here. In Slovenia collaborating with schools has never given any good results. The answers to the question 'why' would be probably various and not very simple. This illustrates not only the unsupportive manner of most schools but is also a reflexion of the social attitude towards (intangible) heritage. During the socialist period it was not cherished because of the emphasis on progress and industry, degrading the rural world. This is a situation that is reflected in contemporary attitudes, with some folklore officially recognised as 'national treasure', while in general people rarely think of it in this manner. This is why most teachers see no point in collecting crumbs from the world of children, despite the fact that school lore shows us a great deal about society, permanence, progress, and children's way of thinking.

In conclusion, my remark on the Slovenian case would be that we must simply try harder, or even in a different way, to better survey children's folklore

(even if we receive no support from the Ministry, the Institute of Education, or schools). With the developments in the contemporary world of folkloristics we will have to find a new methodological approach to collecting. The old methods seem to bring older units, while most of the contemporary units are to be collected differently, including on the Internet. At the same time, it seems that group interviews give the best results in the current context. Surveys seem to be an easier way to reach a wider public, but it became obvious that the results were poor when using surveys to collect school lore without mentors to encourage children to complete the surveys. Considering the Internet and children's lore, the problem of unavailability became huge: with all the internet communicating platforms and closed groups, most material goes by unnoticed by adults, and nor do folklorists have access to it (or access is strictly limited). The question that arises is how to make this material available.

One way or another we should continue collecting contemporary material, because in 20 years' time every unit could be a treasure for research.

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NOTES

[1] The Commission of Slovenian Ethnology was established in 1947. In 1951 it was reorganised into the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology. Both bodies were established under the Yugoslavian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

[2] See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32002L0058, last accessed on 3 May 2022.

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PLAY AND FOLKLORE IN CHILDREN'S PEER CULTURES

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Abstract: This article examines children's creative production of and participation in a shared peer culture. Focusing on material on preschool children's use of counting-out rhymes, faecal humour, and word play gathered in two Slovenian kindergartens by means of participant observation and video ethnography, the article demonstrates the importance of social participation in peer groups from an early age and the alliances, conflicts, and power hierarchies involved. Focusing on how children create and participate in children's culture through interaction with other children in a peer group, ethnographic material is complemented by archival material on children's folklore in Slovenia. By bringing together folkloristics and anthropological and sociological studies of children and childhoods, this article aims to bridge the gap between these disciplines to gain a more nuanced understanding of children's worlds, and the role children's folklore plays in the creation of and participation in children's peer cultures.

Keywords: children's folklore, children's peer cultures, children's play, counting-out rhymes, faecal humour, word play

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Iona and Peter Opie (1959) took to the streets and playgrounds to observe and investigate children's day-to-day activities, routines, games, and other cultural forms that are reproduced without adult intervention, ethnography has gained pronounced influence in the sphere of understanding children's lives. Slovene folklorists have extensively documented children's folklore, typically

focusing on songs, games, riddles, jeers, and other short forms (e.g., Kuret 1979; Stanonik 1984; Terseglav 2006). A great deal of material was collected by means of interviews with adults and their childhood memories. Further material was obtained through the analysis of various secondary sources (e.g., archives, diaries, autobiographies, ethnographic reports) (Ramšak 2007: 33). In the 1980s, Marija Stanonik began to gather children's folklore with the help of school newsletters, after-school clubs, children's magazines (e.g. *Pionirski list*), and popular-scientific magazines for children (e.g. *Pionir*). She collected various types of oral folklore forms, local names, anecdotes, poems, counting-out rhymes, teasers, etc., and published them in edited and annotated form (Stanonik 1995). Furthermore, Saša Babič collected riddles during her field research at several schools (S. Babič, personal communication; see also Babič 2015; 2020).

Yet, rarely did researchers in Slovenia go beyond collecting and analysing the material, and little research has applied ethnographic methods to observing children's interactions in their natural environment. This has left Slovene folkloristics with raw material providing no or very little contextual background. Thus, children's creative production of, and participation in a shared peer culture in which documented folklore units have been used has remained at the margins of researchers' interests. With our background in folkloristics and anthropological and sociological studies of children and childhoods, this article aims to bridge the gap between these disciplines to gain a more nuanced understanding of children's worlds and the role children's folklore plays in the creation of and participation in children's peer cultures. We will focus on how preschool children create and participate in children's peer culture by interacting with other children in a peer group, and then examine the implications of this insight for the wider studies of children's folklore. The material gathered through the ethnographic observation of preschool children illustrates how children invent their own forms of play, which differ from children's folklore documented by Slovene folklorists. This might be due to age discrepancy as folklorists analysing children's folklore usually focus on slightly older children. However, by combining our data, we aim to point to social participation and intersubjective meaning-making as the foundations of children's peer cultures within which children's folklore also emerges. Furthermore, we are referring to other ethnographic studies conducted with older (i.e., primary school) children, which point to the interconnectedness of social participation, peer cultures, play, and folklore. The aforementioned Iona and Peter Opie have described and recorded the lives of children in a playground as it was actually happening (e.g., Opie 1993). Brian Sutton-Smith studied the evolving children's traditions in New Zealand (1959), just as John McDowell (1979) collected and analysed how

children learn about different levels of social, textual, structural, and factual order and disorder through riddles. Following this tradition, Anna Beresin (2010) observed children at recess, interviewed them, audio- and videotaped them, and documented their spontaneous storytelling, gametelling,[1] playground art, and play, as well as children's physical struggle for autonomy within adult control, children's stress and its adult misperceptions. Beresin analysed the consequences of an increase in adult control and commercially sponsored play, as well as a decrease in children's playtime and freedom of movement, and documented what children do with play as a culture of expression as they learn to function in their society (see also Beresin 2013). Julie Delalande (2001; 2003) also observed children in kindergarten and school playgrounds and went beyond collecting the games children play and stories they tell by analysing children's cultures as a micro-society that allows children to acquire what is socially and culturally important for participation in a group. The importance of ethnography and observing children interacting with other children in peer groups for understanding children's lives was also emphasised by Marjorie Harness Goodwin, who conducted a close ethnographic analysis of language practises used by schoolchildren to show how they construct their social worlds through everyday conversational interactions (2006; 2017).

METHODOLOGY

In the analysis of selected data, this article combines the approaches of folkloristics and anthropology of childhood. The fieldwork data was derived from Barbara Turk Niskač's doctoral dissertation, which involved ethnographic research in two Slovene public kindergartens with children aged two to six, in the years 2010, 2011, and 2013. She employed the following methods: participant observation in kindergartens, video ethnography (a total of 660 minutes of daily occurrences in kindergartens were filmed), semi-structured interviews with educators, parents and grandparents, participatory photography, and photo elicitation interviews with parents, educators, and children aged three and over. Although her original study focused on the interconnectedness of play, work, and learning in early childhood (see Turk Niskač 2021), the current study necessitated that we re-read the materials gathered through participant observation and video ethnography in kindergartens. Such secondary analysis has become commonplace, serving to re-examine previously collected data "to explore new questions or use different analysis strategies that were not a part of the primary analysis" (Ruggiano & Perry 2019: 82). Data collected through semi-structured interviews and participatory photography focused specifically

on children's play and participation in work in family and kindergarten settings and are not presented in this article.

The material from kindergartens will be supplemented with the analysis of folklore materials, such as counting-out rhymes, faecal humour, play formulas, and word play, which Katarina Šrimpf Vendramin gathered in the archives of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), in publications by different collectors, internet sources, and through personal observation and communication with the children of the two authors.

SITUATING PLAY AND FOLKLORE WITHIN CHILDREN'S PEER CULTURES

Although peer cultures are often associated with adolescents, children start to create and participate in peer cultures already in preschool. Here, peer culture is understood as "a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro & Eder 1990: 197). In his studies of two-to-five-year-olds, sociologist William Corsaro identified two main themes in children's peer cultures. The first was social participation, since children want to be involved, participate in, and be part of a group. The second is sharing, since "children want to gain control of their lives and they want to share that sense of control with each other" (Corsaro 2003: 37; see also Delalande 2003). Furthermore, ethnographic studies of children's language acquisition have shown that the processes of acquiring language and becoming a competent member of society, or acquiring culture, are deeply intertwined (see Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez 2002; Ochs & Schieffelin 1984). A peer group represents an important context in which children learn language and culture through playing and interacting with each other. Children's folklore is often part of their play and also serves an important function in the context of language and culture acquisition. Its significance in the context of language learning is particularly strongly reflected in multilingual areas, where we can find children's multilingual folklore forms (Pisk & Šrimpf Vendramin 2021).

We understand play as a fundamental way in which humans interact with the world, involving a fictional framework with values and possibilities different from empirical reality. It can also be described as a ritualised process in which not only children, but humans of all ages engage in different ways, for example in the context of religion, sports, and arts. Central to play is imitation, abstraction, and inference – i.e., operations through which humans develop

dispositions and attitudes required of particular modes of being (Schwartzman 1978; Sutton-Smith 1997; Henricks 2009). According to French anthropologist Roberte Hamayon, play consists of two fundamental components: one that lends structure and limitation, metaphors, and another that allows for flexibility, margins or leeway (possibility for unexpected turns, i.e., elements of surprise and diversion) (Hamayon 2016). Besides being inextricably linked to peer-cultures, children's play is also deeply rooted in intersubjective meaning-making (see Turk Niskač 2021).

Children's folklore mirrors adult culture; it includes fragments of various forms of beliefs, rituals, social structures, and technologies, as well as information about the way of life of certain social groups (Bascom 1954: 337). It contains games and texts that adults create *for* children and folklore forms echoing elements such as customs and rituals, which lost their ritual meaning in the lives of adults and made topological transitions to children's folklore (Stanonik 1984: 85; Klobčar 2009: 178). Children incorporate elements from the adult world in their play with creativity that goes beyond simply imitating adults; they incorporate adult activities, transform them, adapt them, mock them, and use them to make sense of the world by imbuing them with their own meanings and interpretations (Corsaro 2003; Montgomery 2009; Hirschfeld 2002). As was noted by American anthropologist Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, "children also create and inhabit their own making, cultures that in significant measure are independent of and distinct from those of the adults with whom they live" (Hirschfeld 2002: 612).

Under the influence of Lev Vigotski, cognitive development came to be understood as a primarily social process "whereby children acquire cognitive skills as a result of interaction with others in culturally defined situations" (Jahoda & Lewis 2015 [1989]: 12).

Children are not simply passive recipients who internalise adult skills and knowledge, and culture is not simply transmitted from one generation to another. Instead, children are actors in the social world and are involved as active and creative participants in the learning process of culture acquisition (Ingold 2007; Corsaro & Rizzo 2008). Here, other children, peers, and siblings are even more important than adults (Delalande 2003). According to William Corsaro, preschool children's production of peer culture marks a major shift in their social development when they recognise that they have the ability to produce their own shared world without direct dependence on adults (2003: 162).

Below, we will present selected ethnographic accounts to gain a better understanding of how children's peer cultures emerge, and what are their possible implications for the study of children's folklore with the focus on faecal humour, counting-out rhymes, and word play.

FAECAL HUMOUR OR FARTLORE

Topics of flatulence, faeces, and other bodily fluids are a pervasive part of folklore (Blank 2010: 62). Thus, faeces and other "dirty" bodily substances are also among popular topics of children's jokes, word play, and their humour more generally (Ackerley 2007; Nwokah & Burnette & Graves 2013: 90; Van der Geest 2016: 127). These topics make children laugh, they are funny because they contain taboo words, words which children are usually not allowed to say or which are associated with inappropriate behaviour (Hauser 2005: 189; Van der Geest 2016: 135). Faecal or toilet humour appears already among preschool children, and as Factor (1988) and Mawter (2005) have stressed, this type of humour is a component of "defiance humour", which is an integral part of children's peer culture. It can be found in the playground (Opie 1993), in sibling interactions (Nwokah & Graves 2009), and in other settings and contexts.

The next video transcript describes how four-year-old girls in a kindergarten,[2] after having finished their creative activity under the guidance of a teacher, started a playful conversation into which they spontaneously incorporated faeces-related and nonsense words:

> Vesna was sitting at the table, finishing her creative activity, Simona was sitting next to her, and Inja was sitting on the floor.
> Inja, who had already finished her creative activity, started a conversation: "And then she pooped and peed on her head."
> Straightaway, Simona continued the conversation: "Yes, and then the girl came, and she looked like this and said yucky, you old hen [laughing]! Then the hen took a bath and they removed it [poop and pee] and then [laughing]…"
> Inja: "What happened then?"
> Simona: "Then she lived happily ever after with *kukica* [made-up word] [laughter]."
> Inja: "And with *bubika* [made-up word], and poop, and vee-vee."
> Simona: "Yes, whoops someone is calling. There's always someone calling me."
> Inja: "Here you go [she hands a toy phone to Simona]."
> Simona pretends that she is having a phone call: "Oh, it's daddy. Hello, daddy. Oh, really? Ooooh [giggles]."
> Simona returns the phone to Inja and says: "Daddy said that he gave birth to such a big baby and he pooped in his pants, and he also gave him vee-vee [covers her mouth with her hands and giggles]."

Inja now pretends to make a phone call: "Mummy, did vee-vee poop on her head? Did poop poop on a head [laughter]? Did vee-vee poop? Or was it poop?"
Simona: "Oh my, Oskar is calling me again [she takes the phone back]."
Inja: "Joškar, Joškar, who pooped?" [Here we can presume that Inja played with the name Oskar and changed it into Joškar. A name Joškar does not exist, although there is a name Joško (male) which resembles the noun 'joška' (female) meaning 'booby'].
Simona: "Oskar! Hello, Oskar [pretends that she is listening to Oskar for a couple of seconds, then laughs]."
Simona makes a wondering facial expression and laughs: "Right now? Really? Oooh. Right now? Ok. Bye [says 'bye' in a funny voice]."
Inja: "What did Oskar say?"
Simona returns the phone to Inja and replies: "That poop peed in his pants, and then vee-vee gave [incomprehensible, both girls giggle, Simona puts her hand over her mouth]."
Inja: "And then?"
Simona: "And then he pooped and peed [laughs]."
Inja: "And what happened next?"
Simona: "He just pooped on my dad's head [laughs]."
Inja: "And then?"
Simona: "And then nothing."
Inja: "Did he poop in vee-vee and in his ass and in…?"
Simona: "Let me see what it is now [she is trying to take the phone from Inja], what does Oskar say now?"
Inja: "No, I will [she does not want to give the phone to Simona, pretends that she is on a phone call]. What? What? Daddy wanted to say something [she hands the phone to Simona]."
The girls continue to play for a little while until Simona suddenly interrupts the play by saying to Inja: "This is a bad word!"
(Video transcript No. 22, 16 May 2013)

Children obviously understood the manners of polite conversation but found amusement in the use of "prohibited" words and subverted social norms in their play.[3] Amusement derived from using prohibited or taboo words also appeared in an online survey on school folklore conducted among Slovenian children during the 2018/19 school year (see Babič 2020). In a question about jokes that children tell each other, the opportunity to rhyme the word "vic" (from German *Witz* meaning 'joke') with words related to excretion, proved so appealing that some answers combined the two:

Povej vic, prdnu je stric.
Say a joke, uncle farted.

Vic, ki ima na riti špic.
Joke that has a spike on the ass.
(Collection of school folklore 2019, ISN ZRC SAZU)

In contrast to linguistic and classical folklore research, which mainly focuses on text, texture, and context, humour research also uses psychological theories to analyse human unconscious and mental processes (needs and fears) manifested in folklore (see Apte 1985; Davies 1998; Oring 2010 [1992]). So a strong presence of scatological humour can be seen as part of the phases children go through while growing up. Faecal folklore or fartlore helps them express psychological shame about the pleasures they experience during excretion at certain developmental stages. By transforming socially undesirable behaviours into allowed or tolerated ones through folklore and play, children can unconsciously satisfy their infantile attraction to their own anal production, which also aids in their stable transition to adulthood (Blank 2010: 72). At a young age, children's scatological humour, whether in verbal or nonverbal forms, generally provides an avenue of satisfying their curiosity about the body and bodily functions, not unlike sexual humour later satisfies their curiosity about external relationships (Apte 1985: 96; Blank 2010: 65).

Multiple forms of children's fartlore were collected in Slovenia, ranging from jokes to counting-out rhymes, jeers or teasers, and word play. One example of a joke from the archives goes:

There was a gentleman who always dreamed about a dwarf coming to him every night and saying to him: Well, now we will pee. And this gentleman went to the doctor and the doctor told him to tell the dwarf not to pee, and then the gentleman did so, but to no avail. Next time, the doctor suggested that he say it more decisively, but again to no avail. Next time, the doctor said to tell the dwarf: we won't pee, we won't pee, we won't pee, but the dwarf said: okay we won't pee, we'll poop. (Collection of school folklore 2019, ISN ZRC SAZU)

Fartlore is also represented in counting-out rhymes (which we will examine more thoroughly separately below). For example, a version of a popular counting-out-rhyme from the archives is adapted to fartlore:

> *Vija vaja pes prdi, starga deda srat tišči, kjer se kupček naredi, tam se šteje en, dva, tri.*
> Vija, vaja dog farts, old man has to shit, where the pile of shit is made, there it is counted one, two, three.
> (Personal archive of Katarina Šrimpf Vendramin)

In the archives, scatological humour is also featured heavily in jeers. However, these were not in the exclusive domain of children. Some jeers, especially those related to friendly teasing, were a part of children's folklore, but their authors and users also included adults (Terseglav 1990: XIV; Šrimpf Vendramin 2019: 96). Examples of such jeers are:

> *Stara baba ropoti, kam'r počene vse smrdi.*
> The old woman is rumbling, wherever she squats everything stinks.
> (Archive ISN ZRC SAZU, ŠZ 6/217, 43)

> *Bistriška sekula se je v hlače pokekala, Bistriška počakala, na dilco kakala.*
> Bistriška sekula [knife] peed in her pants, Bistriška waited, pooped on a board. (Gašperin 2018b: 80)

Apart from taking multiple aforementioned forms such as jokes, counting-out rhymes, and jeers, toilet humour in children's folklore also features in short humorous songs. For example, a well-known Slovenian children's song goes:

> *Gospod in gospa po cesti sta šla, gospod je zavriskau, se u hlače podriskau. Gospa je jokala, ker hlače je prala, gospod pa je kleu, ker hlač ni imeu.*
> A lady and a gentlemen walked down the road, the gentleman screamed and pooped his pants. The lady cried because she washed his pants, and the gentleman cursed because he didn't have pants.
> (Knific 2006: 42)

The next example is an adaptation of a singing song about a sailor who was eaten by a whale. The adaptation begins with the original initial verse and goes like this:

> *Po morju plava kit, ki ima zlo veliko rit, ko pride na sredo morja, se userje do neba. Se krega ljubi bog, k si praska drek od nog, oj, ta presneti kit, ki 'ma tko veliko rit!*

> A whale swims in the sea, and has a very big ass, when it gets to the middle of the sea, it shits itself up to the sky. God grumbles while scraping shit off his feet, oh, that damn whale that has such a big ass!
> (Izštevanke in nagajivke n.d.)

Returning to the material from the ethnographic study in kindergartens, it seems to show that preschool children include scatological themes in their play by chance. This can be seen in the following case. Four four-year-old children shared a table during lunch. Svit started a conversation by saying: "I have a pimple," other children joined in, and the conversation soon revolved around the (im)possibilities of pimple sizes:

> Mia: "Pimples it's little dots and lines."
> Svit: "Yes, tiny, like this."
> Mia: "Yes, they're so tiny."
> Svit: "Yes, they make such a big circle."
> Mia: "So big [shows a circle all over her face]!"
> Svit: "Yes, you can have a back full of pimples."
> Mia: "Yes, the dot is as big as a house [shows with her hands, giggles]."
> Svit: "A pimple as big as…"
> Mia: "The door!"
> Svit: "Like weenie or like poop [all the girls sitting at the table giggle and the conversation shifts away from pimples]."
> (Video transcript No. 18, 23 April 2013)

Like Simona, Inja, and Vesna's discussion of poop and pee above, we suggest that this interaction was not so much about the pimple itself, but rather about finding common ground in social participation. Without determining the rules of the game, children engage in intersubjective meaning-making; they synchronise their conversation around pimples, about the possibilities and impossibilities of their size. Such conversations have a concurrent bonding effect, enhancing the children's belonging to and participation in peer groups. In this respect, humour in children's folklore genres can also be seen as a device for bonding with peers, and laughter is always that of a group, which has social significance; it is always intended for others or to connect with others (Bergson 1977; Stanonik 1984: 87).

COUNTING-OUT RHYMES

As early as the twentieth century, folklorists recognised the meaning and significance of counting-out rhymes in children's social dynamics and play discourse (Tucker 2019: 175). Counting-out rhymes are short, mostly rhythmic texts whose function is to choose someone to play a leading role in the next game, such as playing catch or hide and seek. Some researchers, especially in the nineteenth century, have linked the origin of counting-out rhymes to sacrificial rites, which they believed to have served as devices for sacrifice selection (ibid.).

Counting-out rhymes were supposed to be "magic forms" which, at the time when they still performed their primary function, were not allowed to be changed due to their ritual significance. Once they lost their original function, oral transmission allowed the text to be changed quite freely (Knific 2006: 38). Yet the counting-out rhymes maintained the relative stability of the text structure, as changing the text would result in a different person being chosen. Permanent structure also functions as a mnemonic device, as children, especially preschool children, rely on this permanence to help them with memorising the text (Rubin & Ciobanu & Langston 1997: 421).

Analysis of English counting-out rhymes has shown that literal recall of text cannot be obtained solely by memorisation (Rubin 1995), but memorisation is aided by genre rules / structures that have more limitations. This is called schema-driven recall, where the scheme also includes rhythmic and poetic structure and meaning. The poetics of counting is subtle and exhaustive, most words contain a repetitive sound pattern which is achieved by repeating words, rhyme, or alliteration, and all words that are not included in the meaning are included in one of these poetic processes (Rubin & Ciobanu & Langston 1997: 421). Linguist John Widdowson designated this the alternative of the "three Rs" of children's literary folklore – *rhyme*, *rhythm*, *and repetition* (Bishop 2016).

Changes and variations of texts most often occur in a way that preserves rhymes or does not violate restrictions (Rubin & Ciobanu & Langston 1997: 422). In most counting-out rhymes the sound image, i.e., rhythm and rhyme, is more important than meaning, which is why they can have many textual variants including those that contain foreign language expressions or nonsense words (Pisk & Šrimpf Vendramin 2021), for example:

> *Ekate pekate cukate me, abe fabe domine, ektum pektum tum tum tum, abele fabele dominum.* (Gašperin 2018a: 6)

> *Aj baj kome staj, ije bije kompanije, cimu rakum tikum takum, aj baje ej bumf.* (Sirk 2009: 182)

American folklorist Kenneth S. Goldstein's research showed that children, despite the relative permanence of the genre, adapt otherwise established texts by adding repetitions, new words, and slowing down the pronunciation, in order to choose the person they want (Goldstein 1971; Tucker 2008: 27); the latter was also observed during ethnographic fieldwork in two Slovenian kindergartens.

Here too, children often slowed down the pronunciation, in order to choose the person they wanted, an observation which we will situate in a context of children's social interactions at play – conflict nexus. When four-year-old Lija brought a toy computer to the kindergarten, other children started to quarrel about who would play with it. Lija said, "Whose turn is it? I will check whose turn it is." She then pretended to check data on her toy computer and finally announced whose turn it was to play with it. Another toy, Hana's plush dog, was particularly popular among the girls. A conflict arose when Hana wanted to play with Žana, and Lija wanted to play with Hana (all four years old). Hana resolved the issue by saying: "We can all play together. I decide, who has the dog first because it's mine." Lina soon joined them, and Hana now used a popular counting-out rhyme, "Am bam pet podgan [am bam five rats]", to decide whose turn it was to play with the dog. Children often used counting-out rhymes in such situations, but commonly counted in a way that tailored the result to their liking, which in turn led to new conflicts. Hana's counting-out rhyme should have landed on Žana, but she slowed down her counting in order to point to Lija. Žana did not ignore this and told Hana: "You're rude, you know!" Hana announced that it would be Žana's turn next, after Lija. However, it was Lija's turn to do the counting-out rhyme, and her count landed on Lina. The girls looked at each other in silence for a moment, but then Lija gave the dog to Žana anyway. Lina complained: "Lija, you counted me in." Žana played with the dog for a short time and then started counting-out: "Am bam five rats, four mice, blow in my ear, vija vaja [she pauses for a second] out, Lina." She gave the dog to Lina, who in turn already announced that she would end the count on Inja, which indeed happened. Then Lija tried to persuade Hana that it should be her turn again; this time Hana started negotiating and said she would only end the count on her if she lent her nail polish in exchange. Žana said: "We're in charge, Hana and me. You can also be in charge, Lija. The three of us can be in charge." The girls stood by the wall, waiting for their turn to play with the dog. The girl who got the dog, led it around on a leash for a while, but not for long, and she was already counting who got the dog next. It seemed that the focus of this interaction was not actually on the dog and playing with it, but

on arranging and deciding who would be the next in line and on playing out power hierarchies (determining who is in charge and who decides). The girls continued to play for a while and then started quarrelling again. Hana got mad, she took the dog to her locker in the dressing room, saying, "No, I will never give the dog to anyone again."

Hana was one of the more popular girls, and so of course was her dog. It was not entirely clear whether Hana was popular because she had the dog, or whether the dog was popular because it was Hana's. When children were asked about who they were friends with, two girls named Hana and added that she was their friend because she had a dog. For the purpose of research, children also took pictures at home. One of the girls, Mila, took a picture of her plush dog and told me that its name was Hana. Similarly, Žana took a picture of her plush bear which was also named Hana.

Although friendship and playing out power hierarchy through counting-out rhymes was common among girls, it also occurred among boys in the same kindergarten group of four-year-olds. Birthdays were usually celebrated in kindergarten, children sang a song and made a drawing for the birthday boy or girl, and they in turn brought candy or snacks for the whole group. For Dejan's birthday, the teacher made a cake with fruit and candy and decorated it with three colour palm tree decoration images, which Dejan had brought. Dejan commented that the kids who behaved well would get to take the palm trees home. Several children wanted the palm trees and Dejan finally used the counting-out rhyme "Am bam pet podgan…" to determine who would get them. Yet on this occasion, Dejan too slowed down the counting in order to land on the children he wanted to and gave the palm trees to Vesna, Jernej, and Lija. Živa was offended that she did not get one and went away sulking, while other children tried to convince the chosen children, albeit unsuccessfully, to exchange their palm trees. One of the girls, for example, tried to convince Lija, "Can I have it just for a little bit, I will give it back right away." Finally, a teacher cut these negotiations short, telling the children to put the palm trees away because "they have pointed tips" and she thought them unsafe to play with.

William Corsaro noted that preschool children form friendships based on common play or other common activity and sharing (2003: 69). Five-to-six-year-old children already formed smaller groups of friends, often gender-divided. This was notable also during participant observation in Slovene kindergartens: children formed relationships based on things they had in common, friendships in this context were situational, fluid, and negotiable. Having something in common could mean having similar hair styles, clothes, and accessories such as glasses, as well as participating in joint activities, which included play as well as chores.

When Lija wanted to join Lina and Mia at play, Lina turned her down: "No, you can't [play with us] because you don't have pigtails!" Thus, Lina and Mia had something in common – their hairstyle – while Lija's different hairstyle was the basis for her exclusion from play. Girls in particular defined friendship based on their appearance. When asked why they were friends with certain children, they replied: "Because I find her pretty," "Because she has pigtails," or "Because she has such a nice T-shirt."

Friendships also formed through possession and redistribution or sharing of toys or candy. But objects were not the only currency of social exchange; so were also invitations for playdates at home or birthday parties. Showing, sharing, and retrieving were frequent bases of interaction among children (see also Garvey 1990). Particularly the toys that the children brought from home played an important role in their interactions at play – conflict nexus. These toys were particular objects of desire, which many children wanted to play with; this lent a special authority to the owner who emphasised their dominant position by deciding whose turn it was to play with the toy in question. Thus, children's play also reflects ideas about authority, "status and power between children and their struggle to impose their will on their peers" (Montgomery 2009: 148). This was noted already by Iona and Peter Opie (1969), as well as by Lawrence A. Hirschfeld in his study on using cooties to establish and maintain unequal social relations between children (2002).

WORD PLAY

Human language is one of the most pervasive aspects of social organisation. Every culture has developed a linguistic system that is shared by all of its members and pervades the ways those members interact with one another. By acquiring language, children are simultaneously becoming functioning members of their society (Goldin-Meadow 2006: 353). Word play is an important tool for mastering language. Catherine Garvey distinguished three types of social play with language: "spontaneous rhyming and word play; play with fantasy and nonsense; and play with speech acts and discourse conventions" (1990: 67). She noted that spontaneous rhyming and word play arise from states of mutual attending and desultory conversation when one child starts the word play and other children repeat the leader's words and rhythm.

In the word play observed in kindergartens, it was common for a child to start with a sentence, and for the other children to continue in the same style, repeating the sentence and changing it slightly. For example, at snack time one child said: "I will eat mud", and others followed: "I will eat the flute [pretending

that the hot-dog was a flute]", "I will eat the dinosaur", "I will eat the poison from the snake". All of these activities initiated and maintained social interactions among children. Children liked to repeat the same ritualised actions over time. In this case the repetitive mode of the word play was also accompanied by playing with possibilities and impossibilities. Again, the unspoken rule of the above game was to include in the statement an object which could not be eaten: mud, a flute, a dinosaur, poison from the snake. But children were also very selective and often did not want to respond to their peers' calls for this type of playful interactions and used silencing, ignoring, and direct refusal to decline these calls (see also Schwartzman 1978: 238).

On one occasion during lunch, Nejc and Simon (both 4 years old) sat at the same table. Nejc was persistently trying to initiate conversation with Simon, who simply ignored him. On another occasion Jakob (6 years old) said to Ivan (5 years old): "I will eat a snake", to which Ivan replied: "Stop playing with food, this isn't a snake, this is bread!" As was noted by Garvey (1990: 72):

> *Manipulation of senses is often, except in intent, closely related to outright prevarication and we must presume that, when a child misnames or asserts an obvious untruth and marks it as playful, he has some awareness of the distinction between truth and falsehood.*

A similar word play involved children asking questions. This, too, often occurred among children who were sitting together during mealtime. Four-year-old Aleš, for example, started with a question, "Who wants to go to the swimming pool with me?" and other children at the table all raised their hands and screamed: "Me!" Children do not necessarily take turns in asking questions, as demonstrated in the example where Aleš initiated the game with the first question and maintained his leading role in asking subsequent questions:

> Aleš: "Who wants to go to the seaside with me?"
> Other boys reply and raise their hands: "Me!"
> Oto: "Who wants to go with me… [pauses as he can't remember what to say]"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Aleš: "[finishes Oto's question] … to karate!"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Oto: "No, who wants to go to the cinema with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Aleš: "Who wants to go to karate to fight with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"

> Simon: "Who wants to go to see the dragon with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"

Although here the basic resource in play is language, the form and timing could also mark this example as a ritualised interaction. Through this repetitive ritualised word play, the participants establish and maintain the patterns of exchange, alternating turns, the sequencing of rounds, and precise timing. Such "synchronisation of utterance and pause durations indicates a far greater ability to attend and adapt to a partner's behaviour than has generally been attributed to preschool children" (Garvey 1990: 120). Indeed, play and ritual can be seen as related human processes. They both reflect and sustain social reality and enhance human meaning-making (Hamayon 2016; Clark 2003). Both play and ritual include a capacity for make-believe, symbols, imagination, and ambiguity of meaning that allows room for contradictions, subversions, absurdities, inconsistencies, and illogicalities (Clark 2003: 125).

> *Repetition and repetition with variation have long been recognized as characteristics of early play. They constitute a formative principle in magical incantations and spells, religious chants, cheers for football teams, political rallies, riots, in fact in many events where members of a group must be synchronized to express solidarity.* (Garvey 1990: 120)

From the folkloristic perspective, children enjoy repeating words in rhyme patterns and appealing rhythm that encourages them to start reciting rhymes with their parents and later, when ready, narrate them themselves (Tucker 2019: 176; Freeman Davidson 2006: 35–36). Rhymes are therefore a common linguistic element of children's folklore, which appear in various forms and functions ranging from jokes, counting-out rhymes, jeers and teasers to word games whose sole purpose is entertainment. One such game of rhymes consists of a child asking another to repeat a word they said, and when the word is repeated, the child responds with a rhyme, as for example:

> *Reci miš. Miš. Ti loviš.*
> Say mouse. Mouse. You are chasing.

> *Reci kaj. Kaj? Mačka ima rep nazaj.*
> Say what. What? The cat's tail is backwards.

Because these rhymes are more complex, smaller children often learn them by imitating their older peers, but they design the rhymes to contain humorous themes such as scatological humour used by 10-year-old children as in the below examples.

> *Reci sliva. Sliva. Tvoja rit je lepljiva.*
> Say plum. Plum. Your ass is sticky.
>
> *Reci solata. Solata. Tvoja rit je kosmata.*
> Say salad. Salad. Your ass is hairy.

When we observed children in kindergartens, we noticed that when they were not allowed to talk during meals, they resorted to subtler forms of communication that involved their whole bodies and were often based on imitation. For example, when a six-year-old and a five-year-old sitting at table opposite each other were told to stop talking during the meal, they started to communicate by blinking at each other. Here, imitation is not understood as a passive form of interaction. Instead, it is an active and creative form of establishing and maintaining a relationship (Ingold 2001). Relationships among children were established through play and other joint activities, including chores (for example, clearing tables after meals). In addition, they were often established spontaneously as synchronised activities. For example, while sitting at table waiting for lunch, Matevž (five years old), Nejc (four years old), Andrej (four years old) and Eli (three years old) simultaneously raised their arms and yelled "Hooraah!" Then one of the children said "*Čičke čačke*", and they all started to tap with their hands on the table.

Psychologist Catherine Garvey has said:

> *A ritual is unmistakably play. It exhibits all the descriptive characteristics by which instances of play are recognized. It is apparently enjoyable, performed for its own sake rather than for a goal such as information exchange or the resolution of a disagreement. It is quite spontaneous and engages both partners in precision performances. Rituals are generally based on some other behaviour that could be performed as non-play, like peeking out of the door, exchanging greetings, asking and answering questions and so on. Finally, rituals are very clearly marked as non-literal by their repetition and by their highly controlled rhythmic execution. The message, 'this is play' is emblazoned on the ritual.* (Garvey 1990: 120)

Doing something together, looking for something that connects and establishes a common identity and enhances belonging was at the heart of children's peer cultures. Children also often used strategies of persuasion and bribery when they were trying to persuade other children to let them play with their toys or gain access to some other desirable object: "If you give me [a toy], I will give you a sweet", or "I won't let you use my trampoline". Yet it would be superficial to conclude that children used these strategies only to gain access to the object of desire. The following example demonstrates that it was in fact social relationships that were at the root of their exchange:

> Jernej, Aleš, Oto, and Sven (all four years old) were playing in a corner of the playground, leafing through a book. At first, all the boys browsed the book together, but then Jernej, Aleš, and Sven hid under the table, and there was no more room for Oto. Oto, visibly angry, walked away, sat for a moment, then came back and said, "I won't invite any of you to my birthday party and you won't even get an invitation!" The boys indeed came out from under the table, and Oto immediately invited them to another play corner: "Let's go, there's more space here." But instead, the boys left the book with Oto and went to play with Legos. It was noticeable that Oto did not achieve his desired goal. Looking unhappy, he tried unsuccessfully to at least persuade Jernej to continue browsing the book together: "Jernej, you can look too." The boys ignored him, but he did not give up. A little later, Sven and Jernej started playing with a tennis ball, Oto looked at them and told them: "This isn't a marble. Hey, do you want me not to give you an invitation to my birthday? So you won't come then." Jernej replied: "Yes, we want to come," but Sven said: "I'm not going to invite you to my birthday party either." Immediately after this, the boys began a word play by asking questions:
> Jernej: "Who would like to go to the tractor with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Sven: "Who would like to go to the swimming pool with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Oto: "Who would like to go to the movies with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Sven: "Who would like to go to my birthday party with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Oto: "Who would like to go to the playground with me?"
> Other boys: "Me!"
> Jernej: "Who would like to go fishing with me?"

Other boys: "Me!"
Oto: "Who would like to go play hide-and-seek with me?"
Other boys: "Me!"
Sven: "Who would like to go to the pool with me?"
Other boys: "Me!"

Through this word play, Oto managed to re-connect with other boys and when Sven interrupted the word play by saying "Let's go play hide and seek!" Oto joined them as well.

Thus, word play entailed negotiating inclusion and exclusion from the community (peer group), and ultimately had a bonding effect.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Many of the described interactions from ethnographic accounts happened in in-between places, while waiting for lunch, or in transitions between activities, but also when children were together sitting at table engaged in creative activities, during meals, etc. We hope we have shown the complexity of children's social lives and the amount of labour involved in the maintenance of social participation. Helen Schwartzman noted that in order to be able to participate in shared play, children constantly communicate their intentions to each other and recognise each other's intentions (Schwartzman 1978: 238). For social interactions to be successfully maintained, children have to recognise each other's intentions and coordinate with each other in a shared activity (Tomasello & Carpenter 2007).

We have placed the observed children's interactions at the nexus of play, folklore, and children's peer cultures. According to Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) and Johan Huizinga (2009), play is as much a quest for excitement, uncertainty, and disorder as it is a search for order, control, and cognitive harmony. The vignettes of children's interactions through word play showed how children play with order and disorder, chaos and the cosmos, and explore the limits of what is allowed and actually possible (Sutton-Smith 1997; Huizinga 2009; Henricks 2009).

Play as such inevitably involves subversive acts through which children explore ideas, concepts and actions beyond the norms of society, regardless of whether or not society allows such exploration. In these playful actions rules are undermined, boundaries are explored, and yet the action remains within the rules of play. This was particularly evident in their use of faecal humour.

On the other hand, through these joint activities children also initiate, maintain, and decline social interactions and negotiate their membership in the community of a peer group. This inevitably leads to managing relationships and conflicts, which we observed in the way the children used counting-out rhymes to negotiate power hierarchies and determine who was in charge and in a position to decide for others.

Like folklore reflects the ways of life of the community (Tucker 2008: 7–9), so do children's play and folklore reflect the world of adults, their wider social structures and values. Children apply observations from their daily lives to their play, but they also modify individual elements and lend them their own meanings and interpretations. Ethnographic observation of children's interactions and their use of children's folklore in peer groups thus enables us to gain new insights into the production and participation in children's cultures.

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NOTES

[1] Anna Beresin refers to gametelling as the process by which games emerge as an alternative form of spontaneous storytelling, and analyses the popularity and frequency of games as markers of cultural significance (Beresin 2010: 6).

[2] Pseudonyms are used for all research participants.

[3] Subversion was commonly used in various forms of children's play creating an uncivilised or even primal world that defies the niceties of adult society. For example, teachers in kindergartens did not allow children to play games which included aggression or any kind of weapons. Three boys made Lego guns, but because teachers did not approve of play which included weapons, they found ways to bypass the rules imposed by adults. They used the Lego guns to play that they were firemen and were putting out a fire. They merged the play of putting out the fire with shooting, as their

movements resembled shooting with machine guns. At some point, one of the boys forgot the unspoken rule of the game and said to the other: "Put the gun down!"

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

ISN ZRC SAZU – Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Video transcripts – personal archive of Barbara Turk Niskač
Personal archive of Katarina Šrimpf Vendramin

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CHILDREN AS AGENTS, TARGETS, AND INTERMEDIARIES OF FAMILY HUMOUR

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the humour produced by, aimed at, or referring to children in family communication. It seeks to establish which roles children play in family's humorous communication, and how these roles reflect their agency in the interactions with parents. The research results show that much of family humour is generated by children either consciously or unconsciously. Many of children's idiosyncratic words that provoke laughter when they are originally uttered can go on to form long-standing jokes in family folklore, sometimes losing some of their humorous flavour but still being cherished by adults as children grow up and stop using them.

Plenty of family humour is also generated at children's expense. This aspect of family humour highlights the different power dynamics between children and their parents, some of whom tend to playfully tease their children to a greater extent than they do each other. However, when parents do laugh at one another, children may be mentioned as a point of reference: being compared to a child often means being a target of family humour.

Humorous family folklore does not only assign children the roles of subjects, objects or intermediaries of jokes. It is also used by parents didactically, helps families to bond and can both reinforce and challenge power dynamics in family interactions. Finally, by referring to children metaphorically in family jokes, adults maintain the generalized image of children that exists in popular imagination.

Keywords: agency, children, family, functions, humour

INTRODUCTION

Humour is one of the playful activities that people regularly enjoy as adults. At the same time, humour production and appreciation are important aspects of growing up and cognitive development of children (see, for example, Guo et al. 2017; Bergen 2021), and the particularities of children's and adolescents' humour have long been a topic for academic research (for an overview, see

Zimmermann 2014). Moreover, children can also become a target of humour due to their naïve worldview, incongruous actions or non-conventional speech patterns. Whereas children do not constitute a particular social group, their generalized image in folk imagination is distinct enough to stimulate the creation of jokes on their behalf.

Laughing at and with children is especially prominent in the nuclear family context where children and adults interact closely on a daily basis. Family humour involving children mostly takes the form of conversational joking, but it also includes making practical jokes, sharing humorous personal experience narratives, using well-known catch phrases, telling canned jokes, etc. As contemporary family communication transcends the boundaries of oral interaction and becomes increasingly digitalized (Fiadotava 2020), so does the humour revolving around children. Many parents share humorous memes and other forms of internet humour with their children and accommodate the generic patterns of internet humour to tease their children.

Children's presence in family humorous folklore also manifests itself metaphorically as adults often compare themselves and each other to children. Such comparisons shed light on the representations of children in popular imagination and also contribute to our understanding of jokes made about and by children.

The research question of this paper is to establish which roles children play in family's humorous communication, and how these roles reflect their agency in the interactions with parents. I place the discussion of children's role in family humour within the broader frame of the functions of humour in family communication.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The use of humour by and with children has been a prolific subject of study at least since the 1970s. Among the disciplines that were the first to pay attention to children's humour and have since continued to contribute extensively to its study is developmental psychology. Researchers in this area look at the different types of humour used and preferred by children of different ages, and the general issues of the relations between humour and children's development (see, for example, Honig 1988; Bergen 1998; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass 2010), including their practical applications (McGhee 2013a). Cognitive psychologists outlined different age stages and the types of humour that correlate with them (Zimmermann 2014) and tested them empirically (see, for example, Johnson & Mervis 1997). In the context of the current paper, psychologists' studies are

mostly used to contribute to the general understanding of why some types of humour are produced and appreciated by children while others are not.

There are also various linguistic approaches to children's humour. Semantics focuses on the meaning-making processes that stem from the appreciation of some content as funny (Zimmermann 2014: 124). While examining the content of humour performed by and aimed at children also lies within the scope of this paper, it mostly discusses humour within broader communication settings; thus, it is informed by the pragmatics approach. Pragmatics looks at the ways children's appreciation and interpretation of humour is conditioned by their understanding of the underlying contexts of humour production and performance and not solely by the content of humorous utterance (Schnell 2012; Hoicka 2014). It also provides empirical evidence of how children differentiate between humorous incongruities and genuine mistakes (Hoicka & Gattis 2008) and how the information about a humour producer's character traits (Pexman et al. 2006) and their family relations with the target of humour (Whalen & Doyle & Pexman 2020) impacts humour detection and processing.

A more practical approach is adopted by psychologists, sociologists, and educational scholars who investigate the impact of humour on knowledge and skills acquisition. The importance of humour use to facilitate learning in the educational settings has long been recognized by researchers (see Krogh 1985; Bergen 1992; Bryant & Zillmann 2013 [1988], etc.), including not just formal educational institutions but also learning at home (Lovorn 2008). Humour can be used not only to teach children academic subjects, but also to develop their social competences (Billig 2001: 32) as it generally "contribute[s] to children's social development" (McGhee 2013b: 119). The link between humour use and social competences is also explored in this paper, with a specific emphasis on the humorous potential of folklore both to reinforce and subvert the power dynamics of family interactions.

Whereas psychology, linguistics and social studies have contributed to my analysis of children as subjects and objects of family humour, I mainly approach this issue from a folkloristic perspective. Children's humour has been recognized as an important area of study by folklorists; they have focused on the categorization of its different genres and the interpretation of meanings attributed to them (Bronner 1988: 113–142; Tucker 2008: 26; several contributions in Sutton-Smith et al. 1995), on particular genres within the theoretical frameworks of folklore and humour studies (Voolaid 2016), on the link between humour and identity (Lanclos 2003: 48–83), on the educational potential of children's humorous folklore (Mingazova & Sulteev 2014) and on other topics. Folklorists' studies helped me to map the topical and generic field of children's

humour, as well as to outline several functions humour can potentially have for children.

Alongside these disciplinary approaches, the interdisciplinary field of humour studies has provided plenty of insights that are useful for the study of children's humour. From discussing humorous frames in interaction (Norrick 2004) to exploring the boundaries between humour and aggression (Lockyer & Pickering 2005), humour scholars have provided a conceptual background that can be applied to provide a new perspective on humour in family communication between adults and children. The current paper uses humour scholars' categorizations of the general functions of humour in communication (Meyer 2000) and, in particular, the functions of humour in family communication (Everts 2003). Among the functions of humour that humour scholars have outlined there are several ones that are especially relevant for the interactions between children and parents: creating an in-group solidarity and shared identity, maintaining power relations, marking the borders between a family (or a part of a family) and other people, etc. (Meyer 2000; Everts 2003; Fiadotava 2021).

Many of the scholarly works that created a foundation for this study focus primarily on the humour children produce and share among themselves. Moreover, researchers often paid more attention to the genres of humour with a more or less fixed structure ("canned" jokes, riddles, rhymes, etc.). While acknowledging the conclusions made in the earlier research works, the current study looks at the humour performed by and aimed at children from a slightly different perspective. Firstly, its focus is on family communication that includes both children and adults. Secondly, the analysis is based mostly on the cases of conversational joking, funny personal experience narratives, idiosyncratic family idioms and other fluid genres of family humour. Thirdly, it also takes into account humorous interactions that do not involve the presence of children, but only metaphorical references to them. Such an approach aims at providing a versatile representation of the role of children (and their idealized popular image) in everyday humorous communication in a family setting.

METHODS AND DATA

The data derives from the fieldwork on family humour that I conducted among Belarusian families during my doctoral studies in 2016–2019. The fieldwork consisted of two phases. In 2016–2017 I interviewed 60 couples about their humorous family folklore and their general attitudes towards the use of humour in family communication. Most of the couples that I interviewed lived in Minsk (the capital of Belarus and its largest city) at the time of the research,

but there were also several couples from Mogilev, Brest, Slutsk, and other smaller Belarusian towns, as well as two couples living abroad. The interviews were oral (conducted face-to-face, over Skype/Viber or via telephone) and semi-structured. The questions encouraged my research participants to reflect on the most popular topics and forms of humour that they use in the interactions with their family members, on the practices of teasing and the reactions to them, as well as suggested that they share particular examples of humorous family folklore with me. Whereas my questionnaire included questions about "canned" jokes, most of the data that I collected during the interviews belonged to the realm of conversational humour, humorous practices, funny catchphrases and humorous personal experience narratives.

While such a method of data collection has generated a significant amount of data and allowed for making certain generalisations on Belarusian families' humour (see Fiadotava 2021 for more details), it also became evident that some forms of digital humour are difficult to access via oral interviews. To circumvent this limitation and to supplement my data with the examples of humour that Belarusian families share digitally among themselves, I created an online survey in 2019. The survey received 175 responses which provided me with 260 humorous items as well as comments on the circumstances of their sharing, and the meanings attributed to them in family online communication (see the discussion of the findings in Fiadotava 2020). The pool of the survey participants partly overlapped with the pool of the interviewees as in both cases research participants were recruited via snowball sampling among my friends and the friends of my friends, but due to the fact that the survey was anonymous and asked the participants to submit only their basic demographic data (gender and age), it is impossible to establish to what extent these two sets of research participants coincided with each other.

When I was initially outlining my research design, I was planning to focus exclusively on dyadic traditions (Oring 1984), in particular, on humour between husband and wife. However, as I started conducting interviews, it quickly became obvious that children could not be excluded from humorous family communication, and thus I adopted a broader focus on my data. I amended my interview questions in a way that stimulated my interviewees to also reflect on the humour that they shared with their children, as well as the jokes, teases, and other forms of humour that they made at their children's expense. Moreover, during some of the interviews that took place at my interviewees' homes, children also tried to join in and remind the parents of some family humour, or comment on what the adults were telling me. Even though the children's perspective during my fieldwork was not consistently represented and thus had

only a limited impact on my research findings, the very importance of children in family communication inspired me to explore this issue in more detail.

The data that I collected was subjected to qualitative analysis. I singled out the instances when my interviewees and survey respondents mentioned their children, or children in general, either in their reflections on humour or in the examples they shared. I analysed primarily the content of the examples, but also took into account the family context, as well as the broader social and demographic situation in Belarus. The examples were divided into three categories for the purposes of the analysis: (1) children's humour, i.e., the jokes, witty utterances, humorous behaviour, and funny mistakes made by the children themselves; (2) humour at children's expense, i.e., parents' deliberate attempts to tease or mock their children; (3) using children as a point of reference in humorous family folklore. Whereas the first two categories are partly overlapping (e.g., children can make funny mistakes and then parents start teasing them), this distinction gives an opportunity to provide an overview of children's various degrees of agency in family humour.

CHILDREN'S HUMOUR

As many of my interviewees told me, much of the family humour is generated by children themselves, especially when they are still small. Children's idiosyncratic worldview often transpires in their utterances. Some of these utterances are based on pronunciation mistakes that children make:

> *After I was absent for two days, my son meets me and asks me: "Mom, do you have a paspat?" – "What? A passport? Haven't you recognized me, son?" It turned out he meant "puzzles".* (Female, 33 years old, survey)

Others feature semantic alterations. Children often tend to substitute less familiar words with the more familiar ones in idiomatic expressions or sayings; as a result, the meaning of the expression becomes totally different:

> *When my son was young, he said "vverkh romashkami"* [camomiles over heels] *instead of "vverkh tormashkami"* [head over heels; the original expressions in Russian sound rather similar]*; he still talks this way, I didn't correct him.* (Female, 40 years old, interview)

In other instances, children's utterances might be phonetically and semantically correct, but the context of their use deviates from the conventional norms.

> *If she [little daughter] asks for something, she says "quietly"* [tikhon'ko]*, she thinks it is a magic word, or "just once", "the last time", but she doesn't mean it – the main thing is to get what she is asking for. And she also says "Oh, let's…"* [Nu davaaaaj]*, she thinks it is something that has to be said to achieve the result. "Oh let's, just once" is a typical request.* (Female, 28 years old, interview)

Such errors in early word use (also labelled as "naming errors", "developmental errors", or "incongruent labels"; see Johnson & Mervis 1997) are typical for young children and are incongruous enough for parents to notice them and consider them humorous. They are also similar to the phenomenon that has been labelled as "lapsesuu" ('out of the mouth of a child') in Estonian folklore studies (Põldmäe 1941; Voolaid 2016). As children grow up, some of these weird and funny expressions fall into oblivion, while others become a stable part of family folklore.

In some cases, the humorousness of children's utterances derives from the fact that they transgress the border with aggressiveness. Such transgression would be condemned if it occurred in adults' speech (see discussions on the borderline between humour and aggression in Lockyer & Pickering 2005), but it is amusing when performed by children.

> *My sister-in-law has just come, she lives in Russia. And she says something to my daughter, and she* [the daughter] *replies: "And don't look at me, auntie Alisa* [pseudonym]*, with your such sly and wicked eyes!"* (Male, 61 years old, interview)

> *When I was a small kid* [in the early 1980s, the time of deficit in the USSR] *my father used to take me with him to stand in a queue because people would let him skip the queue. Once there was a queue in a bookstore, but the man who was standing in front of us didn't want to let us skip the queue. … So I asked my father loudly: "If this man dies, will we be able to skip the queue?"* (Female, 36 years old, interview)

Despite the aggressive meaning that can be attributed to these utterances in adult conversations – and, as a result, the adverse reaction they might provoke – in the two cases above the children's utterances were perceived as merely amusing and did not cause negative reaction. This might be due to the fact that these remarks – as well as children's other humorous verbal attacks cited by my research participants – did not contain any swearwords or other taboo expressions, so they were mild enough to be conceptualized as humour.

Children's verbal attacks can be thus compared to a certain extent to court jesters' sarcastic and often unpleasant remarks that were sometimes the only form of criticism acceptable by the ruling class, or to medieval carnivals that provided a temporal suspension from serious everyday reality and opened up discussions that would be impossible otherwise (Bakhtin 1984). Similarly to carnival being a liminal space, and jesters occupying a liminal position in the medieval court hierarchy, children often possess some features of liminal beings (Sherman 1997: 251). On the one hand, it puts them on the margins of the power dynamics of family interactions, but on the other hand, it gives them an opportunity to provide new perspectives even on the most ordinary aspects of everyday life.

Another interesting aspect in the discussion of children's funny utterances is the degree of intentionality of humour in them. In the latter case cited above, my interviewee argued that she did not plan to amuse her father (or other people standing nearby), but rather was genuinely willing to find out whether skipping the queue was possible. However, in other settings children may consciously opt for humorous utterances either to shift the frame of communication from bona fide to humorous one (for the transitions from one frame to another in conversational joking, see Norrick 1993) or to maintain the playfulness of the interaction.

> *The favourite expression of my child (he is almost 8 years old) is "Down with you" (Russian "Tebe kryshka", literally meaning "A lid on you"). I take a lid out of the fridge and suddenly put it against* [his] *back with a bloodthirsty yell: "That's it, down with you" ("Nu vsyo, tebe kryshka!"). He replies immediately: "If you blow a gasket, don't touch the casket" (literally "If you went mad, don't touch the tableware"; the original expression in Russian rhymes: "Lishivshis' rassudku, ne trogaj posudku").* (Female, 36 years old, survey)

The deliberate use of humour by children is an important indicator of their development and it is often one of the few ways available for children to resolve issues and express their concerns (Bronner 1988: 113). Parents often enjoy and encourage children's attempts at humour production, as it brings not only entertainment and pleasant emotions, but also the feeling of closeness between family members. Moreover, the ability to use incongruity humour in early childhood is one of the signs of children's giftedness (Bergen 2014); and as the sense of humour is closely associated with the intelligence (Esterhuyse et al. 2013), parents are even more appreciative of children's use of humour.

Humour also contributes to children's integration into family communication as its equal members. In many cases humour initiated by children is quickly picked up and elaborated on by parents. Co-creation of family humour (on the notion of co-creation of humour, see Norrick 2004) by parents and their children helps to bond families together and establish intimacy in the intergenerational communication (Gibbon 1988; McGhee 2015), but also renegotiate the power relations and in-group belongings within the family. For example, one of my interviewees (male, 31 years old) told me that he humorously appropriated the language of "Qumi-qumi" and other cartoons when speaking to his young son. By sharing the language of cartoons, they exclude the interviewee's wife from their communication; for example, by quoting the line uttered by "Qumi-qumi" characters when in danger, the father can playfully resist the mother's attempts to scold the child. Thus, the conventional power dynamics between parents and children can shift with the help of humour. It gives children an opportunity to enhance their position in family interactions.

Apart from using incongruous speech patterns, children often display non-conventional behaviour that can be considered humorous by their adult family members.

> *One of the recent funny stories happened when he* [little son] *was at the grandparents' place, he managed to forget the keys, then it turned out that he had them, then it turned out that he didn't have them, and then … when I already thought that he lost them, it turned out that he had lost them in his own pocket. But when he found the keys, he came without his backpack.* (Female, 41 years old, interview)

Children's behaviour also elicits humour when children (try to) reverse the power dynamics in the family. For example, while responding to my questions about their family humour, one of my interviewees (female, 66 years old) told me that her 5-year-old granddaughter tried to make her grandfather (the interviewee's husband) quit smoking by blackmailing him that he would never see her again if he continued smoking. Whereas the adults are usually the ones who try to correct children's behaviour, the reverse situation is perceived as incongruous and thus creates fruitful grounds for humour. Moreover, the way the little girl tried to influence her grandfather is also not typical for young children; most likely, she mimicked adults' words which makes the situation even funnier from their point of view.

Similarly to the verbal humorous banter, funny behaviour can be co-created by parents and children. One of my survey respondents (female, 36 years old) shared a photo of her daughter holding oranges in front of her eyes, with a bunch

of bananas on her head and sticking out her tongue. The survey respondent commented that this was a photo of her daughter's and husband's shopping trip; she also mentioned that her husband and their children often make funny photos and videos together.

While much of the humorous flavour of children's incongruous speech and actions is inevitably lost as time passes, and many of the funny words and deeds are quickly forgotten, some of the children's humour forms long-standing jokes in family folklore. Idiosyncratic words and phrases continue to be used by the parents and other adult relatives after the children grow up and abandon them. Even when they do not elicit laughter anymore, they are kept as nostalgic reminders of the times when children were small. They also mark the in-group borders of the family as these words, expressions, and memories are not meaningful for the outsiders. In other words, they perform both the roles of identification and differentiation that are among the most common functions of humour (Meyer 2000).

HUMOUR AT CHILDREN'S EXPENSE

In contrast to the cases described in the previous section, there are also situations when children do not produce humour themselves in family communication. Sometimes they become targets of their parents' and other adults' humour. During my interviews some of my research participants told me that they tend to tease their children playfully to a greater extent than they do each other.

> Wife (44 years old): *We don't tease each other, he* [her husband] *gets offended.*
> Husband (47 years old): *I also don't make any jokes.*
> Wife: *We used to constantly tease Ksyusha* [pseudonym]*, the older daughter. She asked: "What is this white thing in the sky?" And everybody wanted to outdo each other by telling her that it was an explosion, or it was painted by a crazy artist, and she would say philosophically: "Okay, it's a plane." She got offended if someone tried to make fun of her.*

The issue of children's unfavourable reaction to such teasing – usually labelled as "being offended" by their parents – often arose when my interviewees discussed such unilateral teasing. The fact that parents' humour targets their children while the latter cannot effectively joke back reflects different power dynamics and attitudes towards humour between adults and children:

> *Our kid often tells us with a tight-lipped frown: "But I don't have a sense of humour, I do not understand why you are laughing." – "So that's exactly why we are laughing!" Or it can be: "I do not understand your jokes!" – "How cannot you understand, we are just teasing benevolently!" – "No, I am still offended."* (Male, 36 years old, interview)

An important feature of the parent-child interaction that was described above is the meta-comment on the sense of humour per se. The interviewee's daughter does not just fail to understand and appreciate a particular joke (in line with psychologists' findings that more difficult humorous stimuli provide less mirth for children, see Pinderhughes & Zigler 1985); she denies that she has a sense of humour in general, thus rejecting to be included into the family humorous banter. The parents, on the other side, are explicitly stating that the presumed lack of sense of humour is a relevant target for teasing. Given the positive connotation of possessing the sense of humour in contemporary society (Wickberg 1998) such a discussion acquires an important meaning in family communication. Moreover, this interaction shows that the parents and the child have a different understanding of the borderlines between benevolent teasing and serious offence, and of what can belong to the realm of humour in general. This borderline between benevolent and aggressive humour is generally fluid and context-depending (Cann & Zapata & Davis 2009: 456), but it becomes especially crucial in the intergenerational communication between adults and children (Krogh 1985: 295–296). Moreover, different generations might have different and even conflicting ideas about what constitutes "good humour"; humour is sometimes even mentioned alongside other generational identity markers (Zeng & Abidin 2021: 2459).

The example above also illustrates that even if parents do not intend to tease their children, their interactions with children can generate humour unintentionally. In some cases humour might stem from the parents' desire to comfort their children:

> *When I was a child, I always used to look forward to my birthday. And knowing how much I adored this holiday, my parents would tell me that it was my birthday whenever I felt sad. Imagine how surprised I was when I realized I was not 29 years old during my birthday celebration when I was studying in the first grade!* (Female, 18 years old, survey)

Teasing children in family interactions may perform different functions depending on the context of the particular communicative situation – it can be a tool of controlling children's behaviour, or it can be done just for the purpose of

entertainment – but in any case, it instils the feeling of uncertainty in children (Eisenberg 1986). On the other hand, it also initiates children into the adult world of intimate communication which does not always take into account the literal meaning of words, and where insults can in fact signal affection and closeness (Oring 1984).

Not only the funny utterances, behaviour or mistakes of their own children become a part of family's humorous lore and a source of humour at children's expense; some of my interviewees and survey respondents mentioned that they share humorous photos and video clips featuring children that they do not know personally. However, these photos and videos are often connected to the family's personal experiences. For example, one of my survey respondents (female, 42 years old) uploaded a link to a funny video featuring a stubborn and curious toddler continuously trying to reach kitchen appliances despite her grandmother's efforts to stop her. The survey respondent noted that she had shared this link with her family members, and commented that her own child behaved in a similar way when she was small. Another survey respondent (female, 44 years old) uploaded a meme (Fig. 1) and noted that it described their whole life with children:

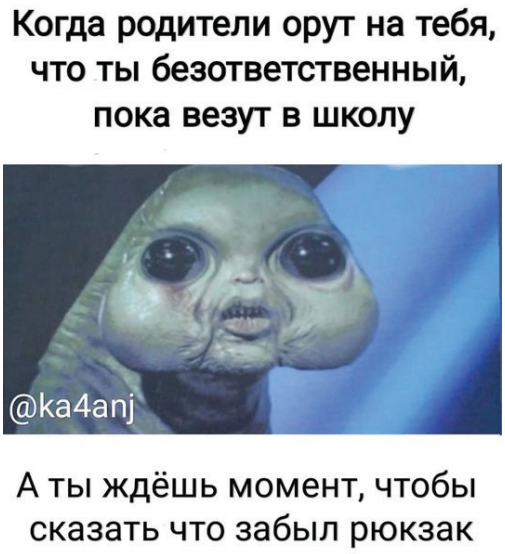

Figure 1. *Source: received via the online survey on 21 May 2019. Upper caption: When parents are yelling at you that you are irresponsible while they are driving you to school. Lower caption: And you are waiting for the [suitable] moment to say that you have forgotten your backpack.*

However, not everyone supported the idea that generic (internet) humour can be used as a suitable reference to a particular family's experiences. One of my survey respondents expressed the following opinion on this matter:

> *I think that every joke is connected to a certain social group. So the humour that revolves around family members will be understood and appreciated only by the members of this family and the friends who know this family. I find a lot of situations that involve my children funny, but similarly funny behaviour of other children rarely evokes my smile.* (Female, 29 years old, survey)

The different levels of abstraction and generalisation that people are willing to adopt in their humour appreciation might signal both the differences in humour tastes (Kuipers 2006) and the idiosyncratic preferences regarding the settings of humour performance. Whereas some people enjoy "canned" jokes and other humour genres aimed at general audiences, others prefer sharing jokes on more personal topics. Similarly, humorous performances in front of large and mostly unfamiliar audiences (for example, stand-up routines or satirical TV shows) may seem appealing to some, while others feel they are too impersonal to resonate with them. Children are thus just one of the variables in this continuum of humour appreciation; but given the prominent role of the family communication – including its humorous side – in people's daily life, and the prominent role of children in family communication, the ways people produce and perceive humour at children's expense are, to a large extent, indicative of their general humorous preferences.

CHILDREN AS A POINT OF REFERENCE IN HUMOUR

Whereas the categories described above focus on the actual children and their role – whether active or passive – in family's humorous interactions, there can also be a less direct way to incorporate children into the realm of family jokelore. For example, adults may tease each other by comparing each other to children:

> *She* [the interviewee's wife] *says: "Cook your meals yourself, why would I cook for you – are you a small kid? My third son?"* (Male, 31 years old, interview)

In the example above, the interviewee's wife not only evokes the general notion of children – through the reference to her husband's inability to cook which is presumably acceptable only for children, but not for adults – but also embeds this reference in the particular context of the family communication as she indirectly mentions their two sons. However, teasing in the form of comparing

each other to children can occur also in the families who do not have their own children, such as the family in the example below:

> *I have a hoodie with ears and quite a lot of toys; that's why my husband always tells me that I'm still a child. And when he starts playing his* [video] *games, I tell him that it looks like he's still a child too. And he replies: "We are a perfect match."* (Female, 25 years old, interview)

Whereas in the first example of this chapter the reference to children was clearly used to underscore the husband's inferiority, in the example above the attitude towards childishness is less straightforward. The fact that the wife has a funny hoodie and toys seems incongruous for the husband, and so does the husband's interest in video games for the wife. But as they both display such childish features, these features may contribute to the harmonious family relationship rather than just serve as an apt target for teasing.

Moreover, comparing each other to children may also be a way to highlight the positive attitude towards life. In a comment on a funny picture uploaded via the survey (Fig. 2), a 28-year-old female respondent wrote that it suits her husband's "childlike humorous" attitude towards life.

Figure 2. *Source: the link to the image was received via the online survey on May 19, 2021 (https://vk.com/wall-26307864_613219?z=photo-26307864_456284204%2Falbum-26307864_00%2Frev). Caption: Today I found a swordfish. Alyosha, 33 years old. The image shows a brand of cookies that was especially popular among Belarusian children in the 1990s (at the time of survey respondent's childhood). The cookie with a long nose (a swordfish) is, however, anomalous and thus provokes humorous reflection. The original text (in Russian) contains the word 'godikov' to refer to Alyosha's age: such a diminutive form is typically used only when referring to young children's age. Alyosha is also a diminutive form of the name Alexey. The use of diminutives alludes to the childlike behaviour of an adult who playfully explores the cookies instead of merely eating them.*

Children appear to be an easily recognizable and powerful metaphor in communication. Folk imagination has a certain generalized image of a child – a somewhat naïve and helpless little human whose main concern is play rather than work. This image can have both positive and negative connotations depending on the context; playfulness is a particularly ambiguous feature that can either allude to the lack of seriousness and responsibility or be associated with lightheartedness and cheerfulness. Humorousness does not manifest itself very prominently in this idealized image: while humour is closely linked to playfulness (see, for example, Bateson & Martin 2013: 103–109), when children are referred to metaphorically, they rarely become a symbol of humour. As the example above illustrates, children can become a reference to a particular kind of humour (naïve and non-threatening), but not the sense of humour per se.

DISCUSSION

By analysing the different ways how children become a part of family's humorous communication – either as humour (co-)creators or its targets or merely its metaphorical references – it is possible to outline the main functions such humour performs in family communication.

Firstly, humour can be used as a didactic tool. In some cases, making a joke, telling a funny story or sharing a humorous meme can be a form of (mild) criticizing, but there are also situations when parents' use of humour is aimed at the development of their children's sense of humour. Due to its entertaining value and attractiveness, humour does not provoke such an adverse reaction as more serious and straightforward methods that parents use to educate their children and influence their behaviour.

Secondly, children's and parents' use of humour helps to establish intimacy in the family. It is particularly evident when humour is co-created by parents and children. By recurrently sharing different forms of humour among themselves, family members contribute to breaching the gap in intergenerational communication as humour can offer alternative ways of communication between generations. If parents and children laugh at the same jokes, this enhances their feeling to belonging to the same in-group, and therefore strengthens the family bonds. While these jokes can be a part of a broader cultural code – such as internet memes or canned jokes – families often endow them with personal significance and use them to refer to their idiosyncratic experiences (cf. Oring 1984: 22–23).

Thirdly, humorous interactions can also result in renegotiating or even reversing the power dynamics in the family. With the help of witty remarks or

humorous behaviour patterns children can have an impact on adult family members. Even if this impact appears negligeable and does not bring long-term consequences, it is still essential for the development of family relations. Family humour can thus be regarded as an important step in children's initiation to adult live. However, humour can also be used to reinforce the intergenerational power dynamics in a family (cf. Everts 2003). As parents ridicule their children's mistakes and make fun of their ignorance (often with didactic intentions, as the previous function has illustrated), they re-establish their own powerful position in the interaction. Even when humour is created by children themselves (for example, by pronouncing some words incorrectly or putting them in an incongruous context), it is their parents' reaction that attributes humorousness to the utterance. The power to decide what is funny and what is not is among the important ways of parents' control over their children, particularly when the latter are still very young. Such a seeming contradiction – that humour can both reinforce and subvert power dynamics – can be explained by the versatility and inherent ambiguity of humour and the possibility to activate its different sides in different communicative contexts.

Finally, family humour revolving around children also helps to maintain cultural metaphors and popular imagination about them. These metaphors transpire both in jokes involving actual children and in the ones that only allude to them. The process is recursive: not only children's (funny) words and deeds influence these metaphors and images, but also the metaphors and images have an impact on how adults perceive children and their humour. Powerless but subversive, naïve but creative, lacking the "adult" sense of humour but being a constant source of jokes – these features are endlessly reflected in many forms of humorous folklore that involves children.

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REPRESENTATIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE MEMES OF THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: HUMOUR AS A COPING AND SELF-DEFENCE STRATEGY

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Abstract: Among the many restrictions implemented at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition from face-to-face learning to distance learning was perhaps the most important one. The article analyses representations on distance learning in humorous memes, highlighting the different perspectives to distance learning – those of students, teachers, and parents. The paper addresses the following research questions: Which local and global features are manifested in the Estonian memes on distance learning? How have students drawn on various cultural resources in these memes (e.g., elements of popular culture known from earlier literature, cinematography, music and elsewhere)? What do the memes tell us about the relationships between children, teens, and parents or between students and teachers? Or, in more general terms, which behavioural patterns related to distance learning are the most prevalent and which are perceived as problems in distance learning during the pandemic or serve as the butts of jokes in memes?

Distance learning memes offer an alternative view on this important form of teaching and learning under the pandemic restrictions, but also on the social aspects of distance learning and the more general crisis in the sphere of education. In my approach to the vernacular reactions to distance learning, I rely on qualitative content analysis. In interpreting the distance learning tradition and its many facets, I revisit the ambivalent trickster character, well-known in folklore and mythology, who could be recognised in the role of a student, a teacher, and a parent in the crisis situation.

Keywords: COVID-19, crisis management, distance learning, home schooling, humour, memes, school lore, visual communication

1. INTRODUCTION

To contain the spread of the novel coronavirus at the beginning of 2020, various restrictions and special measures were imposed in countries all over the world, among the most important of which was transitioning from in-person or face-to-face learning to home schooling and distance learning.[1] During the first wave of the global pandemic, schools in Estonia remained closed from 16 March 2020 until the end of the schoolyear. During the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in early winter 2020, schools had to be closed and distance learning was implemented again. From 14 December to 25 January, all educational establishments – general, vocational, and higher-educational institutions – were closed throughout the country and educational activities were continued remotely, online. Kindergartens and day cares, however, remained open. The restrictions also affected extracurricular education and activities, sports, vocational training, and further education.

Strict nationwide restrictions in educational institutions were reintroduced for the third time on 11 March 2021, and access to contact learning was successively granted to pupils at different school levels from 3 May – initially to primary school children (grades 1–4), the graduating classes (grades 9 and 12), and to students in vocational schools who passed the national examinations in the 2020/2021 school year. Contact learning was also accessible for those learners who needed educational support services and counselling or performed tests. Practical training in vocational schools had to be postponed whenever possible (see Kriis.ee).

The health crisis rapidly turned into an education crisis, and the altered way of life, i.e., distant working and learning and the related aspects, reverberated instantly in folklore on the local and global level, among other things also in the form of internet memes that spread in Estonia (see also Hiiemäe et al. 2021; Kuperjanov 2020). It must be mentioned that multilocal, augmented reality and multiplatform working arrangements are by no means a new phenomenon – in fact, the wide accessibility of online and digital technologies in Estonia had enabled employees to work from home office in a number of institutions also before the pandemic. Distance learning is a form of pedagogical learning that has been practised for a long time and is known to have started in the US in the late nineteenth century, perhaps even before that. In the current pandemic context of Estonian schools, distance learning is a form of learning in which education is performed without the physical co-presence of teachers and learners. An important subcategory of distant learning is online learning, in which studies are carried out fully online, and it was extensively used during the

COVID-19 pandemic. During the emergency lockdown, as schools were closed, educational activities moved from classroom to home.

Despite the wide spread of digital technologies in Estonian work and educational environments already before the pandemic, for younger schoolchildren the situation of distance learning and the substitution of in-person learning with mainly online learning has been rather exceptional. Also, the university lectures and workshops are usually held physically in the classroom, which meant that the reorganisation of studies became necessary. The use of technology both in schools and universities proved to be particularly valuable, but it also created new challenges and inspired different forms of vernacular reactions.

During the pandemic there were discussions in various media outlets regarding the complexity of this method of learning. For example, as far as younger students were concerned, the whole family had to adapt to children studying at home. Families had to schedule daily activities and ensure that children stuck to it; they also had to agree on who and when would help the children in their studies if they failed to study independently. A plethora of questions emerged, for example: How to motivate a child? Where would a parent with poor digital skills find help? What could one do when digitally given home assignments are not completed by due date? Furthermore, some families would struggle with acquiring the technological equipment necessary for distance learning.

Teachers faced issues such as how to teach a subject online so that it would reach every single student or how to test comprehension and ensure that all students participate in the class and think along.

Soon after discussions and the first preliminary studies on the impact of distance learning on students' mental health ensued. The Estonian Youth Mental Health Movement issued a summary of a survey already in April 2020, which highlights five most typical problems:

1. Half of the respondents noticed deterioration in mental health.
2. For many young people, being left alone with their thoughts is at the core of mental issues.
3. Increased screen time related to distance learning and significantly reduced opportunities for hobbies and recreational activities during the pandemic are important factors in damaging mental and physical health.
4. Multifaceted issues related to family and loved ones:
    a. Some perceive the multiplied time spent in close contact with family members and limited alone time as a source of stress. For many, this includes a feeling of being trapped at home, more conflict, and limited opportunities to get support (from mental health professionals or friends) via video or phone calls.

   b. Many young people have become lonely and feel that they have no one to share their concerns with. They wish that they had someone to communicate with; young people living completely alone are at particular risk and often doubt their ability to deal with serious concerns.
5. Quite a major source of stress is the increased academic workload and the fragmentation of tasks and instructions in e-learning across platforms. One of the sources of difficulties is also the lack of a proper learning environment, or the impact of living conditions on learning (Voogla & Purre 2020).

The survey inspires the question as to whether and how these problems are reflected in popular humour about distance learning, which was particularly strongly represented in online memes. Taking the Estonian case as an example, I will highlight the different representations that emerge in the memes: the positions of the student, the teacher, and the parent. I will also explore the local and global features that the memes represent. How have students drawn on cultural resources when making these memes (e.g., elements of popular culture known from earlier literature, cinematography, music, and other important cultural phenomena)? Whether and in which ways do the memes represent, for example, family relations (between children, teens, and parents) and relations at school (between students and teachers)? Which tendencies and behavioural patterns related to distance working are the most prevalent in the memes?

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Humour is a useful tool that helps in dealing with confusing circumstances and adapting to new situations. For example, according to psychoanalytic or relief theories (Spencer 2009 [1911]; Freud 1963 [1905]; Deckers & Buttram 1990), humour serves as a psychological valve to release tension, including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jürgens et al. 2021; Brzozowska & Chłopicki 2021; Fiadotava & Voolaid 2021; Cardama & García-López 2021). In addition, cognitive-behavioural or incongruity theories also come into play, which help to identify the technical inconsistencies and moments of surprise that evoke humour (Attardo 2014). According to the folkloristic interpretation, memes about distance learning can be viewed from the pragmatic perspective – creative memes are an excellent example of the practical outcomes of folklore as a coping facilitator, they can be understood as a manifestation of a kind of defence strategy (on the pragmatics of folklore, see Hiiemäe 2016: 10). In this paper I integrate these

approaches and provide a complex overview of how humour targeting distance learning operated on emotional, cognitive, and pragmatic levels.

While the theoretical approaches discussed above focus primarily on the content of humour, it is also important to take into consideration its formal aspects. In this paper the theoretical basis for exploring the forms of humour is contemporary meme theories, which utilise the concept of meme to signify a certain type of internet humour in the digital era. For a folklorist, an internet meme is a digitally created and digitally shared form of folklore, mostly combining image and text, which represents and allows for the study of attitudes, stereotypes and views or beliefs prevalent in society. Such humour and meme creation thus serves a more significant purpose than mere entertainment. To quote Davis (2008: 554), it unites and helps to bring people together in challenging times, reduces uncertainty, allows group cohesiveness and affiliation, enhances credibility, and helps to communicate feelings.

According to the comprehensive definition formulated by Shifman (2014), memes are a group of digital items sharing common characteristics in content, form and/or stance, which were created with awareness of each other, and were circulated, imitated and/or transformed via the internet by many users. An important characteristic of memes is intertextuality, which lies at the intersection of the medium, people and message (see Laineste & Voolaid 2016: 28), in that they refer to each other but also rely on earlier cultural texts. An image, a sentence or an idea from an earlier context is elevated in a new context, the old is borrowed as is or is only slightly alluded to. Memes can be circulated, copied and/or changed online by multiple users and, in turn, the social media platforms enhance their circulation.

A popular viral internet meme is often a humorous contemporary media form, which evokes particularly strong feelings. Plenty of memes follow the basic templates provided by online meme generators. As humour is an inherently social phenomenon (see Kuipers 2009), thus interactivity in creation and sharing of memes is important, and due to the possibilities provided by social media and digital software, anyone can participate in spreading a meme. Memes can also express social criticism, they can be used to create a sense of community or political protest. Here, memes are used to discuss, in "memeing", the various facets of distance learning that students, teachers, and families were facing in the new situation and are still trying to cope with.

The most suitable tool for analysing the memes and answering the research questions appears to be qualitative content analysis (see Laherand 2008; Lagerspetz 2017) which involves the close reading of the data and its interpretation as a system of interrelated phenomena rather than singular units of expression. In the analysis of vernacular reactions to distance learning, it is vital to have

a complex approach to the memes and their contextual background (i.e., taking into consideration the fact that they are set in the contemporary pandemic period). The qualitative analysis also draws attention to the multimodality of memes (Yus 2019), namely, taking into account that the messages of memes are generated through combining image and text to open up new perspectives. Based on the data analysis, I divide the material into three broad categories, which focus on (1) the student's, (2) the parent's, or (3) the teacher's perspective. At the micro level the focus is on the power relations between these three perspectives, and at the macro level attempts are made to understand the broader social processes that affect the meme creation.

The memes used in this article mostly come from schoolchildren and, as such, are representative of contemporary school lore. In Estonia, this research topic has been partly explored in an earlier article on the representations of school life in the self-made meme sites in three schools in the Tartu region by Mare Kalda and Astrid Tuisk (2019). Memes representing distance learning can be thus categorised as 'school memes' since they interpret and reflect school life. Mare Kalda and Astrid Tuisk (2019: 154) have discussed memes as a certain tool of youth subculture. Memes can be used to play tricks on others, gain the upper hand, infuriate or ridicule others, discuss taboo topics, but they also give their users the chance to reciprocate and express cleverness and wit, even to improve oneself. To cite a source interviewed for this article:

> *Memeing is totally my language. It's actually the language of all teenagers, we send memes to each other all the time. A situation could totally be a meme, a person could totally be a meme – which means that it is funny. People might not even know how they could become a meme, characters of TV series may become memes, but then you can make a meme out of anything – even kids making funny faces.* (Personal interview, girl aged 19, May 2021, EFITA, F33-014-0001)

Thus, memeing appears to be as an important means of expression in today's written social media discourse as are smileys or emoticons (Hougaard & Rathje 2018). Incongruous situations and people who behave in an unconventional manner become the sources of memes; the participants of online chats employ visual memes to ridicule these situations and people and provide commentary on the current events.

In describing and conceptualising the folklore of distance learning related to containing the coronavirus, it is useful to apply the term 'trickster', previously used in folklore studies and mythology (on the origins of the term see Brinton 1868). A trickster is a mythological character who plays tricks and pranks, cun-

ningly fools others, defies conventional behaviour, swindles and is swindled, invents new things, and participates in the creation of a culture or the entire world, "shapes and reshapes the world, performs heroic deeds and is cunning, but can also often act foolishly or wickedly" (Krull 2006: 31). According to Hasso Krull, the pattern of a trickster is highly ambivalent, they stand outside of good and evil, transgress all boundaries, knowingly behave in a wrong way, and are both clever and fools at the same time (Krull 2006: 30–31).

In earlier school humour, the character of a trickster, for example, could be represented by a stereotypical international joke character, an impudent schoolboy Little Johnny (Juku in Estonian). In the pandemic, we all had to adapt to the new situation and often had to solve problems with trickster-like cleverness. In distance learning memes in particular, the trickster figure is an indispensable tool that can be used to describe students' reactions and ways of adaptation to distance learning. The article analyses how this figure is reflected in the meme repertoire discussed here (taking the form of a student, a parent, or a teacher), and how it contributes to the meaning-making and humour production in these memes. Dealing with the situation often required trickster-like cunningness and two-sided behaviour, which can be found in this meme material.

3. DATA SOURCES

The main source of this paper is the meme collection of the academic archives of the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum (EFITA), which during the COVID-19 pandemic has grown by more than 2,000 meme units on various topics (see Kõiva & Voolaid 2020), as well as memes received during the campaign of collecting COVID-19 folklore, which was organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives.

A separate source contains texts associated with a specific context, which were created as an outcome of a specific campaign. Namely, in April 2020, Tartu Variku School made a call to schoolchildren in Tartu to share their experience on distance learning in a city-wide meme competition under the heading "My distance learning", which resulted in 541 memes on the subject. In May 2020, the contributions were handed over to Estonian humour researchers by a youth worker at Tartu Variku School, and the materials are stored in the academic archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. In addition, I browsed through the files on COVID-19 folklore of the Estonian Folklore Archives, which also contained some memes on distance learning. The material collected in the course of the competition is comparable to that collected by means of certain thematic open-ended questionnaires. In folklore studies, creating sources in this manner

is a common practice – previous nationwide campaigns to collect school lore or life histories have been based on topics determined in advance (Voolaid 2007, 2012; Hiiemäe 2018). Similar to folklore studies, where such source creation has introduced terms such as 'thematic writing' and 'thematic narrative' (Apo 1995; Jaago 2018: 5), we can here speak of memes created on a given theme as 'thematic memes' or 'thematic memeing"'.

I have been personally involved in the international research project studying COVID-19 folklore and humour, which resulted in the creation of the International Coronavirus Humour Corpus (about 12,000 memes). The joint project is led by the partnership of Giselinde Kuipers (Leuven Catholic University) and Mark Boukes (University of Amsterdam) and involves researchers from more than 30 countries. In the project's survey questionnaire, which was translated into different languages,[2] people were asked to send jokes, including memes, which circulated among internet users. Since 2021, the global corpus has been available to all the project's participants for comparative research purposes. Whereas most of the data used for this paper comes from Estonian sources, additional comparative material (around 30 memes, most of them in English) from the International Coronavirus Humour Corpus was used to provide an international context.

4. ANALYSIS

The global aspect of Estonian distance learning memes becomes evident already in the meme templates. One of the reasons for such globalisation is a wide range of meme generators and online environments that make it easy for anyone to create, copy, modify and share memes. Users can also make textual or visual enhancements to the meme templates. Meme templates make use of popular elements and characters of pop culture, and are borrowed from well-known animations, TV series, comic books, movies, or other viral sensations popular among the youth. Definitely one of the most popular ones among them is the blank template featuring the Canadian rapper Drake (Figs. 1–3, 37), which allows expressing a pleasant and an unpleasant feeling, activity, situation, etc. Very popular meme templates are also "Running Away Balloon" (Figs. 4–5) and "Distracted Boyfriend". Earlier it has been observed that in the case of humorous internet memes and virals (i.e., the vernacular digital content mostly forwarded without any amendments), users wish to adapt them to the local language and culture, resulting in the intertextuality in the interaction between the local culture and global influences (Laineste & Voolaid 2016: 26).

Quite widely exploited templates are those featuring the motifs and characters of US animated series, such as SpongeBob, the Simpsons, Spiderman, but also various singers, actors, and videogame characters. Highlighting such intertextual references divulges information for describing both global trends and local traditions. At this point, it is worth noting that the visual solutions tend to lack references to texts of Estonian culture. Considering the large number of memes there are only a few, such as the meme drawing on the children's television programme *Buratino tegutseb jälle* (Buratino is at it again; Fig. 6) and a photo in which one may recognise Estonian school textbooks (Fig. 7).

Figures 1–3. *The meme template featuring the Canadian rapper Drake, "Drake Hotline Bling", is one of the popular global meme templates in Estonia.*
1) Send the teacher my homework before the deadline / 5 min before the deadline.
2) Homework / PC gaming.
3) Students in a Zoom class:
camera on, interacting with the teacher and other students;
camera off, mic off and videogames on.

Figures 4–5. *Memes created on the popular template "Running Away Balloon".*
4) Me / Don't have to go to school.
Still have to study / Me / Don't have to go to school.
5) Me / Sleeping till noon,
Zoom classes at 10 in the morning / Me / Sleeping till noon.

Figure 6. *The meme featuring well-known characters from the Estonian children's TV programme* Buratino tegutseb jälle. *Me graduating from high school / My mom graduating from high school.*

Figure 7. *The meme based on Estonian school textbooks. E-school, e-learning, e-government / but what is e-dictation?*[23]

Just as the organisation of studies during distance learning implemented in different countries has many global universal features, also the memes about distance learning share many similarities – they are highly translatable and adaptable across national borders (see, e.g., memes known in Estonia and

Belgium, Figs. 8–9). Bauer (2021: 668) has called distance learning memes a kind of carnivalisation – creating memes subverts the established order and offers release from the tense atmosphere associated with it through humour.

Figure 8. *A meme collected in Belgium.*

Figure 9. *A meme collected in Estonia. School / Distance learning / Corona.*

Figure 10. *The winning meme of the competition "My distance learning".*
*Classmates asking homework answers from me / *Me, who just woke up a minute ago.*

Figure 11. *2nd place in the competition.*
The real reason why the results of so many students have improved: coronavirus pandemic / lockdown / 10 hours of sleep / students' health.

Figure 12. *3rd place.*
Parents waiting for the government to announce that schools will be reopened.

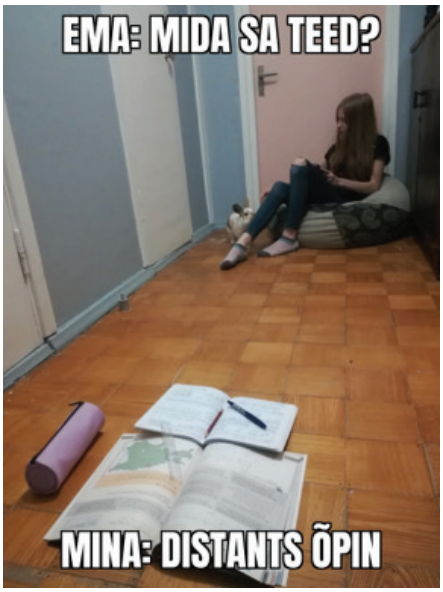

Figure 13. *4th–5th place.*
Mom: What are you doing?
Me: Distance learning.

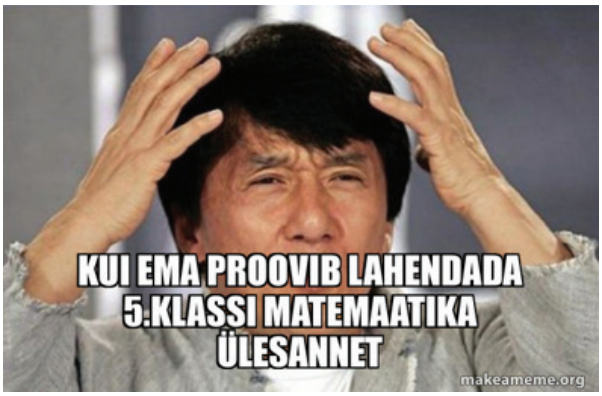

Figure 14. *4th–5th place.*
When your mom is trying to solve a 5th-grade math assignment.

The most popular distance learning memes seem to play on universal visual motifs, such as cat pictures or funny kid face pictures, which are not specific to the pandemic period but are abundant also in other times and on other themes.

4.1 The student's perspective in memes: Student as a go-getter or trickster

The theme assigned to the competition – "My distance learning" – was approached from an egocentric perspective, which is why the majority of the material is written in first person. However, the social network of a student includes classmates, the teacher, parents, and, for example, also pets at home. The winning meme of the competition held at Variku School (Fig. 10) played on this very idea: "Classmates asking homework answers from me. Me, who just woke up a minute ago."

Many memes play on the dilemma between what a student actually prefers to do or does in secret and what needs to be done. This commitment/pleasure dichotomy is not unknown in distance learning, but it is particularly prevalent in visual memes about distance learning and deceiving the teacher has proved particularly easy under the new arrangements of schoolwork. The most often mentioned pleasant things to do are taking a nap and sleeping. During an online class, a student can easily freeze or switch off the camera at home, to make the teacher believe that the student is attending the class but is taking a nap instead (Fig. 15).

Figure 15. *A perfect character to identify oneself with when tricking the teacher during an online class is the trickster character Megamind.*
When you leave a gif/image of yourself in a live Zoom class and take a nap instead.

A student is a trickster-like fraudster, impostor, someone who exploits the situation for their own benefit. An example of this is the blue-skinned humanoid alien Megamind (Fig. 15), a super-intelligent hero known from pop culture, a video game, and a popular animated series. The meme reveals a double life and trickster-like pretence as here the students' real wishes conflict with the expectations of their public responsibilities. In such cases memes allow social

masking (Chirico 2014: 485) to perform roles in order to protect students' private selves and reflect the duality between the public appearance of a person and their real self.

Here certain tendencies or patterns that allow grouping the memes into categories emerge. In the memes, a student is on top of the situation, but at the same time he or she is in a quandary and does not have a clear vision of their own future at the time of crisis, and often lacks information even about a vital thing such as whether schoolwork will take place in the classroom or online. Memes also reflect failures and mishaps of life itself, and the particular misfortunes that may occur during distance learning, for example the situations when technology fails and it is impossible to access an online class. One of students' fears even in face-to-face learning is when a teacher chooses a name from the list for the student to answer the assignment in front of the class. The memes also depict funny mishaps when a student has worked hard to make themselves presentable before an online class only to realise that they have mixed up the time when the class was supposed to start and all the preparations have been in vain. Such humour engages an audience into dialogue in a variety of ways which open up different possible meanings, as well as the contradictions and incongruities witnessed in everyday situations (Clements 2020: 3).

The memes of Estonian schoolchildren demonstrate macaronic language use (e.g., Figs. 16–17, 24, 39), which is significantly influenced by the English language.

Figure 16. *The moment when you have done your schoolwork for 2 hours and realise that you need to do it all over again / I don't want to live on this planet anymore.*

Figure 17. *Online class / Me trying to get in / Let me in / Still me / Let me iiiiiin!*

Figure 18. *The entire class having a heated argument over something / Me who is 10 minutes late for the online class.*

Memes are often built upon the opposition of me vs. others (e.g., teacher, parents, classmates; Figs. 10, 18, 19). The distance learning experienced during the pandemic is polarised against learning before the pandemic, the so-called normal life, the year 2019 with the year 2020 (Figs. 20–21). Such a juxtaposition on different levels also creates a fertile ground for the incongruity needed for humour.

According to a common belief, students prefer not to go to school. However, very many memes indicate that students like to attend school in person and wish that things would be how they used to be. To do what one has just been deprived of is a very human desire.

Memes describe the situation where a student is coping well with home learning but misses the quality that only being physically present at school can offer (Figs. 22–23).

Figure 19. *Thoughts during school / When can I get home? / Thoughts during the lockdown / When can I get to school?*

Figure 20. *How our teachers see distance learning / How we see it.*

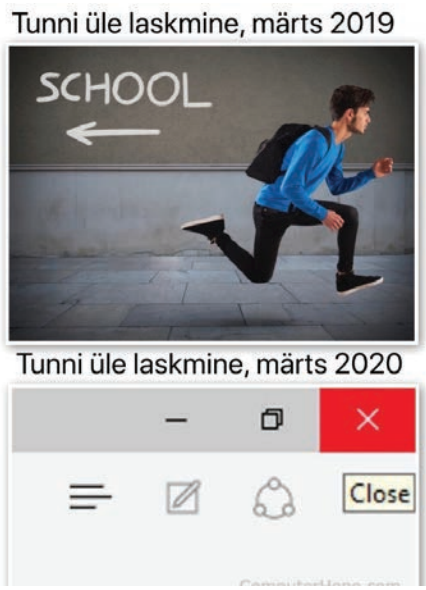

Figure 21. *Skipping class, March 2019 / Skipping class, March 2020.*

Figure 22. *Keeping social distance! #wantbacktoschool.*

Figure 23. *How do you like being away from school? / I don't like it. I want to go back.*

Figure 24. *We have a lot to learn / Change my mind.*

Figure 25. *Me waking up in the morning and looking at e-school app.*

Figure 26. *My face after a long day of distance learning.*

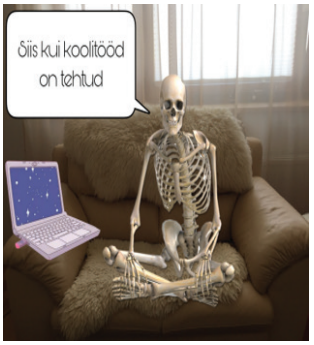

Figure 27. *Once my homework is done.*

Figure 28. *I've done it all! Give me more homework!*

Figure 29. *When you've done all your homework in 2 hours.*

A number of memes involve complaining about having to do too much homework (Figs. 24–25). This corresponds to the survey results discussed above concerning the issues of distance learning, as not all students can manage independent study successfully. At the same time, many might struggle with homework also in a normal situation. The memes also reflect giving up after a long day of distance learning, when schoolwork is finally done, resulting in a figurative collapse, visually expressed, among other things, by a dough face (Fig. 26) or a skeleton (Fig. 27).

Many memes convey an altogether opposite message: there is too little homework to do and the main problems with distance learning are being bored at home, having no interaction with classmates, and missing social gatherings (Figs. 28–29).

Quite a few memes point to more specific issues – for example, the mundane problem of not having a computer for doing homework (Fig. 30) or being alone with your anxieties at night, feeling the fear of not being able to cope (Fig. 31). Both refer to serious social issues that are formulated and expressed in memes, as well as reflect one of the social goals of memes – to provide relief. Moreover, these two memes also point to the fuzziness of the border between the funny and the serious. The sad facial expression of the student who became the character of the meme and the realisation "Me not having a computer during distance learning" indicate that the situation is far from funny and should

rather evoke sympathetic feelings from the recipient of the meme. Or simple factors distracting studying at home – a disobedient younger brother or sister who may affect focus and concentration or cause mischief, such as ruin school supplies (Fig. 32). In the last example humour is the result of a recognition of incongruity followed by its resolution (see Attardo 2014: 383) – the memes offer a simple and humorous solution for the situation: an annoying small sibling needs to be put into a cage.

Many memes also convey the message of distance learning being a pleasant experience. On a positive note, some teachers have been extremely creative in their approach to distance learning. Such is, for example, the playful task given by a PE teacher in a school in Tartu to make a GPS drawing of a specific image by moving along a given route (Fig. 33). Here the potential of humour in education comes to the forefront – it helps to make boring everyday exercises funnier and more pleasant for students.

Figure 30. *Me not having a computer during distance learning.*

Figure 31. *Have I forgotten something? / No, all is good. / What about the graded literature test?*

Figure 32. *A distracting factor during home learning / Problem solved.*

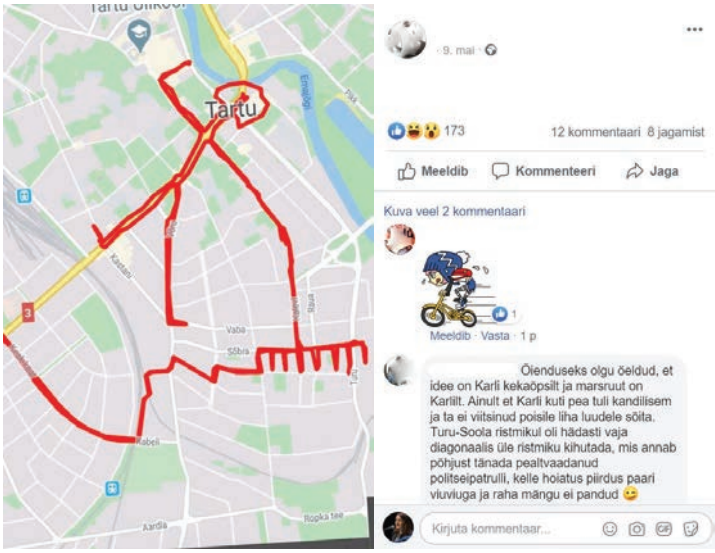

Figure 33. *Playful task given by a PE teacher in a school in Tartu to make a GPS drawing of a specific image by moving along a given route.*

4.2 Parent's role in memes about distance learning

A student's communication environment during distance learning includes parents, especially when the latter are using home office for distance working and often bear a double burden of their own distance working and responsibility for managing household and home life. In the memes submitted to the competition "My distance learning", the parents' perspective is reflected via the students' creative works. Depending on a student's age, studying at home inevitably makes the role of a parent as a supervisor of the child's homework more important, as if a substitute teacher at home. The memes, interestingly, do not imply the existence of cooperation between students and their parents as the parents have assumed an authoritarian role as the organisers of supervision (Figs. 34–35).

Figure 34. *Yes, mom! I've already done my PE homework.*

The parents' social responsibility in the crisis situation of the pandemic is illustrated by a meme (Fig. 37) commenting on closing the Kristiine Gymnasium in Tallinn after one of the schoolchildren was diagnosed with COVID-19 even before the state of emergency was declared (see Vasli & Adamson 2020). The global meme template integrates the two choices that a parent faced: leave the infectious child at home or send him to school. Rapper Drake's smiling sentiment, with the text "Let's send the sick kid to school, because he can't miss school under any circumstances and looks kinda healthy", alludes through irony to the parent's decision which led to the whole school being closed. This particular meme unit is one of the few distance learning memes that is directly linked to a local case.

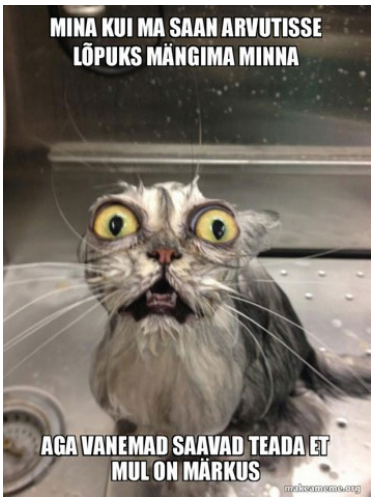

Figure 35. *Me when I can finally start gaming but parents learn about the reprimand I received at school.*

Figure 36. *A mother with three children during distance learning.*

Finally, very many memes convey the idea that parents are fed up with the situation and distance learning may lead to parents discovering a vaccine much sooner than scientists. To some extent, the trickster pattern is transferred to the parents, who have to be equally resourceful in coping with distance learning and protect themselves under the burden of responsibility (Figs. 14, 36).

Figure 37. *Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/Eesti/comments/fekgtt/mis_juhtus_kristiines_tegelikult_parandatud/.*
Parents: Won't send the sick kid to school for he may infect others /
Parents: Let's send the sick kid to school because he can't miss classes and looks kinda healthy.

A widely shared international meme (Fig. 38) also shows how the roles become blended – a parent may simultaneously fulfil the role of a distance learning teacher, a distance student, and a distance worker, and although the parents may be physically present at home, the children must still deal with things and manage on their own.

During the pandemic, even more universal joke motifs about parents were spread in different languages. Parents dissatisfied with the school and teachers' work finally have the opportunity to take on the challenge to become teachers ("Dear parent! If you have ever suggested your child's teacher how she should do her job… NOW is your moment to SHINE!"). The specificity of home schooling was further emphasised by the admonition not to lose self-control during an online class (Message at e-school: "Dear parents! Please be informed that during distance learning children have their cameras and microphones switched on… We keep seeing parents wearing undies in the background!"). In both cases, the meme representing a teacher's appeal to the parents lacks the image, but in these cases images are not essential for understanding the meaning of the message as the verbal text itself fully conveys the idea.

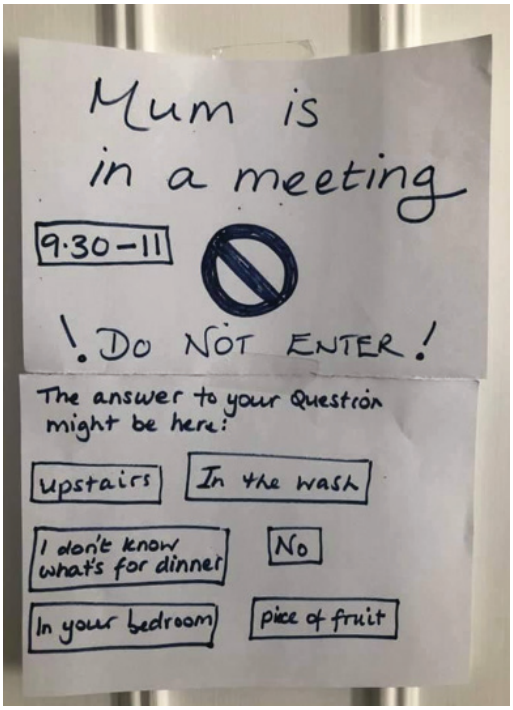

Figure 38. *From the collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives. The same memes circulated in different languages, including Dutch and Estonian.*

4.3 Representations of teachers in memes about distance learning

The memes also depict a teacher who, in most cases, is seriously focused on schoolwork – the one to give assignments and test them, a demanding grade giver and a disciplinarian. This role overlaps with jokes known in previously collected school lore: "Teacher – an animal tamer or a prison guard (1989, RKM II 426, 605), teacher – a restrictor of freedom (1992, RKM, KP 6, 469 (3); see also Voolaid 2004).

A good example here is a meme mixing Estonian and English, featuring US Senator Bernie Sanders as a teacher (Fig. 39). Sanders became a viral meme character in spring 2021 (Kalda 2021) but was highly popular among meme makers already during the first wave of the pandemic. Portraying a teacher in such a humorous manner gives the students the feeling of superiority, which by definition reveals power dynamics and relief, which is instrumental for the individual's well-being and the process of de-stressing (Clements 2020: 17).

Figure 39. *The macaronic or bilingual meme featuring US Senator Bernie Sanders, who became a global meme character in spring 2021.*
Teachers / I am once again asking for your homework.

Figure 40. *A Zoom class with teachers / Reality.*

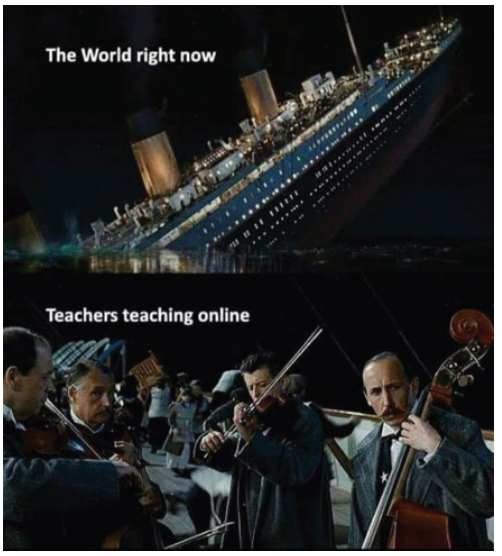

Figure 41. *A meme from France.*

Several memes reveal the teachers' challenging task to always remain inspirational and motivational for the children while they are on the verge of burnout (Fig. 40). A meme created in France, for example, shows a highly popular international motif of the string orchestra that continued to play as the *Titanic* sank, until the violin was flooded with water. This motif lies at the basis of many digital folklore items.

Figure 42. *Distance learning graduates laying bricks.*

Teachers giving online classes perform the same role – they are frontline workers who work until they collapse in the capsizing world. The memes discussed here clearly represent people coping with the new situation – a student as the trickster can be the master of the situation, outwitting the teacher and the parents. At the same time, the parents and teachers are also finding the distance learning, implemented to contain the spread of the coronavirus, as highly challenging, and so they are forced to seek, and manage to find, such trickster-like solutions to organise their children's and students' lives outside of school and class.

5. CONCLUSION

The meme material which has been inspired by distance learning is a fascinating contemporary subject that combines the challenging COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning as a characteristic feature of this period. After all, distance learning has affected the lives of the majority of the society. The Estonian material is largely based on internationally known universal meme templates that have been adapted to the local language and cultural space. When investigating the social networks and universal motifs reflected in the memes, it is important to rely on qualitative content analysis that would also take into account the communicative context of the pandemic era. While COVID-19 virus per se is rarely explicitly mentioned in the memes, they reveal a distorted reflection of various aspects of distance learning that may sometimes coincide with universal stereotypical themes related to school (e.g., willingness/unwillingness to go to school, problems with managing study time, etc.). Stereotyping in these memes also serves as a pragmatic tool for all parties involved so as to mentally simplify the situation. Topical issues arising from distance learning – the lack of necessary technological skills, insufficient technological devices, complexities of organising learning space and working time, confusion caused by unclear messages, and mental or other challenges associated with the new situation – are discussed with humour, which is characteristic of these memes.

An analysis of the perspective of students, who are the main creators, suggests that, as school humour, the funny memes about distance learning represent a form of communication which has offered an alternative and multifaceted perspective on this important method of learning during lockdown. The material suggests that memes can be described as a language ("memeing") in which young people conceptualise their (distance-)learning experience. The egocentric or student-centred perspective that is characteristic of this specific material highlights the general attitudes and shared patterns that are based on oppositions which are typical of youth culture (the common pairs of opposition

being me / classmates, student / teacher, student / parent, and in more general terms, young people / authorities; see Williams & Hannerz 2014) and hyperbole (e.g., too little / too much homework).

The stereotypical roles reflected in the memes can be analysed figuratively via the ambivalent trickster figure, known from earlier folklore studies. Students are shown as cunning go-getters who use memes to discuss uncomfortable issues, mishaps, and problems. Stereotypically, from the students' perspective, teachers and parents are represented as authoritarian supervisors, grade givers, whereas the memes also reflect the human fatigue of the seemingly unfaltering and ever-responsible adults in the complicated pandemic circumstances. This is why memes are a highly important channel for schoolchildren to make their voice and attitudes about the forced distance learning heard, and meme creation thus serves a more important purpose than mere entertainment. Memes about distance learning help to cope with the growing pains of these young people and with different realities, and act as a valve in a crisis to relieve tension. However, these memes also reveal the key point in the education crisis linked to the COVID pandemic: Will this period have a lasting impact on the educational attainment of this generation? How will this period impact the human society in the future? Let us hope that in the times of crisis, education will manage to lay a better foundation than in this internationally spread meme showing what life will be like after the first bricklayers who are distance learning graduates start professional work, and that it would be quite the opposite of the proverb about home-schooling that circulated in spring 2020, stating: "The first grade will surely be thrown behind the fence" (i.e., turn out to be a failure).

Further research could adopt an interdisciplinary perspective towards this material; it could focus in more detail on the language aspects of young people (for example, the use of colloquial expressions in memes). Moreover, a more profound cross-cultural comparison could shed light on the national peculiarities of the data and allow for outlining the global and local features of vernacular reactions to distance learning.

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NOTES

[1] The outbreak of the coronavirus SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19), which started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, reached Estonia on 26 February 2020, when the first infected person was officially diagnosed. From March 12 to May 17 of the same year, Estonia was under a government-induced state of emergency, with special measures imposed to contain the spread of the virus: ban on public congregating, including cultural events, conferences and sports competitions; (educational) work was carried out in the form of home and distant work and study; health checks were in place at country borders; shopping centres, museums, etc. were closed; the so-called 2+2 rule was in force, allowing two people or families move together in public places; and the social distancing of two metres was imposed. (See also the chronology of the COVID-19 pandemic in Estonia, available at https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koroonapandeemia_kronoloogia_Eestis, last accessed on 12 May 2022.)

[2] Available at https://edu.nl/kp8xe, last accessed on 19 May 2022.

[3] E-school is a widely used school management application in Estonia. E-dictation is a countrywide Estonian orthography test held annually on 14 March, Mother Language Day, since 2008.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

EFITA = academic archives of the Department of Folklore, Estonian Literary Museum

RKM = Folklore collection of the Department of Folklore at the Estonian Literary Museum (1945–1994)

RKM, KP = Collection of school lore of the Department of Folklore at the Estonian Literary Museum (1992)

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CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS AND CO-CREATORS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTS: THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN FILMS ON ESTONIAN CHILDREN'S CULTURE IN THE 1950s

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Abstract: This article gives a folkloristic insight into how cinema and films influenced Estonian children's culture in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. During this period, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union. Due to the lack of Soviet film production at that time, the cinemas began to show American, German, and other films of the 1930s, so-called foreign films or trophies. The post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in both themes and images, but also ideals, characters, and soundtrack, became box-office hits. The source material comes from the relevant essays sent to the Estonian Folklore Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum. As memories show, cinema and films had a strong influence on children and young people. Trophy films had an impact on children's culture, and children's games and activities found inspiration in them. Children build the culture of their peers, being both consumers of the culture and creating a culture of their own based on the culture of adults. Adult films helped them to socialise and take part in cultural exchanges.

Keywords: children's culture, interpretative reproduction, post-war period, Soviet cinema, Stalinist Estonia, trophy films, youth culture

> *My trips to the cinema started during the German occupation. There was a war going on. We needed something beautiful, something calming to balance the anxiety and worry. My friend's mother attended church. My mother went to the cinema. … During the Soviet era, my mother used to sew a lot at her desk. We rarely went to the cinema. But when we did, the film had to be staged afterwards as vividly as possible for her by scampering around the room.* (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019))

The passage chosen to open this article aptly illustrates the importance of cinema for children and their parents during and after World War II – even to the extent that the stories seen at the cinema were re-enacted and re-lived through play. In this article I will explore, on the basis of memoirs, the influence cinema had on children's culture. I discuss only the influence of cinema, because even though Estonian Television started broadcasting already in 1955, many families did not have a TV set until much later. Different sources, based on personal experiences, describe games that were inspired by films as well as the trend of collecting photographs of actors. Even though those who reminisce about their experiences preferred watching foreign films that were not about war and fighting, such as the so-called trophy films that were released in the late 1940s, the article also discusses Soviet war films.

THE MEDIA AS A ROLE MODEL AND GUIDE FOR CHILDREN'S GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Children bring characters, plots, and themes seen in the media into their games. Many scenarios find their way into children's games through children's own day-to-day observations and are inspired by the environment and the real world they are familiar with. Children gather and weave together characters, ideas, and themes from other sources too, including their peers and different media channels. The influence of the media is not limited to television: before the arrival of television, games could be fashioned from things heard on the radio or read in books, and prior to that, from the stories told by adults (Kalliala 2006: 52; Opie & Opie 1984: 12, 330). The importance of media influence on children's culture of play has been highlighted by several scholars. It has been established that play scenarios have increasingly moved away from real life; in the past, most characters and ideals in imaginary games were derived from daily life (Vissel 2004: 187; Korkiakangas 1996: 75; Kalliala 2006: 72–73).

Sociologists consider children as active social participants with their own will, interests, and desires. Children create their own unique peer cultures, using influences from the world of adults in innovative and creative ways. Children themselves are active participants in both cultures (Corsaro 2005 [1997]). Researchers investigating children's games and the media do not favour the view that children are merely passive bystanders who are influenced unidirectionally by what they see in the media (Tucker 2008: 111; Kalliala 2006: 52). Kate Willet calls the media-inspired games "remixes", where children mix together different source materials and re-enact them in games that build on their personal cultural knowledge, skills, and desires. She highlights children's role in

the process, arguing that this is how children create new fields of meaning in their remixed culture (Willett 2014: 149).

The influence of the media is not neutral; it is ideologically charged. The media is seen as playing an efficient role in children's socialisation, especially these days when screen media takes up more and more time. Andra Siibak and Kristi Vinter have pointed out that many children form their "sense of self with the help of the media. Through media idols, children experiment with new roles, construct identities and form social relationships with other children. Among other things, the media is seen as a powerful tool in shaping children's gender roles and perceptions" (Siibak & Vinter 2014: 85).

Fantasy games have been interpreted as a direct preparation for roles in adult life. Children learn about gender roles and role-play through their games (Shuffelton 2009: 225; Tucker 2008: 108–112). As such, games function as tools for socialisation, helping children to learn a behaviour that is considered "appropriate" for men and women, as determined by cultural norms (Tucker 2008: 108–112).

The role of the media in modern society is significantly greater than it was in the 1950s. Today, children spend plenty of time on screen media. They are directly targeted by both media products and the toy industry, which commercialises the characters seen in the media in the form of toys (Chudacoff 2007: 161–195). A major difference between the two generations of children is that, while in the twenty-first century the media is used by everyone (including nursery and school-age children), in the past it was exclusive and not as readily accessible (Süss 2007: 783). In the 1950s, however, it became possible for children to go to the cinema and this opportunity was widely exploited.

SOURCES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As materials, I have used entries to the children's games competition organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. 45 individuals of different ages participated in the competition. The contributions not only describe childhood activities, but also give explanations, revealing their background and reflecting on them. The guidelines did not include specific questions about the films or the games based on films. They did, however, ask about the imaginative or fantasy games that the participants themselves had invented. The article draws also on ten contributions from a group of writers on biography and folklore. Members of this group usually write a one- or two-page text at home and then read it to the group, which meets once a month.[1] I will look at stories that deal with the subject "Cinema in my life". The cinema-themed

database on which the article is based consists of the work of 19 people, two of them men, the rest women, all of whom are Estonians and have grown up in Estonia. The birth dates of these contributors range from 1929 to 1953. The authors who grew up in the 1950s are now retired but active people.

The texts are written specifically for competitions or meetings and are based on the writers' first-hand experiences. In the field of folkloristics, such entries, sent specifically for collection competitions, are known as thematic storytelling (Estonian: *teemajutustus*) or thematic writing (Estonian: *teemakirjutus*) (Jaago 2018: 6; Pöysä 2009: 41). A number of personal thematic collections have been organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives in recent years and this has become a common way for acquiring archival material. However, the outcome of these collection competitions or thematic writing events has not been analysed significantly in Estonia.

Descriptions of visits to the cinema, film experiences and film-inspired games and hobbies in childhood form a part of childhood memories. As the thematic writings presented here are based on older people's memories of their childhood, it is important to also consider aspects related to memory and the historical perspective when analysing them. The writing of memoirs is always selective, subjective, and evaluative. Memories can be re-evaluated over the course of a lifetime and are influenced by later events in collective and individual experience. Writing memoirs is a way of processing both the present and the future through the past, where the past is given meaning from the perspective of the present. Memories do not convey the events themselves, but the meanings given to them (Kõresaar 2005; Portelli 2000 [1998]).

Similarly, it is not possible to speak about games and hobbies in terms of their precise descriptions, but of our memories of them. Many games have fallen into oblivion, but this means that there is all the more reason to dwell on games and ways of playing that recur in the works of several authors. One type is the games and activities inspired by films seen at cinemas and recalled by retired writers.

There are many ways to narrate the past, but the focus is always chosen by the writer. The memoirists' failure to place their play experiences in a broader historical and social context is likely caused by the biographical time (childhood) and the way of collecting, as the instructions did not require this. The chosen perspective is that of the child. The memories are presented as much as possible from the point of view of the child – any broader knowledge of the historical and political context is shared to a very limited extent with the imaginary reader. Sometimes people may identify with a group and speak on behalf of an entire group, such as a generation. The depiction of the Soviet era in Estonian memory culture has been one-sided, biographers have viewed it as

a "time of suffering" and the dominant line has been images of "rupture", where Estonian national development has stalled (Aarelaid-Tart 2006; Kõresaar 2005; Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013).

In the twenty-first century, on the basis of the contributions sent in the form of thematic writings, it is particularly valuable to explore the attitudes and views of the writers. It is not possible to establish a coherent picture of the past and the historical truth of an entire generation (Pöysä 2009: 51–52). The focus in this paper is on what these authors have tried to express in their contributions. In order to understand, as a researcher, the children's experiences of the 1950s, I will explore the historical and cultural context of the time. As a research method I will use contextualisation (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 66–72) and William Corsaro's thoughts on the nature of interpretive reproduction of children's culture (Corsaro 2005 [1997]).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The independent Republic of Estonia (1919–1940) was occupied by the Soviet Union in the course of World War II, in 1944. The late Stalinist period (1944–1953) saw the beginning of large-scale social Sovietisation. Ideological pressures in society intensified. The existing economic system was dismantled, the command economy came into force, collective agricultural cooperatives (kolkhozes) were formed, and collectivisation devastated a large part of the rural population. The repression of the Stalinist regime culminated with mass deportations in March 1949. The post-war decade was the heyday of the so-called Forest Brothers movement (Est. *metsavennad*). The large-scale immigration of Russian speakers changed the ethnic and demographic structure of Estonia. There were shortages of both food and other commodities, and the production of staple goods and meeting people's everyday needs were greatly hampered by the prioritisation of heavy industry. Nearly all essentials were hard to come by: groceries, consumer goods, tools, clothes, furniture, etc. People's meals were meagre.

Ideological pressures in society intensified. Literature and art demanded a flattering portrayal and glorification of Soviet society, and the cult of personality was imposed without moderation. Strict censorship and Stalinist propaganda were introduced, Joseph Stalin became the central figure in literature, art, cinema, and theatre. Public information channels were largely employed in the service of communist brainwashing, so that the new Soviet person (Rus. *sovetsky chelovek*) was constantly subjected to propaganda.

The goal of the state authorities of the Soviet Union was to sever ties with the outside world and the period of independence of the Republic of Estonia.

The borders of the Soviet Union were closed; only people with special permits were allowed to go abroad. Foreign newspapers, radio and TV channels were not available; they were blocked. The use of textbooks printed during the Republic of Estonia was prohibited in schools. Political organisations for children and young people were set up, and membership of children's and youth organisations was compulsory (Pajur & Tannberg 2005: 271–288; Mertelsmann 2012; Raun 2001 [1987]: 169–188).

SOVIET CINEMA IN THE 1950s

The first local cinema in Estonia was opened in Tartu in 1908; later cinema houses were built in larger towns. After World War II, travelling cinemas started to operate in the Soviet Union, including Estonia.[2] The travelling cinema sessions took place in community centres, school buildings, kolkhoz centres, and also in the open air. There was great interest, as cinema was not only the most important visual medium before television, but also a "window onto the West" (Mertelsmann 2012: 151). Cinemas were places where the village youth could socialise, as in the post-war decades a film was usually followed by dancing. The showing of films was organised nationally, for a long time by the National Cinema Committee of the ESSR. There were strict regulations as to what could be shown: films, including trophy films, were preceded by a propaganda round-up of Soviet life. Even though there were very few films aimed directly at children and young people, the latter formed a significant and responsive audience. Cinema was available to children in both the city and the countryside because it was cheap or free, and films were shown in the halls of almost every major schoolhouse or community centre.

The Soviet state (most notably Joseph Stalin) had set out to cinematise the entire Soviet empire, whilst hoping that it would also help fill the national treasury. The film production of the Soviet Union was scarce at the time. This is how foreign or trophy films were introduced in cinemas. In Germany, 17,000 feature films were found in the *Reichsfilmarchiv*, which remained in the Soviet zone after Germany's defeat in 1945. Some of these trophy films were copied, dubbed, and screened in the Soviet Union between 1947 and 1956, and informally also later (Kanter 2014; Kenez 2009: 191–195; Mertelsmann 2012: 149–151).

Trophy films were criticised for being ideologically inappropriate for the Soviet people, and attempts were made to prohibit and regulate their screening, but this did not succeed (Kanter 2014; Kenez 2009: 193). Trophy films became widely popular throughout the Soviet Union, turning into something of a cultural phenomenon and causing a culture shock (Mertelsmann 2011: 65;

2012: 150; Tanis 2017). People were fascinated by the films and expressed their fascination in different ways – these screenings caused quite a stir.[3] Actresses like Marika Rökk became female role models for an entire generation across the Soviet Union (Tanis 2017). One reason why these films became so popular was that they were very different from Soviet films. These were mainly American, but also German musical, comedy, and adventure films. On the one hand, they represented a "window into another world" and a different lifestyle, and on the other hand, they did not deal with daily affairs, but were a kind of "escapist fairy tales". They were very different from the socialist realism of Soviet filmmaking (Mertelsmann 2011: 67–68).[4]

The first post-war films starring Estonian actors, *Elu tsitadellis* (Life in the Citadel) (1947) and *Valgus Koordis* (Light in Koordi) (1951), were also released, and well received (Raun 2001 [1987]: 187).

Soviet films were used as propaganda devices to promote the ideological principles of Soviet power. The concept of the hero and the enemy played an important role, among others, in ideological pedagogy. The number one nemesis during the post-war years was fascism, contrasted with Soviet patriotism. Films for children and young adults, as well as books and radio broadcasts, featured young heroes fighting for their country (Raudsepp & Veski 2015: 209–210).

Thus, the trophy films differed from Soviet films in both their subjects and their presentation. The entire setting was different, creating a contrast especially for children and young people who had been born and raised in the realities of the post-war years, in an economically poor environment. The treatment of love and romance in trophy and Soviet (war) films differed markedly. Soviet films subordinated even love to ideology. Catherine Clark has conducted an in-depth analysis of Soviet novels of the 1930s and 1940s, including the novel that became the basis for the film *The Young Guard*. The socialist realism that prevailed in both cinema and literature embodied a certain puritanism – erotic scenes were prohibited, sexual relations and sexual desire made taboo. The foundation of the Soviet family was not love. She writes: "In the Stalinist novel, however, love is an auxiliary ingredient in the plot. The hero's love life is not valuable in itself; it serves only to aid him in fulfilling his tasks and in attaining 'consciousness'" (Clark 1981: 182–183).

The romantic angle was feeble and constrained, the portrayal of emotions restrictive (Borisova 2008). Foreign films portrayed love as a true, great, and self-sacrificing emotion. From the mid-1950s onwards, but especially in the following decades, Indian and Argentine love films shaped the way Soviet people and the children of the period understood romantic relationships and behaviour (Borisov 2002: 290; Kalmre 2015a: 1333; Rupprecht 2017 [2015]: 85–87).

CHILDREN'S PLAY CULTURE IN THE 1950S

There are several distinctive features that characterise growing up and play in the post-war years. Even though children had a considerable workload, they still found time for play. Some studies reveal the way Estonian children played in the post-war period (Grauberg 2003; Tuisk 2018, 2019). Based on the memories under discussion, many games inspired by the countryside were played, imitating home life. One of these was the farm household game using twigs, cones, and stones. The scarcity of toys during and after World War II, and the way children had to make their own toys from natural and other accessible resources, is highlighted in some studies of childhood play (Ramšak 2009; Paksuniemi & Mättä & Uusiautti 2015). Outdoor games were prevalent and group activities enhanced the children's sense of team spirit. Memories also mention objects that are not actually intended for children to play with. One of these is the munitions left over from the war, which the children used in their activities. Playing with munitions continued after the war: children's playthings included cartridges and shells left over from the war, as well as guns and pieces of military equipment (Tuisk 2018).

The abundance of war games during and after World War II is highlighted in the works of researchers as well as in the competition works about children's games. Ideas for games were taken from real life: for example, deportations, chasing escaping convicts, but also kolkhoz assemblies and weddings. Ideas for war games could also be found in films and books.

Yet no imitation of Pavlik Morozov or other Soviet child heroes can be found in the memoirs I examined. However, children imitated films whose plots were adventurous, such as children's film *Timur and His Team*,[5] as described by a woman born in 1952. In comparison, Soviet children's films of the mid-twentieth century were dominated by ideological struggles and markedly polarised characters. In addition to the "enemies", children's films featured battles against disloyal and selfish companions, who occasionally transformed during the course of the film (Fedorov & Levitskaya & Gorbatkova 2017).

Adventure games got their inspiration from books, among other things. Reminiscences point out that Indians and cowboys, Robinson Crusoe, as well as the adventures of Matsi poeg Mats (Mats's son Mats) were played.[6]

THE MEMOIRISTS' PERSPECTIVE: WAR FILMS, TROPHY AND OTHER FOREIGN FILMS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ACTIVITIES

Cinema-themed reports describe the emotional impact of cinema and films on children or even young women and men. In addition to the storyline of the film, they also remember the events leading up to the cinema visit, how they felt while watching the film, etc. It is meaningful and indicative of their importance that both games and other activities inspired by the films are still remembered today, in old age. War and trophy films have a particular place in the memoirs and are often contrasted.

Children were heavily influenced by what they saw in war films. For example, a woman who went to a school on Muhu Island describes how, after seeing the film *The Young Guard*,[7] children started to play it so passionately that their teachers banned the game (ERA, DK 124, 1–10 < Tallinn < Muhu parish – M. L., b. 1940 (2013)). The film is about the resistance movement of young people during the German occupation; the events are tragic, and the film is not suitable for younger children. There is also a romantic angle, as in most Soviet war films (see, e.g., Clark 1981).

A number of those who write about their childhood cinema experiences emphasise how war films instilled fear in them. For a man born in 1929, the mandatory viewing of *The Young Guard* left a deep, paralysing impression: "The film overwhelmed my psyche so horribly that I did not go to the cinema again for several years" (EFA I 316, 55–56 < Kambja parish < Tallinn – K. K., b. 1929 (2019)). Children could experience similar unnerving feelings when war games were staged or turned too cruel, as several accounts point out.

One of the films that is mentioned in the memoirs is *Tarzan*.[8] This is recalled in both children's games competitions, where the writing is inspired by games, and in cinema-themed stories. The Tarzan series (1932, 1934, 1936) were shown in Estonian cinemas as early as the 1930s. A woman who grew up in a small village in southern Estonia reflects on her experience of watching the film and playing a Tarzan game; three other women also talk about playing the game:

> *Tarzan, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Jane Maureen O'Sullivan, was very popular. There was such a crowd at Tagula* [village] *that the audience could not fit in. We climbed in through the window and sat on the floor, a metre from the screen. It was May. Afterwards the boys learned to make Tarzan noises in the schoolyard and tied ropes to the branches of trees to swing on them as if they were vines. And then they were looking for a Jane who could be lifted to the top of the tree – I was the smallest*

> *and lightest in our class.* (ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019))

The impact of foreign films on girls (or rather, young ladies) is highlighted by a memoirist who explicitly contrasts the heroes of Soviet war films with other film actors and the themes of war with the love themes of foreign films. At the very end of the passage, she reveals that she was in love with one of the actors:

> *I was fed up with the characters made into heroes by Soviet propaganda. Again Pavel Korchagin, Pavlik Morozov, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, Volodya Dubinin. We had to repeat them over and over again from class to class, memorising pieces of the transcript. Some passages have stuck in my memory like a memento. Now I fell in love with new heroes who bore no resemblance to the previous ones. They did not wave red flags, they did not carry guns, they did not have the slightest desire to throw themselves onto the barrel of a machine gun. They were beautiful and successful, courageous and enterprising characters. And they were played by great actors. My favourite ones were Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison from the film "My Fair Lady".*[9] (ERA, DK 633, 16–18 < Tartu < Suure-Jaani parish – E. U., b. 1945 (2019))

The three women recall that they were captivated by the beautiful songs and music of the films and that they danced and sang as seen in the films. "All kinds of love stories" were danced, sung, and invented while wearing old lace curtains, explains a woman born in 1946. In addition to Indian and Egyptian films, the activities were based on photographs of the actors, which were seen in magazines and advertising brochures (ERA, DK 387, 1-5 < Tartu <Lüganuse parish; Jõhvi parish, Kiviõli; Sompa borough (2016)).

Collecting photos of the actors, exchanging them and pasting them into albums was another hobby of the girls, and one that is also linked to the film about Tarzan (EFA I 169, 111–122 < Valga – T. K., b. 1940 (2013); ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019)); ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019)). Memories of such collecting activities are also shared in biographies (ERA, DK 387, 1–5 < Tartu < Viru-Nigula parish < Hargla parish – V. S., b. 1946 (2017); Mertelsmann 2012: 151). The same girl from Tagula school, who later went to school in Viljandi, writes at length about her collection. Three pages of her photo album of film actors are dedicated to Tarzan:[10]

> *All the girls in my room and I myself developed the greatest interest in film actors, especially foreign actors, in 1953–1957, when we studied at Viljandi Pedagogical School and shared the same room at 32 Jakobsoni Street. Some schoolboys came to the dormitory to offer us photos. Every time we saw a film, they would come with their photos. We had hardly any money, but we could not resist buying the photos. Sometimes the price of a photo was 2 roubles, sometimes 1 rouble a piece. We saw many films twice, all depending on the actors, like Eddy Nelson, Robert Taylor, Clark Gable, the films* Tarzan *and* The Call of Destiny. (ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019))

As these descriptions show, pictures of actors and actresses were also cut out from cinema adverts in newspapers and magazines from the era of the Republic of Estonia. The photos were collected, exchanged, and shared.[11] One contributor describes the photos as priceless items, which were smoothed out, and even washed and ironed (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019)).[12]

One activity recalled from childhood is making paper dolls, drawing clothes for them and playing with them. This activity is also associated with the portrayal of film and theatre actors.

Considering the limited time during which the trophy films were shown, the games, hobbies and perceptions that derive from them occupy a remarkably large part of the memories.

THE FILM OF TARZAN AS A BASIS FOR CHILDREN'S CREATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Re-enactments of Tarzan are cited as an example in a number of studies of children's games of the mid-twentieth century (Virtanen 1978: 29–30; Opie & Opie 1984: 338; Vissel 2004: 188; Chudacoff 2007: 130). Leea Virtanen presents the Tarzan game in her chapter on war games, and Peter and Iona Opie place it among their Storybook World games. This includes games imitating different kinds of adventures, as well as "modern fairy tales", such as the adventures of Cinderella-like orphans or treasure-hunters (Opie & Opie 1984: 337–338). The descriptions suggest that the game mimics the actions of Tarzan. As children like to imagine different adventures in games (Opie & Opie 1984: 332; Kalliala 2006: 73–82), the Tarzan film provides a good example. Tarzan's portrayal can be found in both

biographies (EKM EKLA, f 350, m 1: 2679) and fiction, such as Leelo Tungal's *Seltsimees laps ja suured inimesed* (Comrade Child and the Grownups) (2008).

Tarzan was reportedly imitated specifically by boys. Two women recall playing Tarzan together with boys. One of them remembers the Tarzan-like "hanging from tree vines" and the copying of his yell, but she names boys as the performers. She thought they liked Tarzan because he was as bold and skilful as they wanted to be (K. H., b. 1938). The recaller and her schoolmates adapted the film to their own culture, imagining themselves adventuring in the jungle like Tarzan. It is also important that the narrator uses our-form, as does another woman born in 1938, whose memory is quoted above. According to William Corsaro (2005 [1997]), a common peer culture is created collectively, using the products of adult culture creatively and interpretively. The latter means that they take over the necessary traits of their culture that matter to them. In the present case, the idea (there may be other ideas) of a brave and courageous hero finds re-use in children's culture.

In addition to the adventurous theme, boys probably liked the character of Tarzan. Most children's play researchers (e.g., Evaldsson 2009: 323; Hughes 1993) acknowledge that boys' and girls' favourite characters, as well as the favourite heroes they portray, are different. In general, studies of children's games have shown that boys prefer to show their physical dexterity, courage, and toughness, fighting spirit and aggression, while girls' participatory culture is characterised by cooperation, close relationships, verbality and peacefulness. Ann-Carita Evaldsson (2009: 316–328), in her survey of children's games and play, provides a number of examples of how pre-school and primary school age children's gender roles are constructed and manifested through play, but underlines that one has to be cautious in drawing rigid conclusions. Both boys and girls learn, experiment, challenge, and refute stereotypical gender roles while constructing overlapping social identities through playful interaction.

The masculinity of the Tarzan character in the film is also emphasised in discussions. Tarzan is a fictional character, a white Englishman raised by apes in the wild African jungle. Tarzan combines a rugged jungle upbringing with a natural hereditary intelligence, and as such embodies the American ideal of masculinity (Reid 2017: 147–148).[13]

If we place Tarzan in the post-war context of the Soviet Union, an important feature emerges that distinguishes Tarzan's character from Soviet film heroes. Among the trophy films were several films based on cowboy and pirate themes, these "wonderful films were more attractive and interesting than the boring and slow ones of the Soviets" (Zhuk 2014: 596). Sergei Zhuk notes:

> *Screened in the USSR during the 1940s and 50s, Tarzan and the adventurous pirates from the American films taught Soviet children the first lessons of individual freedom as an absolute value, while cowboys and sheriffs from the western films showed a model of personal responsibility and what Joseph Brodsky later called 'the momentous justice'. Thus American popular culture introduced ideas of personal independence, which shaped the entire imagination and perception of the outside world for this Soviet post-war generation.* (Zhuk 2014: 597)

THE ROLE OF TROPHY FILMS AND OTHER FOREIGN FILMS IN THE SOCIALISATION OF GIRLS

Girls were fascinated by beautiful actors and were performing films and plays, dancing to music and singing. Making paper dolls, drawing clothes for them and playing with them was very popular with the girls of that period. This too has been associated with the portrayal of the work and life of film as well as theatre actors.

A woman, born in the 1930s, shares her impressions of how she and her girlfriends played the lives of actresses, aspiring to be like the beautiful actresses seen in cinemas, and re-enacting their roles. Shirley Temple, Zarah Leander, and other actresses of the period were the beauty icons of the era.

> *In my schooldays, trophy films with happy endings were shown in cinemas, starring famous actors and actresses: Zarah Leander, Deanna Durbin, Marika Rökk, Shirley Temple, Lilian Harvey, the figure skater Sonja Henie. These films captivated us with their beauty, dance, and music. … Eventually, we began to play these film stars ourselves. Each of us took the name of one of our favourites and "incarnated" as that actress. My deskmate was the best, because she herself was a tiny, beautiful, adorable little poser like Shirley Temple. We wrote letters to each other in the role of the film stars. When we came to school, we exchanged them.* (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019))

Dressing oneself or one's dolls in beautiful clothes, portraying them as beautiful and fancy, is a way of creating an "illusion of luxury and fine living" (Illouz

1997). Films and film actors are also used to "sell" and create romantic sentiment – girls' romantic culture is strongly linked with consumerism. Films (as commodities) shape girls' perceptions of romantic feelings and relationships (ibid.). Researchers have pointed out that girls in their activities do not so much imitate the activities of actresses and their lives, as they learn from popular culture exactly how to imagine themselves as desired objects, how to be a woman (Gannon & Byers & Gonick 2014: 125–126).

In the 1950s, the dreams of adolescent girls were nourished, among other things, by foreign romantic films. As mentioned previously, the middle of the decade saw the arrival of Indian musical romances and Argentinian melodramatic films in Soviet cinemas.[14] Essays on cinematic themes describe how, after seeing an Indian love film, people would walk the streets with tear-stained faces – a melodramatic film had a profound effect on young women (EFA I 317, 16–17< Valga < Kose parish – E. M., b. 1944 (2019)).

The prevalence of romantic themes – love and relationships – is also seen as part of girls' culture. A woman who remembers the film *The Hussar Ballad*[15] as her greatest cinematic experience, describes the effect the film had on her:

> *It was colourful, about love, and with very beautiful actors. I was particularly touched by a scene where a girl was singing with a doll on her lap. The song was about longing for her lover. The subject and the emotion touched me deeply because I myself longed for that feeling, but had not yet experienced it.* (ERA, DK 630, 15–17 < Häädemeeste parish – M. J., b. 1952 (2019))

As was also pointed out above, girls collected pictures of actors in their albums and exchanged them. The popularity of handmade scrapbooks, songbooks, and diaries among girls in the twentieth century is believed to be the result of the fact that, through these activities, young women were able to realise their unfulfilled desires, unanswered feelings, and longings. In the studies of girls' subculture, this kind of self-representation has been recognised as one of the most important markers of age, identity, and group behaviour. Analysing love stories among girls, Eda Kalmre concludes that for them, the themes of love and friendship that predominate in these written collections were important elements in their maturing process (Kalmre 2010, 2015b). Collecting photos of film actors in albums may have served the same purpose – to be a repository of important topics at the time when one was growing from a girl into a woman. Regardless of time, environment, and context, girls define their lives and identities through romantic culture (Kalmre 2015a: 1340).

In the 1950s, adolescent girls' dreams were fuelled by foreign romance films. They tried to create a romantic culture for girls by collecting photos of actors and dancing and singing like actors in movies. This was one of the sources on which they built their gender identity.

Childhood memories written several decades later do not usually show exactly how fantasy games were played, as the narrators no longer remember it. Also, the source material is not ample enough to draw extensive statistical conclusions. However, comparing the playful activities inspired by the trophy films, it turns out that different groups of girls came up with different activities. In this way, they portrayed themselves directly as actors, exchanging letters, as in the example of Shirley Temple the woman born in 1938 recalls. But they also played, sang, and danced based on the beautiful music and love themes of Indian and trophy films, as the woman born in 1946 recalls. It is noteworthy and repetitive in the descriptions that this was done collectively by many people together. According to William Corsaro, young children create and participate in a common peer culture. They provide information about adult culture, but they interpret and reproduce it creatively in the course of social interaction, giving new meanings to cultural products and thus shaping a common peer culture. Children are active social participants with their own will, interests, and desires (Corsaro 2005 [1997]).

CONCLUSIONS

In post-war Estonia, just like the rest of the Soviet Union, cinema was one of the few forms of entertainment. Interest in cinema was great, as it was the most important visual medium in the late Stalinist era before television, as well as a window to the West, which shaped the entire imagination and perception of the outside world for this Soviet post-war generation. The post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in terms of their themes, ideas, presentation, and setting, became box-office hits. A luxurious, glittering, and gorgeous world was contrasted with the impoverished realities, fears, and ideological oppression of the 1950s Soviet Estonia. Cinema and films had a strong influence on children and young people in particular, who in their memoirs highlight the contrast with Soviet war films.

Trophy films had an impact on children's culture. Children were borrowing, recycling, and reinterpreting cultural representations and ideas in a creative manner. By interpreting trophy and other foreign films made for adults, children created their own, children's culture. At the same time, films as cultural products

also influenced them, shaping their views and perceptions. In particular, films had an impact on children in building their gender identity. Trophies and other foreign films have left a deep imprint on Estonians' collective memory.

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NOTES

[1] For further information on the biography group, see Kirss & Hinrikus 2010. A similar group of contributors of the Folklore Archives in the Tartu region was formed in 2019.

[2] A travelling cinema is a mobile unit engaged in the scheduled screening of films (on the premises designed for this purpose or in random locations, as well as in the open air). In 1960 there were 27,890 travelling cinemas in the Soviet Union and 197 in Estonia (ENE 1975: 16). In addition to travelling cinemas, there were also local cinemas in Estonia: in 1950, 207 venues were listed as showing films in Estonia (Mertelsmann 2011: 64).

[3] "The spring of 1947, Marika Rökk, but especially the screening of *The Woman of My Dreams* (1944) in Moscow was recalled for years to come – from the queues to the speculation on tickets, the like of which had never been seen…" (Kanter 2014: 126). According to Bulat Okudzhava from Tbilisi: "Normal life in the city stopped. Everyone was talking about the film and rushed to see it when they had the chance. People on streets were whistling the tunes of the songs from the film, and you could hear people playing the songs on the piano through open windows" (Kenez 2009: 192–193).

[4] The more entertaining productions of the Soviet cinema in the 1930s were the hugely successful musical comedies starring Liubov Orlova as the lead: *The Merry Lads*; *Volga, Volga*; and *Circus* (Mertelsmann 2011: 67–68). The adventure and fairy tale films of the 1930s specially intended for children were also mostly free of ideology, but they were rarely screened in Estonian cinemas at that time.

[5] The film *Timur and His Team* was released in 1940, and dubbed into Estonian in 1945. Arkadi Gaidar's book was published in Estonian in 1945, the radio play was completed in 1952.

[6] Both Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* and Karl August Hindrey's story "Matsi poeg Mats" were published in Estonian as early as 1880.

[7] *The Young Guard* (1948) was directed by Sergei Gerasimov at Mosfilm. The film is based on the novel by the same name by Alexander Fadeyev (1947). Alexander Fadeyev was one of the most important exponents of Stalinist ideology and policy in literature.

[8] The first film based on the Tarzan stories was made in 1918. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's first film *Tarzan the Ape Man*, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan, was released in 1932 and was a huge hit. The film was followed by sequels and was distributed worldwide. The film is based on the stories of the American writer Edgar Rice Burroughs, published during the 1910s. Several of Burroughs's stories about Tarzan's life were also published in Estonian from 1923 onwards. Children growing up in the 1950s may have been familiar with these books.

[9] *My Fair Lady* is the 1964 film adaptation of the stage musical of the same name, which won eight Oscar awards. The film was directed by George Cukor and starred Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison (see http://www.filmiveeb.ee/filmid/2486/Minu-veetlev-leedi/, last accessed on 27 June 2022).

[10] In addition to the Tarzan film, the album also contains photos of Indian films, other US-produced trophy films and actors, as well as Soviet film actors such as Liubov Orlova, Pavel Kadochnikov, and others; photos of theatre Estonia operas *Yevgeny Onegin* and *The Young Guard*, and actors (Elsa Maasik, Georg Ots, and others), signed in Estonian and Russian.

[11] For more on the Estonian girls' scrapbooks and other albums, see Kalmre 2010. For information on this practice in New Zealand in the 1950s, see Sutton-Smith 1981: 218–220.

[12] The reflections under consideration reiterate that personal toys, as well as books, were very important, valued, and cherished (Tuisk 2019: 59–60).

[13] The author of the story, Burroughs, characterises Tarzan as "the perfect specimen of manhood", which was precisely what he intended to portray (Reid 2017).

[14] Indian actor Raj Kapoor and Argentine actress Lolita Torres became legendary. Concerning Latin American films in the Soviet Union, see Rupprecht 2017 [2015].

[15] *The Hussar Ballad* (Mosfilm, 1962) is a musical comedy directed by Eldar Riazanov, starring Yuri Yakovlev and Larisa Golubkina. It takes place in 1812.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

EKM EKLA – Estonian Cultural History Archives, Estonian Literary Museum
ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum
EFA – Folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives
DK – Digital manuscripts of the Estonian Folklore Archives

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SUICIDE GAMES, ABANDONED HOUSES, AND THIRST FOR DANGER: THE YOUTH'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES AND THE MEDIA'S MORAL PANICS ABOUT SEMI-SUPERNATURAL CHALLENGES IN ESTONIA

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Abstract: The article looks at the dynamics of the media and real life in relation to the so-called dangerous folklore of teenagers, which includes, for example, contacts with aggressive (semi-)supernatural fear creatures, frightening experiences in abandoned houses and notions of so-called suicide games. The authors analyse the interactions between media reality and youth behaviour and related developments in folklore. It is concluded that the presentation of media information in the form of moral panic mainly based on the concept of young people's vulnerability, which focuses on extreme risk examples, does not support safer coping, but focuses only on certain types of risk behaviour, often ignoring other concerns and the complexity of problems but also natural self-protecting mechanisms of the youth.

Keywords*:* children's folklore, horror folklore, media representations, moral panics

INTRODUCTION

The presentation of motifs that generate fear and a sense of danger in the media and in media-influenced interpersonal communication is fluctuating – in one period the problem of mysteriously disappearing and missing people comes to the fore, in another child suicide games, in the third the Covid-19 crisis. In this article we discuss the dynamics of the media reflections and teenagers' narratives and opinions in connection with the so-called dangerous folklore, which includes, for example, contacts with aggressive (semi-)supernatural fear creatures, horror experiences in abandoned houses, as well as perceptions related to suicide games. We look at the interactions between media reality and youth behaviour and related developments in folklore, combining folkloristic and sociological research methods (mainly qualitative thematic, context, and discourse analysis) and springing from the research question of how the views and experiences of the youth regarding such folklore differ from its representations in the media and thus, to what extent selective media moral panics – on the example of suicide games – can help to keep children safe from dangers related to such folklore. Folklore material used in the article is represented by topical texts (circa 500, the respondents being mainly 11–19 years old) collected during three school-lore collecting campaigns on the initiative of the Estonian Literary Museum (in 1992, 2007, and 2017–2018), with the focus on the thematic texts of the most recent collecting initiative that contained an explicit question about fears and dangers. The reason why earlier material was also included was the wish to exemplify how some types of dangerous folklore (e.g., conjuring aggressive ghosts, visiting abandoned houses) remain topical in the youth's accounts throughout all periods but suicide games come to the fore during a very limited period and in a very limited number of responses only after explicitly asking about them (mainly in 4 interviews from a total of 10 that the authors conducted with youngsters in 2018–2019). However, in the media material the above-mentioned repetitive motifs and warnings related to these do not occur at all, yet internet suicide games get unproportionally much attention. The main period of the analysed media coverage was 2017–2022. Focus was on the articles in the newspaper *Postimees* and the news portal *Delfi* (as some of the most popular media channels in Estonia) and their online comments, but radio programmes and other media articles (circa 20 in total) and social media – mostly Facebook – posts (circa 30 threads initiated by worried parents) that were found using a thematic keyword search were also observed.

Already in the 1990s, folklorist Linda Dégh (2001) referred to the wave character of "the culture of fear" (cf. also Furedi 2019 [2018]), which at its peak can make people act both ostensively (i.e., live out folklore motifs in real life) and

pseudo-ostensively (i.e., only seemingly live out folklore motifs). Social scientist and cognitivist Dan Sperber (1996) has pointed out that the construction of new ideas, new uses of words, the introduction of new objects and behaviours do not take place in any direction but are based on "attractors" whereby the suggestive repetition of information that contains such attractiveness factors can cumulate to moral panics. Since we are also talking about moral panics in relation to children's suicide games, it is appropriate to first clarify the term, and here we consider the colloquially-sounding but apt definition of sociologist Stanley Cohen (1972: 9) to be appropriate:

> *A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to, the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible*.

Investigative journalist Malcolm Gladwell (2004) additionally uses the term "stickiness factor", hinting to the phenomenon that if certain motifs that trigger the reaction of large numbers of people are deliberately emphasized in the transmission of information, the resulting resonance may be expressed in an epidemic-like manner. Obviously, in today's media-influenced world, the media is one of the most important determinants of the dynamics of fear and panic. For example, a focused representation of certain types of threats or violence (e.g., issues related to the endangerment or direct abuse of minors) almost always triggers respective fears and defensive behaviour in society.

However, the regularities of when the topics of danger highlighted in the media cause only an explosive verbal reaction or also its transfer to the level of real-life actions are not always clearly predictable. Therefore, we also agree with the authors (e.g., Rowe 2009: 23) who have called for caution when labelling social or media reactions as moral panics because doing it may, in some cases, pay down levels of threat and negative consequence, and present anxieties, whether justified or not, as automatically exaggerated. Thus, this article does not try to claim that such phenomena as suicide games do not deserve attention at all, but the authors rather attempt to call for a more nuanced and delicate analysis without exclusive labels.

CHILDREN'S SUICIDE GAMES IN ESTONIA AND ELSEWHERE: BACKGROUND AND OUTPUTS

Alexandra Arkhipova et al. (2017) analysed the wave of horror in Russia that began with a writing published in 2016 in the newspaper *Novaja gazeta* about the youth's so-called death groups – certain virtual communities on a popular social network Vkontakte. Arkhipova et al. describe how the author of this newspaper article from 2016 claimed that an anonymous organized group of criminals was deliberately forcing adolescents to commit suicide using special manipulation techniques (e.g., intimidation, code messages, increasingly severe self-harm) and was already responsible for at least 130 young people's deaths. The alleged criminals behind these manipulations were described as a mafia organization, the activities of which contained, among other things, supernatural elements, to which parallels can be found in earlier children's folklore. As the panic grew, the descriptions became more colourful; for example, the mayor of the town Ulyanovsk compared the activities of the criminals behind the so-called Blue Whale Challenge with those of the Islamic extremist group ISIS.

The content of the newspaper article was also referred to in the Western media, but in the first place it provoked a multi-level reaction in both the Russian-language press and social media, which led, at the level of the authorities, to public calls for introducing strict codes of conduct and control of the youth to prevent the threat. However, already in the same year public comments from researchers followed, stressing that there was no link between these death groups and young people's suicides. Many "real" suicide stories turned out to be urban legends – often produced by the youth themselves. Moreover, it was also proved that the administrators of the death groups were not an organized criminal organization, but some stories of fatal participation turned out to be simply folklore, and the initiators of some of the identified groups were actually teenagers. Snopes.com, a well-known website that debunks fake news and gossip, also declared in 2017 that no causal link was found between teen suicides in Russia and elsewhere in the world, and virtual death games (such as the Blue Whale Challenge) (Evon 2017). Soon various Western media outlets confirmed the same in relation to different geographical contexts.

However, the same moral panic related to the Blue Whale Challenge reached Estonia with some delay, and its crest lasted only for a relatively short time. On 1 March 2017, the state radio station Vikerraadio issued a warning that the well-known suicide challenge from Russia had also started spreading among the Estonian youth (although insofar the information about the game spread mostly among young people with a Russian background living in Estonia). Among other things, the radio broadcast mediated an interview with an 8th-grade girl who

"had been in contact with the game", and with the head of the police serious crime department. The girl explained that she created a fake identity and posted fake videos just to get to know what was going on in the death group; in the end she got scared and left the group. According to her, her Russian friend also neither hurt herself nor put her health in danger in any other way. However, the police representative disregarded the fact that the interviewed girl had in fact deliberately used ways to ensure her own safety, and emphasized that, given the information received from the international media and the interview with the girl, it had to be concluded that the situation was very serious, at the same time still admitting that all the information other than the mentioned interview was based solely on foreign media. The police officer also concluded that when children talk about such a suicide game, they do not understand that it indeed ends with real self-hurting, without specifying that in various age groups the understanding of the game and its impact can vary. In the same year, the same set of motifs appeared in a different media context and genre, when one participant in the TV-show "Ordeal of Clairvoyants" claimed that a young Russian clairvoyant who had fallen or jumped out of a window in an unexplainable manner had actually died as a victim of a similar suicide game.

A bigger wave of perceived danger arrived in Estonia in 2019, when the newspaper *Postimees* published an article on 29 January, titled "A dangerous killing game Momo on social media threatens children: 'You will die in three hours'" (Mõttus-Leppik 2019). This was followed by the description that Momo was the next level of the previous Blue Whale Challenge that was associated with 130 teenager suicides. As a chain reaction, information spread both on social media (e.g., as warnings in mothers' Facebook groups in 2019) and in face-to-face conversations, but in the Estonian context, only examples of children who had felt fear and not children that were injured were cited as evidence of the dangerousness of the game.

The visual component of information transmission is also telling – in *Postimees*, the information was presented on a black background, illustrated by a large-scale image of Momo. A reportage on the same topic in the TV news broadcast "Reporter" used video clips depicting self-injuring activity and ways of joining the Momo game in a detailed way as illustrative material. The question arises if such a media coverage (e.g., consciously creating a morbid and frightening atmosphere) can serve as objective warning at all or is it rather a way of sensation-mongering that has a great potential of panic-evoking. The World Health Organization and some communication and suicide researchers have made specific recommendations to address the issue of suicide in the media, explicitly recommending to avoid "whipping up" strong emotions and using a sensationalizing and panic-evoking style (WHO 2017; Värnik 2003).

A month later – on 1 March – the newspaper *Postimees* published an article that marked the end of the moral panic. The article had a strongly emotional wording similar to the previous one, but with the opposite message: "Parents, calm down! Momo is an urban legend that has duped millions" (Lamp 2019). The article was again illustrated with a large-scale picture of Momo. The article described the origins of the visual image of Momo and emphasized that the panic surrounding the game was clearly blown out of proportions, yet it reminded that "for children, the internet continues to be a place filled with horror". As is often the case in media coverage on health and safety, the article quotes experts with no photo or name (cf. Hiiemäe & Utriainen 2021 for a longer discussion of this take), who comment on the dangers related to the surge in suicide narratives. Rather than including the already overused image of Momo, it would be far more appropriate and specific to illustrate the article with a photo of some of the quoted experts. Articles on suicide games seem to suggest that some sensational news are released to the media after only a very brief background check and when new and contradictory information happens to emerge later, the resulting contrast can be employed to create a new sensation.

Two recurring features emerge in the contents of the media coverage of the topic – the question of who is to blame (e.g., the internet, inadequate parental supervision, people who struggle to control their emotions), and guidelines for the right and wrong behaviour. However, it is noteworthy that, even after it has been established that a panic had been caused by an international urban legend, these news pieces still call for imposing stricter control over children. It is also worth noting that such approaches usually lack gradation – recommendations by the police are absolutizing in their emphasis that the online activities of minors must always be monitored and devices that young people use must have limited internet access and *only* age-appropriate content (the examples are from the issue of the Estonian daily *Postimees* on 1 March 2019; emphasis by the authors of the current article) or that children must be educated in matters of the digital or online world (Pealinn 2020). This one-size-fits-all approach to both toddlers and late adolescents places an overwhelming responsibility on the parent and instils the belief that the teenagers themselves lack intellect but also analytical and executive functions.

DANGEROUS, VULNERABLE OR RITUAL YOUTH: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Over time, there have been several changes and shifts in emphasis in the theories that interpret young people's behaviour. In the 1970s theories of deviancy and dangerousness of the youth (see an overview of respective theories in Pearson 1975) gained popularity. In the 1980s, in the then Soviet Estonia, viewpoints related to deviant youth as dangerous hooligans and the need for their re-educating in special schools were in fashion – quite simultaneously with the publishing of the influential critical book titled *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (Pearson 1983), which showed the recurrence of the concept of the dangerous hooligan through time. Soon approaches followed that emphasized the ritual dimension of the youth's risk behaviour, seeing it as an attempt to ritualize a difficult transition to adulthood (Le Breton 2004). In the second decade of the twenty-first century, a new conception of risk is emerging in education and development studies, characterized by the repositioning of the focus from safety objectives in guidelines for adolescents into more flexible goals, emphasizing that individuals must be able to risk because risk is an indispensable condition for development and becoming somebody (Porrovecchio 2013). Some authors, in turn, see the role of risk behaviour in supporting the formation of values; for example, David Le Breton (2004: 1) defined the actual widespread diffusion of risk behaviours among teenagers as "passion for risks" with the quest for finding reference points, meaning, and a system of values, and contrasted it with the – in his eyes – far more insidious risk of depression and the radical collapse of meaning.

The approach emphasizing the vulnerability of adolescents has been prevalent in sociological research in the past decade. According to the approach, the vulnerability of children as a social group is viewed through markers of the lack of safety, taking into account processes unfavourable to the child's age-appropriate development, unsafe situations, relationships, the living environment, etc. (cf. Andresen 2014), regarding markers of unsafety as relatively static categories defined by researchers. Children's subjective perspectives on their own vulnerability have been insufficiently studied (a study that takes subjectivity into account is, for example, Tins 2019). Indeed, as a criticism of vulnerability studies, researchers have highlighted that an overemphasis on vulnerability can have a stigmatizing effect, as children who meet the vulnerability criteria are automatically perceived either as at risk or as victims, when in reality a child who is vulnerable may simultaneously also be strong (Andresen 2014). While the studies focusing on youth vulnerability often argue that children are unable to judge risk and thus it is necessary to implement prohibitions and

restrictions, the empirical evidence that this article is based on indicates that young people do have a clear perception of risk, and it is precisely the testing of risk perception and challenging its limits that creates the thrilling experience. Moreover, some studies by psychologists have shown that teenagers are not attracted to just any kind of risks – for example, an experiment by Tymula et al. (2012) showed that teenagers are not prone to seek out clearly obvious risks but are particularly attracted to risks with the component of the unknown. At the same time, narrative school lore contains many stories which reveal that, in the course of the experience, young people have found themselves being pushed beyond the limits of tolerable risk, leading them either to withdraw temporarily or permanently from the activity they considered risky, or to adopt special safety measures (e.g., the activity is never practiced alone but always in a group; carrying a phone with them at all times to be able to call for help in a place that is considered risky).

In general, sociological works focusing on the youth's vulnerability do not take sufficient account of resilience and belief- or folklore-related coping mechanisms of young people. In recent years, however, articles criticizing the one-sidedness of the concept of vulnerability have begun to emerge (e.g., Cree & Clapton & Smith 2015, but one of the earliest in this direction was already Cohen 1972), questioning the groundedness of societal moral panics and rethinking the concepts of youth vulnerability in a more multifaceted way. This article tries to offer a contribution in the same vein.

THE YOUTH'S PERSPECTIVE

When it comes to issues pertaining to minors, their own views certainly need to be taken into account. The interviews carried out by the authors revealed that, in general, teenagers were much more aware of the subtleties of social media suicide challenges and other risk specifics than their parents. By the time the media started to appeal to parents to talk to their children about the dangers related to the Blue Whale Challenge and Momo, many children had already gone through the stages of belief, fear, and overcoming fear, whereas the response was clearly age-dependent – it was primarily younger children who found the topic scary rather than teenagers, who were seen as the target group. For example, a 13-year-old boy (2018) commented on Momo and similar death games: "I don't know anybody who would know anybody who would be so stupid that he would ever do anything of the things that these death games ask you to do", and an 11-year-old boy (2018) said: "It is a stupid joke, nobody would do it." During this period (mainly in 2019), parents' concerns about their

children not talking to them about serious things like suicide challenges came to the fore on social media, but in many cases (particularly among teenagers) the reason why they were not interested in talking was not that they wished to keep it secret, but that they had already passed through that stage – they were neither no longer interested in nor had feelings about the topic, and it was thus not categorized as "serious". The fact that the respondents of the 2018 school-lore campaign did not raise the topic of suicide games at all – although there was a question about fears and dangers in the questionnaire – also shows that the respondents did not perceive this topic as relevant. At the same time, it became clear from the responses that teenagers generally (irrespective of their rural or urban background which were both represented) tend to use a number of various media channels daily and obtain also certain understandings of risk behaviour from the media; for example, fears related to various horror figures from movies and other media as well as tips for conjuring ghosts were listed. In the interviews, the respondents were asked about things that made them feel vulnerable, but again, suicide games were not mentioned although the respondents described other problems related to internet use (e.g., some female respondents mentioned perverts who approached them on the internet but also that they did not feel frightened because they knew ways how to protect their safety).

The Estonian material even suggests that there has been a certain role reversal in relation to the death games: instead of the expected victim role, the "poor defenceless youth" assumed the position of power by spreading urban legends and visuals on the topic and perceiving these challenges, at least partly, as a form of mockery and humour. By observing behavioural scripts, digital ethnography suggests that the disproportionately strong response from adults was partly due to differences in communication patterns – many adults, but also younger children (especially first- or second-graders), sometimes struggle with understanding the nuances of reality and pseudo-reality in teenagers' online communication. The persuasive display of threats associated with such inherently sensitive issues as cyberbullying, suicide, and even coercion to commit suicide often triggers a fear response in parents and a desire to implement strong countermeasures, although these may bring along yet other deviance mechanisms and counter-community formations (cf., e.g., Waldron 2005). However, the emotionally charged media coverage and responses to that may not necessarily allow us to notice a selective perspective to moral panics.

HAUNTED HOUSES AND DANGEROUS GHOSTS: THE SELECTIVE NATURE OF MORAL PANICS

There is a plethora of other forms of risk behaviour, often involving (quasi) supernatural folkloric motifs and core characters, which tend to be much more popular and lasting among teenagers but never reach the media or the parent's scrutinizing eye. Some of these existed already before the digital age; for example, almost every family can recall how children were playing with munitions in the post-war period in Estonia (cf. Tuisk 2018). Some folklorists have referred to the youth's dare challenges related to supernatural lore in certain types of places as "legend trips", and have described such behaviour already in their studies carried out in the 1980s–1990s (e.g., Ellis 1983; Bird 1994). The viral spread of information on the topic, and the curiosity that it evokes, inspires teenagers to experiment – to visit haunted houses, wander in cemeteries or ruins in the dark, experiment with contacting spirits, whereas instructions for that and self-defence techniques are again often derived from the social media or other online sites (e.g., apps for talking with spirits), and may be based on international legend plots or horror films, thus embedding both the story and the action triggered by the narrative. Elizabeth Bird (1994: 192) regards this kind of legend tripping as a type of play, calling it "playing with fear".

When talking about exploring abandoned houses, a 14-year-old boy (2018) mentioned in an absolutizing tone that "everyone" was doing it. According to a girl in her early teens, "everyone" also practises summoning spirits (e.g., Bloody Mary). In school lore, abandoned houses are associated with danger, crime, meeting strange and dangerous people (such as drug addicts), ghosts, and simply being involved in something that is forbidden. As the following account reveals, the media has also contributed to these connotations.

> *Once on a class excursion we found an abandoned house in the forest – it was really terrible, but we went in and looked around. In horror movies you always tell the main character: don't be so stupid and don't go into the abandoned house but when you see one, you still want to see what is going on in there.* (ID382, girl, born 2001, Tartu, 2018)

Also in the following example text, influences from the media come to the fore and the wish to get excitement and at the same time preserve the safe observer status is expressed.

> *When you see an abandoned house in a TV-series, you can be sure that in the following scenes it will be the stage for a terrible crime or for the*

> *appearance of a supernatural being. When you visit abandoned houses, you actually don't want any of these consequences, but you still want to get a similar thrill that you have when watching the series.* (Boy, 14, 2018)

In endeavours of visiting ghost houses and trying to get in contact with ghosts, the participants are most often teenagers, but younger siblings may also be involved. Almost no narratives describe doing these activities alone, thus it can be defined as a collective self-test. Some authors describe the excitement of risk-taking, testing one's courage and mental limits with the term "initiation through fear" (e.g., Le Breton 2004). The personal experience stories of schoolchildren also describe the practice as a form of challenging themselves but also as a way of learning to establish and perceive boundaries; sometimes it also develops phobias, which, however, usually alleviate over time, indicating that there is a strong autobiographical reflection in these stories. In the following description, which combines an abandoned house and a séance for summoning spirits, the respondent is so frightened by the experience that she never wants to return to the place.

> *I have my own experiences with conjuring ghosts. Once we thought with girls that it's so boring, what we could do. Then one girl had the idea – let's conjure ghosts. In the beginning everybody was hesitant but then we agreed. First, we had the question about where to do it. But one of the girls knew that there was an old house nearby. We looked on the internet for what we would need and then we started our adventure. We had white paper, a plate, a pen and two ordinary tea candles with us. When we reached the house, we chose a suitable room in it. We wrote "yes" and "no" and also numbers from one to ten on the paper. We put the paper on the floor, put the plate in the middle and lit the candles. We found the sentences that were needed for conjuring a ghost and the bravest of us said these words. We waited, nothing happened. She said them once again. Then the candles went out, but it was silent. We thought that it was probably because of the wind and lit the candles again. This friend said these words the third time, and then the door slammed loudly and the candles went out again. We ran away as quickly as we could without looking back and I don't want to go there ever again.* (ID2816, girl, born 2001, Karksi-Nuia, 2018)

Thus, so-called dangerous folklore and related behaviour have a role to play in socialization, where the ability of participants to assess the situation may be quite different, but some precautions are typically mentioned; for example,

a girl narrated about a female friend-of-a-friend who saw a killer clown with an axe standing by her house and looking into her window – the reaction of the girl was to call the police but allegedly the killer clown left before the police arrived (ID1185, girl, b. 2003, Aegviidu, 2018). The emphases are also different in the following two personal experience stories about the Bloody Mary challenge: in the first one, the respondent believes that the ritual definitely influenced his fate, while the respondent in the second example clearly categorizes it as fiction, even though she is aware of the details of the story.

> *One day I was at a friend's home and he suggested that we do Bloody Mary (I mean the ghost, not the alcoholic drink). I agreed and he explained how to conjure this ghost. Soon we conjured her so that we crossed our hands on the chest and turned around three times, saying Bloody Mary every time. I don't remember very well how it happened but I believe that I insulted her. During the following weeks I had very bad luck.* (Boy, born 2003, Märjamaa, 2018)

> *Ghosts don't exist. There are just fictional rituals for conjuring them. I have tried to conjure Bloody Mary. Bloody Mary is such a woman that when you conjure her, she appears in the mirror instead of your own reflection and she will come out somehow and kill you immediately. There is also Baby Blue who should be her child, but she killed her child.* (Girl, b. 2002, Tallinn, 2018)

Personal experience narratives contain much fear but among hundreds of texts there were none describing really fatal consequences (except a few clearly fabricated stories that blurred the borders of films and personal experiences). The question arises, why so? Are the youth clever enough not to come into real danger or do young people who face really horrible experiences remain silent about them? We tend to think that in most cases the youth have at least some self-protection mechanisms and these are also shared and negotiated amongst the peer community.

CONCLUSIONS

The societal moral panics related to various dangers have a cyclical character. In 2020, the topic of death games was newsworthy for only a brief period of time, when people were warned on social media about instigators of suicide challenges, who disguised themselves behind the image of the famous cartoon character,

Goofy the dog (e.g., newspaper *Pealinn* 2020). In 2021, neither reports of suicide games nor thematic moral panics reached the media. However, children's real suicide rates made the media (and people) worry but were in this context explained with the impact of Covid-19 which is in the time of writing this article (March 2022) the current major attractor motif in societal communication and the media. On the background, abandoned houses and dark bathrooms have been attractors for the youth already for decades and are visited also during the Covid-19 crisis (even more so because no public restrictions that are implemented elsewhere apply there). With the crisis in Ukraine, which started with the military invasion of Russia on 24 February 2022, the societal emphasis shifted to the sufferings of Ukrainian children, and the Estonian media channels but also school psychologists started sharing instructions for the Estonian youth of how to avoid getting depressed because of war news. At the same time, traditional legend tripping of teenagers continues, being sometimes partly used as a remedy against societal frustration related to major crises.

The perception of risk among children and teenagers as well as trends in risk-seeking behaviour are heavily influenced by the media, but this age group may pick up different emphases and receive some of their information from other channels than their parents. Paradoxically, in some cases, minors obtain information about folklore-related risk-seeking behaviour precisely through the moral panics in the media, which are intended to warn them of the risk, but which at the same time may arouse their interest and lead them to learn more about it. Empirical evidence suggests that media coverage plays heavily on emotions and portrays teenagers as predominantly vulnerable and irresponsible and increased prohibitions do not have the desired effect on young people. At the same time, the media focus on limited signal motifs gives a simplified portrayal of the dangers, as a result of which the risks that emerge in the forms or places that happen to remain outside the media-driven risk maps may go unnoticed.

There is no doubt that adolescent suicides are a serious problem, but linking them to one particular virtual game is a simplistic reduction of complex and multi-faceted psychosocial processes to a single cause, as if the latter could instantly explain away all the aspects of mental health issues among the youth which may be intertwined with family, school, and societal factors, personal life history and character traits. There is a huge gap between the risk-seeking and self-challenging behaviour, which teenagers often display, and the wish to die. The former is often driven by a healthy need to learn and a thirst for life, which is not easily deterred by intimidation and bans, and is counterbalanced by partly belief-based coping agency and self-protecting mechanisms, which may differ from person to person. Fortunately, or unfortunately, parents will never know about some of the potentially dangerous actions their children may take (e.g.,

entering collapsing buildings or running across the road in front of moving cars without any pressure coming from virtual horror characters scrutinised in the media), as they are more likely to be looking at the selective dangers induced by the media in the form of moral panic.

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SLOVENIAN FOLK LULLABIES: ANALYSIS OF THE LULLABY TEXTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

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Behind the laconic language of [folk songs] are complex mental states that would be better substantiated by Freud than by the evident logic of life.
(Terseglav 1987: 124)

Abstract: The evening ritual of putting a child to sleep, as we know it in Slovenia today, originates from the period of bourgeois family formation. An important part of this ritual is the lullaby. The archaic form of calming with rhythm (rocking) and droning is much older than the middle-class family. When falling asleep, the child is in a liminal state, and by singing a lullaby the singer is also in a liminal state. The analysis of texts of selected Slovene folk lullabies showed that lullabies are constructed in an oneiric manner and are therefore liminal. The analysis relied primarily on Freudian psychoanalytic thought.

Keywords: folk lullaby, liminal, psychoanalysis, Slovenia

INTRODUCTION[1]

The idea to write about the evening ritual was born while writing an article about the education of the little residents of Ljubljana between the two world wars. Reflection on the evening ritual of calming the child to sleep associated me with the liminal state of humankind. The article connects the ritual of falling asleep with liminality in time (from time to timelessness) and space (every departure is an arrival) and analyses the texts of Slovenian folk lullabies within the psychoanalytic thesaurus to understand the content of adult attitudes towards children, which singers[2] (in the liminal state) passed on to children in the evenings.

Psychoanalysis is a corpus of knowledge about the unconscious and a method of treatment that brings this knowledge. Psychoanalysis analyses the individual, society, and culture. It is subversive but uneconomical, wasteful in the age of neoliberal consumer culture because of its precise analysis and accurate reasoning. Society is dominated by cognitive-behavioral models of understanding and "discoveries" of neuroscience, most of which have been part of psychoanalytic knowledge for over a hundred years. Biological, i.e., Darwinist interpretations of culture are always dangerous for social well-being. Thus, the behaviorist repressive training of children coupled with the eugenic concern for a healthy offspring offered a hand to the fascism and Nazism of the Second World War (Cunnigham 1996).

I see my modest article as an answer to the call of the great Slovenian folklorist Marko Terseglav and as part of the noble tradition of Alan Dundes.

The analysis of lullaby texts is synchronous, covering not all lullabies from Slovenia but rather a selection of them. Contemporary lullabies that were collected and recorded in CD format, entitled *Al' že spiš? ali Kako uspavamo v Sloveniji* (Are you already sleeping? or How we fall asleep in Slovenia) (Juvančič & Šetinc 2006), are not included. This collection includes a selection of lullabies that are sung in Slovenia today; so in addition to folk lullabies, there are also artificial ones and those from other cultural environments.

The selection I made for this article consists of folk lullabies that were written in the twentieth century, mainly before and after World War II. The origin of lullabies, however, is undoubtedly much older. They were created in a rural environment but transferred by nannies to the pre-war bourgeois environment, where within the construction of a new childhood the evening ritual of putting a child to sleep was born.

In the first section I will introduce the liminality of the evening rite, mainly relying on Victor Turner's concept of liminal state and my field records of experiences of going to bed of pre-war Ljubljana children from the lower bourgeois stratum. At that time a kind of evening rite was established. In the second section the theme of lulling and liminality will be elaborated. The question in the third section is simply "What's going on when singing a lullaby?" So, the aforementioned selection of lullaby texts will be (psycho)analysed, mostly through Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious and drive theory and infantile theories of sexuality, which will be explained on a case-by-case basis. The analysis is followed by a conclusion.

1. LIMINALITY OF THE EVENING RITE

As we already know, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Dutch folklorist Arnold van Gennep recognised that rites of passage (*rites de passage*) are tripartite. The first phase is marked by separation, the second phase is a borderline period, and the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous. In the third phase, the transition is completed: the ritual subject has new clearly defined rights as well as obligations to others. The most typical example of a rite of passage is the initiation of young people into adulthood (Gennep 2019 [1909]). In the late 1960s, British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner summed up Gennep's three-part rite and reshaped it to some extent: 1. separation from the everyday flow of activities, which involves crossing the border or *limen* into a ritual world, in which known time and space no longer apply; 2. mimetic performance of the scale of the crisis that led to the separation, in which the structures of everyday life are problematised; and 3. re-entry into the everyday world – reintegration (Turner 2008 [1969]: 94–97).

Today we find analyses of the liminal experience of the subject (threshold person) not only in the classical contributions of folkloristics and cultural anthropology, but also in the articles on tourism, new spirituality, psychiatric treatment, social overthrow, artistic practice, etc. If the liminal state is characterised by a decline in the general coherence of the world as people imagine it, then there is almost no human experience that does not carry the character of liminality, from the point of view of what was and is becoming. For example, the sense of self changes during the process of transition from child to adult. The rejection of support in positions of authority is followed by disorientation, which concludes with a view of the world that differs from the initial one, exactly because it consists of the experience of the transition itself. In general, "liminality is not a weird exception to the normal state of being; it *is* being," argues literary theorist Peter Schwenger (2012: xii). We could say that the liminal state of the subject is not the opposite of the "normal" state, but an everyday and integral part of it. For example, the experiences of insecurity and anxiety which we face to excess in contemporary society are liminal.

An evening ceremony with a dimension of passage seems universal. Psychotherapeutic material reveals a plethora of ways by which a person may go to sleep and fall asleep at night, but the repetition is universal. Sleep preparation and calming are the first two parts of a three-part construction. Sleep is usually the last act of the daily evening ritual.

> *Sleep is a 'departure' by the individual into the unknown on a daily basis. On a path where many things can happen, sometimes even unpleasantness.*

> *It is therefore necessary to prepare the child for this departure before going to bed. The child needs to be calmed down, invited to sleep, provided with security and, above all, a safe return. Coming to a new day, to a new reality the next day.* (Cvetko 2005: 67)

Going to sleep represents the child's separation from the waking world and emotionally important people. From the point of view of the child's mentality, it is important how the parents do this. If they want a young child to fall asleep peacefully and rest, they need to calm them down and perhaps comfort them. If the process of going to sleep takes place in a known sequence, it provides the child with a predictably safe environment. The evening ritual varies from family to family, but the scheme, as Gennep and Turner learned, is dictated by the cultural code and social order of the time and space. For example, in 1926 Fran Govekar in his *Bon ton* advised a mother to "put the child to bed and – the child falls asleep" (Govekar 1926: 89). Similarly, the writer emphasised that the mother should "accustom … the child to obedience and order from the first year", and should "accustom them to go to sleep at a certain time", to insist and "not give up for any price" (Govekar 1926: 89–90). The ritual as parents know it in Slovenia today (feeding, washing, sleeping) was rooted in the middle-class bourgeois family at the time Govekar wrote his *Bon ton*, when the child was placed in a special place in the construction of a bourgeois family. The bourgeois imaginary of childhood defined the child as an innocent being to be cared for, guided and directed. Unlike the present, the evening ritual in the upper bourgeoisie was provided by nurses who probably sang folk lullabies.[3] In the first half of the twentieth century, the children of the lower classes of the urban and suburban population, who did not grow up with maids, also began to become acquainted with the components of the evening ritual. These are covered by my field records.

Mr T. recalled that his "mother covered me and kissed me, my father never did. She also sang a lullaby "Sleep now, sleepy", but also "some Swabian [German] lullabies were in between". Mrs K. described the evening farewell in this way: "We prayed together in the evening, but then we girls had to go to bed. Mother made a cross over my face." The evening ceremony was similarly described by Mrs F.: "Before going to bed, my mother sometimes told me the fairy tale about Hansel and Gretel or Sleeping Beauty ... and she made the sign of the cross over my brother and me." Whereas Mrs D. recounted:

> *Father was a commander: 'Now kneel down and pray!', despite the fact that he was a socialist. It was a hard upbringing! Then we had to go to bed. They crossed us in the crib before sleep and gave us a kiss. My mother*

> *always sang a lot… and I asked her to sing for me when she put me to bed… I knocked on the wall: 'Mommy, sing!', and she sang to me from the kitchen, the folk song "Pojdem na Štajersko"* [I'm going to Styria]*, "Na planincah…"* [In the mountains…]*, so that I could hear her voice and fall asleep easier. I still have an extraordinary auditory memory! When my father was away, my mother slept with us in the double bed.*

Mrs D. recalled: "I pounded on the wall, 'Mommy, sing!', and she sang folk songs to me from the kitchen", which testified to the mental connection that is important at the time of physical separation (Bowlby 1998 [1973]) before children fall asleep (Winnicott 1991 [1971]). The process of falling asleep represents a drowsy intermediate, transient, liminal mental space between wakefulness and sleep, between the known and the unknown, between a world where there is an illusion of control, and a dreamy conscious world. It is about saying goodbye to the reality that is inhabited by important people and going to a dream where anything can happen. For a peaceful sleep, a sense of security is necessary, which in the absence of an important adult is provided to the child by a transitional object or a transient phenomenon that calms and comforts (Winnicott 1991 [1971]). Narratives from the Ljubljana area do not reveal transitional objects (pacifier, bottle, diaper, pillow, blanket, plush animal, etc.)[4] for children from suburban areas and lower middle class, so I think that the children of that time used transient phenomena, such as indistinct singing, vocalisations, as well as repetitive caressing, stroking the hair or earlobes, thumb or fist sucking, etc. (Winnicott 1991 [1971]). Examples of field narratives reveal that the evening rituals of the lower classes of the bourgeoisie and suburban workers in the first half of the twentieth century included calming ingredients: prayer, reading a fairy tale or singing a lullaby, and protective phenomena such as crossing and/or kissing. A kiss is an extension of parental protection that a child carries with them to sleep. Crossing, however, allows the superfluous being to enter the parent-child relationship, which will protect the child even when the parents are asleep.[5]

I shall return to the protective role of prayers below. At this point, it is important for me to learn that before World War II, the "important other" in the child's intermediate, liminal state was not physically present. The cultural norm changed with the gradual democratisation of the child after World War II. Only in the late 1930s educators, also due to the flourishing of psychoanalytic knowledge about the psychosexual development of the child, associated behavioural repressive training with fascism and began, unfortunately too late, to advocate democratic child rearing. It also meant putting the child to sleep in a more sympathetic way, at least on a conscious level.

2. LIMINALITY OF SLEEP

In Slovenia, folk songs were composed in rural areas, as at the end of the nineteenth century the majority of the Slovenian population were peasants. "The basic group of bearers [in addition to farmers] consisted of shepherds, soldiers, craftsmen, plebeian inhabitants of cities …, various, but … lower social classes" (Terseglav 1987: 22). With industrialisation and urbanisation, it became part of the urban environment, as the bourgeoisie, which mostly came from the countryside and later went there on visits and trips, recognised it as "natural" and "uncontaminated", worthy of national identity, which was an important topic of public discourse at the time.

Most of the ethnological contributions dealing with the way of life of the majority of the population in Slovenia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries do not report engagement with young children. This is not surprising, as children on the farm had more economic than emotional value. Until they grew up enough to become part of the workforce and take care of their own food, they were not really important. In bourgeois families, on the other hand, the child was supposed to have emotional value, which served to consolidate the social status. The children of the upper bourgeoisie were cared for by more or less numerous maids. The child was a social representation and contribution to the "body of the nation". In noble families, children were separated from their parents even more. The children of working-class families were at the mercy of the care of "neighbours" and later at the mercy of "streets" most of the time. 70 years ago, the majority of adults in Slovenia commanded, threatened, intimidated, and physically punished their children more than they cherished and caressed them (Puhar 1982; Huzjan 2020, 2021). In this regard, it would be necessary to investigate who sang lullabies to the children,[6] some of which we can still hear today. Was it the mother, the toothless grandmother, an older sister, an aunt, a peasant girl, a wet nurse, or a babysitter?

The survey material revealed to Katarina Ščepanovič, a student of ethnology and cultural anthropology, that "singing lullabies has been present to approximately the same extent since 1915 (when the oldest respondent was born) until today [i.e., in 2006, V.H.]; this is expected to put about a quarter of children to sleep" (Ščepanovič 2006: 28). Her findings show that in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, the most common technique for putting children to sleep was praying together, saying or singing prayers. Prayer to the guardian angel was widely used and "can also be found in school readers from the end of the 19th century until World War II" (Juvančič 2009: 282). Singing lullabies was never part of the prevailing culture in Slovenia, but the lullaby remained alive "almost as a ritual tradition" (Cvetko 2005: 66). It is a "universal

human act" (Juvančič 2009: 277), but the form and performance of the lullaby depend on the culture in which the singer lives.

The lullaby is a form of song that transcends time and social strata, as well as space through migrations. Researchers of the Slovene folk music tradition define it as an "improvised musical practice" with stable patterns of folklore form ("aja tutaja" or "nina nana") with a repetitive melody and simple rhythm (Juvančič 2009: 279). It is a musically simple song of uniform rhythm and small intervals. In its simplicity, it preserves the features of ancient singing and archaic melodies (Cvetko 2005: 64–65). It seems that its essential attribute is that it is defined only by its use. Therefore, a lullaby is any song that is used to put a child to sleep (Lomax Hawes 1974; Cvetko 2005; Pisanec 2006; Juvančič 2009). What is it in a lullaby that puts a child to sleep?

An attribute of every ritual is predictability, which brings certainty and therefore security to the ritual subject. A physical proximity of the other, the predictability of the rhythm and of the melody which comfort the child to sleep are important to the central aspect of the evening ritual – falling asleep. A monotonous rhythm is calming due to the proximity of autonomic processes such as breathing or heartbeat, and especially due to sucking. Sucking is a "rhythmic repetition of sucking touches with the mouth (lips)", which culminates in satiety and a feeling of pleasure. Over time, this separates and becomes independent from the original function of sucking. "Sucking out of pleasure is associated with full concentration of attention, and leads either to sleep or even to the motor reaction of a kind of orgasm" (Freud 1995 [1905]: 59; cf. Winnicott 1991 [1971]).[7] Other sleep-inducing techniques are also associated with rhythmic sexual pleasure, namely rocking, cuddling while walking, riding in a pram, even in a car or train, etc. When reading or telling a story, physical proximity and a familiar voice calm the child, which is also important when singing. Physical closeness, rhythm and voice are supposed to contribute to a pleasant and safe feeling when going to sleep, while not ignoring the fact that a child's experience of closeness can also be bad.

In the preface to the book *Aja, tutaja*, puppeteer Jelena Sitar wrote:

> *Just how is [the child] supposed to separate from the exciting surroundings, light and contacts and move into the darkness and loneliness of sleep? … A close adult with their presence, touch and voice in a slow repetitive rhythm helps the child to overcome the time of transition from wakefulness to sleep. When children close their eyes, they can still hear their mother's or father's voice, which becomes quieter and more distant… Until a new meeting, when children open their eyes again…* (Sitar 2005: 3)

The lullaby "draws a line" (Cvetko 2005: 67); it is a threshold that must be crossed to enter the world of sleep, although falling asleep can also be dangerous. The following lullaby suggests that it is not always certain a person will wake up:

> *Whoever is sleepy, let him go to sleep, let him go to sleep.*
> *I'm not sleepy, and I'm not going to sleep.*
> *One has slept three nights, three nights,*
> *and his eyes have sunk into his neck.*
> (Pisanec 2006: 49)[8]

According to "some beliefs, a person [should] die symbolically in a dream (leaving the soul)" (Paternoster & Lamut & Valič 2006: 53). The comparison between sleep (during which a person is absent, although physically present) and death does not surprise us, as we also say that someone who has died has fallen asleep forever. A daily evening farewell (e.g., a kiss or goodnight greeting) from loved ones has a similar apotropaic character; it is an expression of connectedness or attachment (Bowlby 1998 [1973]) in case the person does not wake up. Each sleep is a metaphorical death. People "drown" in sleep; they are left breathless.

The aforementioned song is about a singer who is putting a child who is afraid of sleeping to sleep. (Re)creating a simple rhythm and melody can induce a tired singer to sleep. Schwenger compares reading or creating texts with hypnagogy, sleepiness, napping or slipping into sleep when the images that a person "observes" with their eyes closed are far away. This state is not yet sleep, nor is it the dream world. It is the liminal state between being awake and sleeping, in which a person is no longer fully conscious (Schwenger 2012: 1–49). The singer also crosses the threshold during the musical improvisation. So during the singing of a lullaby the liminal state is dual; it is the state of the child and of the singer.

Sleeping is a mental exercise of the process of separation; not only the separation of the child from an adult, but also the separation of the adult from a child. In this regard, American folk musician and folklorist Bess Lomax Hawes wondered if it was not the case that in a lullaby, "the mother is actually talking to herself about separation" (Lomax Hawes 1974: 147–148). There will be more discussion of the singer's experience of the liminal state further in this article. I conclude the section by stating that with the daily practice of falling asleep, the child internalises an important calming function, and over time develops a calming habit through the use of their own sleep ritual, which also allows a grown-up to fall asleep.

3. THE LIMINAL STATE OF THE SINGER AND THE LIMINALITY OF THE FOLK LULLABY[9]

Sleep is a socialising practice with the internalisation of conceptual cultural codes. It is a transfer of cultural norms and ideological meanings. On the basis of a comparative analysis of putting Japanese and American children to sleep, Lomax Hawes noted that the way in which children are lulled to sleep has a significant impact on early childhood development. Therefore, with regard to the manner adults put children to sleep, "they get what they obviously want" (Lomax Hawes 1974: 144). In view of the findings, it is important to know that lullabies are perhaps the first musical work one encounters at the beginning of life. The analysis of their texts thus opens up the possibility for us to get to know the first elements of culture that the child receives (Del Giudice 1988: 271), and the reality lived by the singer. At the same time, one should bear in mind that the relationship between the singer and the child is culturally and socially conditioned.

Folk lullabies, as well as the folk song tradition, include general notions of the cultural space where they lived or still live. Culture in the broadest sense of the word is a construction built on fantasy with real effects on the community. Sigmund Freud stressed the close connection between so-called "proto-fantasies" and folklore traditions. In the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he wrote that in proto-fantasies the individual reaches "beyond his own experience into the experience of previous times", so that proto-fantasies are a phylogenetic possession (Freud 1977 [1916–1917]: 351). Thus, "scenes of parental sexual intercourse, seduction in childhood, and threats of castration are … inherited property, phylogenetic heritage, and they can also be acquired through personal experiences"[10] (Freud 1989a [1909]: 215). Unlike Carl Gustav Jung, Freud considered it "methodologically incorrect to reach for explanations of phylogeny before we have exhausted the possibilities of ontogenesis", although in the latter it is "organically showing anew what was once produced in ancient times and what was inherited as a disposition for re-acquisition" (ibid.: 215–216). Given that it is not the singer but the lullaby that is in psychoanalytic "treatment" in this text, we can ignore Freud's methodological restraints and descend into the analysis of the texts of Slovenian folk lullabies with the help of some psychoanalytic concepts. If a singer were in psychoanalysis, then her associations and dreams would serve as analytic material. However, since the texts of the lullabies are analysed, we would ignore the singer's personal story and focus on the culture of Slovenian community. The most important psychoanalytic concept is the unconscious. The unconscious cannot be observed directly; it can be inferred from gaps in conscious production (and from symptoms). Psychoanalysis

shows that what manifests itself as a product of consciousness is actually formed in the unconscious (Freud 2000 [1899]).[11] Analysis of the text of lullabies will therefore reveal unconscious contents of Slovenian culture that become accessible precisely with texts of lullabies – as far as my aim is concerned.

So far, the Slovenian academic community has not undertaken a thorough analysis of the texts of lullabies. A selection of Slovenian folk lullabies that is analysed in the article has been identified as such by collectors who included lullabies in their collections of folk songs (e.g., Štrekelj, Dravec, Cvetko, etc.). Most of them were provided by Igor Cvetko in his booklet *Aja, tutaja* (2005), and were collected from the archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), from printed professional sources (Merkù 1976; Dravec 1981; Kumer 1998; Marty & Šivic 2004) and his field notes. With his song corpus Cvetko tried to cover the Slovenian ethnic territory, though lullabies from Upper Carniola, Carinthia, and Prekmurje region are less represented. I supplemented the original selection with some "rocking songs" by Slovenian most prominent collector of folk songs, Karel Štrekelj (1911), and with a few extra lullabies from ZRC SAZU Institute of Ethnomusicology, which I came across in the diploma thesis of Anuša Pisanec (2006). Not all available lullabies are included in the analysis, as I do not categorise them in terms of genre, topography, etc., which would require knowledge of folklore. Texts that were "frozen" at the time of recording, i.e., in the twentieth century, are analysed as "dead" records, namely without context: without lullaby's musical, i.e., rhythmic and melodic aspect and without performance in its sensual appearance. Ethnomusicological knowledge is required for such an analysis. Also, the results of the analysis would be more relevant if I were to interview the singer. Without interpretation of the field subject, we enter the analysis with a certain degree of deviation from reality. Observing singing while falling asleep would provide a sensory and emotional experience, though interfering with the intimate space of another is ethically questionable. Nevertheless, the classic ethnographic question about a distortion of reality due to the presence of an observer remains unresolved.

The Slovenian ethnomusicologist Igor Cvetko pointed out that the texts of lullabies are not so important, because they "do not actually have … a real text … The 'story' remains at the level of imaginary 'pictures', maybe a verbal entanglement, but no more" (Cvetko 2005: 67), and Croatian ethnomusicologist Tanja Perić-Polonijo agrees with him in principle (2000). Italian-born American folklorist Luisa Del Giudice found that some Italian lullabies actually "defy semantisation", while others shed some light on their "internal organisational principles" and therefore meaning (Del Giudice 1988: 270). The texts of lullabies seem to put researchers in an awkward position, as they are supposed to be gen-

tle and child-friendly, but this is often not the case. Young Slovenian researcher Anuša Pisanec found that the text of a lullaby could often be "thought not to be intended for children" (Pisanec 2006: 32), and English-born Canadian folk song collector and singer Barbara Cass-Beggs wrote that in some lullabies we find "outlines of fear and unhappiness" (B. Cass-Beggs & M. Cass-Beggs 1969: 5). However, a researcher from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sanela Popović, in her analysis of the motifs of Livno's folk lullabies, found the exact opposite, stating that from birth the child is portrayed as a desired, beloved being to whom the whole community, Christian and mythological beings, plants and animals wish all the best now and in the future (Popović 2013). Let me give an example of one of the first lullabies that Popović analysed:

> *Cuna, nana is outside.*
> *The wolf could slaughter your nano.*
> *Wolf, don't nana!*
> *Nana is dear to me.*
> *She gave me a breast.*
> *And she will give me the other,*
> *when I go to sleep.*
> (Popović 2013: 401)[12]

Popović found that the lullaby has an intimidating-pedagogical character, but this did not shake her belief that the singer sings about love for a child. When researchers encounter such ambiguities, they solve them by neutralising or mitigating them, saying that they do not mean what is being said, or by disavowing them: they know what the lullaby is about, but claim it had a good intention nonetheless. Or, as Perić-Polonija writes, "the melody and the sleeping rhythm belong to the child, but the verse to the mother" (Perić-Polonijo 2000: 5). Even if it is true that what is sung in a lullaby is not important, so that the verses belong to the mother, we cannot claim that the child does not hear them. That is why it is all the more exciting to remove the smokescreen that obscures them.

3.1 I shall begin with a seemingly benign description of a sleeping situation:

> *Aja, tutaja, the cradle is rocking,*
> *in the cradle the little boy* [or cat] *is lying.*
> (Cvetko 2005: 10, 11)

or

Nina, nana, nana,
our boy is sleeping.
(Cvetko 2005: 28)[13]

"Aja, tutaja" and "nina, nana" are two of the smallest recognisable units of literary folklore. "Aja, tutaja" and "nina, nana" replace begging, muttering. Lomax Hawes would define them as buzzing (Lomax Hawes 1974: 143), Del Giudice, on the other hand, wrote that the 'n' embracing vowels "provides soft and soothing sounds, which lead to sleep with repetition" (Del Giudice 1988: 285). At the same time, these are the child's first syllables – a-ja, na-na, ni-ni, ni-na, ta-ta, tu-ta, etc. – which, because they are childish, seem to be suitable for use in a lullaby. However, Del Giudice pointed out that behind the seemingly meaningless words "nina, nana" (or "aja, tutaja") an ancient, magical meaning is hidden (Del Giudice 1988: 271–272). The lullaby is said to be close to a spell, magic, ritual, and fairy tale. Magic forms are supposed to protect the child from abduction by supernatural beings during sleep, i.e., during the period of separation. The incantation is said to have an apotropaic function and the singer is said to be a witch or a shaman (Ikegami 1986 in Govednik 2006: 9–10; Del Giudice 1988: 271). "Aja, tutaja" and "nina, nana" are therefore remnants of ancient magical spells with a protective function.[14]

> *In this sense, lullabies can be understood as the practice of communicating with (ancestor) spirits and supernatural beings, and intercessions for the well-being of a child. In the past (and still today) in Slovenia, the role of guardians of the passage was taken over by Christian characters (God, Jesus, Mary, the Holy Trinity, angels or saints), and among them we also find pre-Christian and present-day (sleepy-sleeping) beings*. (Juvančič 2009: 282)

3.2 Making the sign of the cross over the child or saying prayers before going to bed (e.g., "Holy Angel", "I Love Thee", "My Creator"), which I mentioned in the section on the liminal in the evening ritual, also have an apotropaic function. Even today, there is a living common prayer said together with parents, after which the children undoubtedly fall asleep more peacefully, as the parents are reassured. Prayers allow for a state of rapture, but they also have a hypnotic effect. Some of them are therefore, so to speak, "naturally" assimilated into lullabies:

Tutaj, ninaj, young child,
you would like to fall asleep!

May the eternal God protect you,
God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!
I will rock you,
Mary will cross you.
Let the holy guardian angel guard you,
Holy Trinity guard you!
(Štrekelj 1911: 478)[15]

The above lyric is not only a prayer, a request to supernatural beings to provide protection to the child, but also expresses the desire for the child to fall asleep. It is similar to the shorter one:

Aja, tutu,
sleep sweetly,
the angel of God will rock you.
(Marty & Šivic 2004: 27)[16]

3.3 The lyrics below, however, are not only a request for safe sleep, but also for an appropriate future life for the child. The desire for children to grow up as soon as possible was not only a desire to have labour force and a possibility of their own survival (social moment), but also a desire to neutralise the singer's burden of care and anxiety in relation to a helpless child (psychological moment):

Tutaj, ninaj,
Tutaj, ninaj,
young child!
To be big soon,
To serve God,
The Virgin Mary and Joseph!
Tutaj, ninaj, nač.
Tutaj, ninaj, nač!
(Štrekelj 1911: 478)[17]

3.4 In addition to prayers, folk tales, (family) ballads, church hymns, recruitment songs, drinking songs, animal's and shepherd's teasers, etc., are also assimilated into lullabies or are, as originals, used to help children fall asleep. In the nineteenth century, Slovenian ballads about infanticide were used as lullabies, for example, "The noble lady slaughters son of her servant", "The bride is doomed, the child is glorified", and "The illegitimate mother murders her child"[18] (Štrekelj 1895: 191–196; 1986: 238–247, 247–252). The act of murdering one's

own child has been repeatedly subjected to various psychological, sociological, and philosophical (ethical) research. In most explanations one finds a moralistic undertone. For example, Del Giudice assumed that choosing a ballad about a child killer for a lullaby is a moral lesson, "a dilemma [which] serves only as a negative example for reflection and can actually strengthen [mother's] bond with the child" (Del Giudice 1988: 278). However, there are also interpretations that reveal infanticide as a way out of the captivity of social bonds.[19] The social connotation of infanticide is obvious: forced marriages, required virginity when entering into marriage,[20] rape, the criminalisation of abortion and contraception, the pregnancy of maids and other single women, etc. The birth of an illegitimate child testified to the presupposed female pleasure, which was controversial for male domination. That is why the illegitimate mother was an outcast of the society. But why use a ballad of infanticide for a lullaby? The closeness between the two genres, the ballad of the child killer and the lullaby, seems indisputable – both thematise death, real or metaphorical; the child goes to another world, dies or falls asleep. The use of a ballad of infanticide to enable falling asleep indicates the ambivalent attitude of the singer towards the child. It is an anchor of the murderous fantasies of the singer to the child as well as to her father, or more broadly – the society and culture to which she belongs. This ambivalent attitude – the ubiquitous fear of death[21] and the desire to die – is revealed in many folk lullabies.

3.5 As we move forward, the two-part lullaby is interesting:

> *Mother sways, sings beautifully,*
> *the child smiles sweetly.*
> *He does not know about his sorrows,*
> *nor about the sorrows of the world.*
> *Mother dies, golden mother,*
> *the sweet little girl cries.*
> *Milica looks around the wide, wide field.*
> (Emeršič 2006: 67)[22]

The first and second parts are fundamentally opposed: in the first stanza the child knows nothing about suffering, then it strikes with all its force. We do not know whether the singer is singing about the past or scaring the child with the future. The ubiquity of the metaphorical and real death of the time is illustrated also by the following lullaby:

> *Quiet, quiet, little Tonček, just don't cry so.*

Your mother was buried, it's terribly bad.
Rock him, rock him so he won't cry,
he will grow up, he will graze chickens.
(Pisanec 2006: 78)[23]

The child's mother has died, perhaps only metaphorically, but mourning is not desirable, it is necessary to grow up and start working. The song also expresses a fear of the child's death, as he skips mourning in his mind and is already grazing chickens. The defence mechanism of disavowal is in progress (Freud 1987 [1927]).

3.6 In the next lyrics, we witness a lullaby that mentions breaking wind:

The little one was lying in the cradle,
the cradle was swaying, and he fell asleep.
The little one was lying in the cradle,
three times he farted and fell asleep.
(Cvetko 2005: 50)[24]

Feeding is followed by falling asleep, and babies ("little ones") still have an immature digestive tract. But why does the singer mention a fart in the lullaby? At the beginning of life, children are beyond good and evil; they are not ashamed of anything, they are not disgusted by anything, they are immoral, so to speak "driven", according to Freud, "polymorphically perverted" (Freud 1995 [1905]: 70). As they grow, they are like a fart: halfway between cleanliness and dirt.

3.7 Although a drive is "the psychic representation … of an intrasomatic stimulus source" (Freud 1995 [1905]: 48),[25] people still equate it with instinct, that is, the instinctive activity of animals. They equate the child with an animal as in the following poem:

Aja, aja, aja [or *nina, nana*],
pussy [or little girl] *is asleep.*
(Cvetko 2005: 8, 26)

or

Ninaj, nanaj,
little child, dream,
ninaj, nanaj,

little child, dream!
(Dravec 1981: 466)[26]

The phrases and words "go to sleep", "you are sleepy", "dream", etc., are suggestible and express the singer's desire to say goodbye. This is perhaps the most important function of a lullaby. As an expression of separation it is common all over the world.

3.8 The next lullaby demands reciprocity between unequal partners:

You're not hungry, nor thirsty,
I gave you milk.
I'll sing a little,
and you'll fall asleep.
Tutikaj, oj, ninaj ninikaj.
(Cvetko 2005: 30)

or

Fall asleep, fall asleep, my son, my son.
Silence your cry. I will rock you,
I will sing to you beautifully.
(Cvetko 2005: 52)[27]

The singer comforts – "everything is fine" – and expects reciprocity: "I give milk and song, you fall asleep", "I give song and rocking, you stop crying and fall asleep" in an asymmetric relationship of socially and culturally unequal partners.

3.9 A singer asks for cooperation on the basis of a promise in the following lullaby:

Ajaj, ajaj [sleep, sleep], *my darling,*
child you are tired tonight,
Ajaj, ajaj [sleep, sleep], *my child,*
mother is rocking, singing.
Come, come dove,
you will rock my child,
the child will sleep softly
and will not cry.
There is a lamb outside,
the lamb is beautiful and white,

the lamb will jump along with me
sway my child.
Beautiful flowers bloom,
white and colourful.
We will get up early in the morning,
we will pick beautiful flowers.
(Pisanec 2006: 77)[28]

"Do not cry," the singer sings, "because I promise you that we will be together again tomorrow (picking flowers)." In this gentle lullaby the singer invites animals (turtle dove and lamb) to lull and promises to the child a day worth waking up to. Lullabies with a promise or bribe are a common and widespread motif (cf. Lomax Hawes 1974: 145), such as the frequent and widespread frustration of an adult when putting a child to sleep.

3.10 What if the child is "annoying" and does not want to cooperate?

Aja, tutaja, the boy is annoying, …
He's sleeping sweetly now.
(Cvetko 2005: 13)

or

Aja, tuta, naja,
the boy is annoying now,
the cat will come,
and it will piss on him.
(Cvetko 2005: 15)

or

Aja tutaja, Franček is annoying,
the bav bav bav will come and put him in a bag.
(Paternoster & Lamut & Valič 2006: 53)

or in the extended version:

Aja tutaja, Franček is annoying,
he doesn't want to sleep, he always cries,
the bav bav bav will come and put him in a bag.
(Paternoster & Lamut & Valič 2006: 53)

or

Aja, tutaja,
Marija is annoying,
Marija is crying,
she doesn't want to sleep yet.
(Cvetko 2005: 12)

or

Aa, tutu,
just sleep sweetly.
Mary rocked and sang nicely:
"If you don't fall asleep quickly, you'll get it on your ass."
(Cvetko 2005: 20)

or

Aja, tutu … if you don't sleep,
you'll get it on your ass.
(Cvetko 2005: 23)[29]

The child cannot fall asleep – "annoys", often "cries" – and hinders the satisfaction of the singer's desire, who therefore threatens that the cat will "piss" on him, "bav bav bav" will put him in a bag or the singer herself will spank him. When a child cannot fall asleep, the singer feels great discomfort. Lullabies testify that the singer unconsciously clings to the projections in her frustration: the child refuses to fall asleep and is bothering me, so I will threaten him. The child cannot fall asleep because he feels physical (hunger) or mental discomfort (restlessness). I will write more about hunger below; here I will elaborate on the previously mentioned ways of intimidation: the cat will "piss" on him, "bav bav bav" will stuff him in a bag and he would be beaten. Freud associates urination with pollution in several places (Freud 1995 [1905]: 69; 2000 [1899]: 214, 372–373), which would suit a male cat. The word "piss" also has a derogatory character, because when a person "pisses" at someone, they do not respect them and thus dominate. Putting someone in a bag means to place them back in the womb,[30] more precisely: to remove them. "Getting it on the ass" is a spanking act, "even if it does not hurt much, it means humiliation and the rejection of love" (Freud 1989b [1919]: 331).[31] The consequences of spanking were not only described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Izpovedi* (Confessions) (1956 [1782]),

but also by Freud, who found that the sadistic behaviour of adults leaves, in addition to the educational message, indelible sexual traces on children. These are the fantasy consequences of experiencing active (sadistic) and passive (masochistic) gratification, with masochism taking precedence in the sexual context (Freud 1989b [1919]). The rhythmic tapping on the bottom to calm the baby, which Cvetko (2005: 20) refers to in the lullaby, also has a sexual character;[32] as Freud wrote: "Already here something that is true of all life is visible, that sexual gratification is the best sleeping pill" (Freud 1995 [1905]: 59).

3.11 Less than a hundred years ago, many children in Slovenia were hungry before going to bed , which makes it very difficult to fall asleep:

Flour is hissing, hissing
our little girl is crying.
Give her food, give her drinks,
and she will be, and she will be full.
(Cvetko 2005: 51)

or

Ovbe, father Čamer,
there is a big moaning in the house:
the children have died,
they over-consumed boiling porridge.
A fern grows behind the stove,
hunger jumps around the house!
Father Čamer!
There is a big moaning in the house!
(Štrekelj 1911: 478)[33]

Čamer is a bull, "ruler among the beef family",[34] so someone who can take care of the well-being of the family to which the singer belongs. But sometimes even the *pater familias* fails to support the family:

Tajnonina, tajnona,
my husband is not at home.
Where did he go? In Ižola,
for the sour pinca!
(Štrekelj 1911: 479)[35]

Pinca is sweet festive Easter bread known in the Primorska (coastal) region. If a man went for sour *pinca*, then he would bring nothing. Hunger remains, vividly described by the phrase "behind the stove grows a fern" – the stove has not been lit for a very long time. The singer's concern that the child will go hungry is projected into the image of death ("the children died") and accidents ("they ate boiling porridge"), which could be realistic. The hunger is so severe that it is impossible to wait: the children over-consumed hot porridge. The word "gluttony" [*žretje*], on the other hand, adds a sadistic overtone to the concern for satiety: children are said to have died horrible deaths from burns while feeding.[36] Once again, we are witnessing the basic ambivalence of the singer towards the child, namely the fear of death and the desire for death, with which the problems would disappear. Hunger and general deprivation are constant companions of Slovenian history (Šorn 2018).[37] There is also a lullaby that thematises a hungry mother:

Tana, nina, nena,
the cow doesn't want hay.
The cow will die of great hunger.
The cow wants greens.
There aren't any greens,
we'll go look for them.
(Cvetko 2005: 34)[38]

The cow is a metaphor for the mother who can die of hunger. In addition, she does not have enough milk to breastfeed.[39] Satisfaction of hunger and thirst is one of the basic human needs and the basic concern of an adult at the beginning of a child's life is that the baby is fed. As we have noticed, a common theme of lullabies is the opposite of satiety – hunger (cf. Del Giudice 1988: 277).

3.12 In some cases, the deprivation of food turns into a fantasy of abundance, the antithesis of the fear of hunger, and therefore the fantasy fulfilment of the singer's desire, which partly comforts her:

Tona, nina, tonana,
in one pocket an apple,
in the other hazelnuts,
and in the other little pears.
(Cvetko 2005: 37)[40]

Fantasies of abundance are joined in lullabies by fantasies about the well-being of a child in the face of a general lacking:

Aja, tutaja, golden wheels,
silver cradle, son is sleeping in it.
(Cvetko 2005: 14)

or

Huha, huhoka, a cradle in the field,
red are the bells, silver wheels.

or

Aja, tutu … cradle is of gold,
young child in it.
(Cvetko 2005: 22)[41]

Gold and silver, which symbolise money (Freud 2000 [1899]: 373), stand out in lullabies.

3.13 Freud (2006a: 17–23; 2006c: 97–104) found that there is a conditional identification between the aforementioned money (gift) and excrement on the one hand and between excrement, the penis, and a child on the other, adding "that these elements in the unconscious are often treated as equivalent to each other and could easily replace each other" (Freud 2006c: 99), therefore: money – excrement – penis – child. In this respect, the next lullaby, which Cvetko calls a "gentle teaser" (2005: 27), is not surprising, if we ignore an evident patriarchal segregation between sexes all over the world:

Nina, nana, the girl is shitty,
the boy is beautiful [clean].
(Cvetko 2005: 27)[42]

3.14 In the lullaby "Tajna, nina, nena, / yellow flower. / The bird flew, / it rocked the twig. / The apple fell, / the girl picked it up" (Cvetko 2005: 36)[43] it is not certain whether it is an image of abundance with oral gratification, when food just "falls from the sky", or an explanation of conception and birth: the "flower" symbolises female genitalia, upon which lands a "bird" or "cock" (penis),[44] which rocks the "twig" (in the form of the male genitalia) and in nine months a baby girl is born ("the apple fell, / the girl picked it up"). Lullabies with chickens and eggs are similarly ambiguous:

Ajčka, tutajčka, the hen lays eggs,
four for me, five for you,
that is exactly nine.
(Cvetko 2005: 16)

or

Ujsa drajsa, ujsa drajsa,
the hen lays eggs.
I have five, you have five,
and there are ten.
Anica, just fall asleep sweetly,
just look, the sleeper has been flying.
And Mommy will rock you,
Anica, sleep sweetly now.
(Marty & Šivic 2004: 26)[45]

It is not clear whether there is a phantasy of abundance of food for all ("four (or five) for me, and five for you") or an infantile explanation of conception and birth, which Freud calls the "cloacal theory", i.e., fertilisation through the mouth and birth through the anus. Infantile theories of sexuality synthesise a child's notions of sexuality with their sexual experiences. In addition to the cloacal theory, infantile sexual theories include attributing the penis to both sexes, coitus as a sadistic act, giving birth by "caesarean section", also through the navel, etc. (Freud 2006b: 25–40). At the same time, we cannot ignore the fear of the death of children, as indicated by the over-compensatory numbers 9 and 10 (children).

3.15 Even more ambiguous are the following lullabies, in which pigs and steers perform:

Ujsa, ujsa, ujsa,
two fat pigs.
We slaughtered one,
and sold the other.
(Cvetko 2005: 44)

or

Hujsa, drgunca,
two fat little steers:

we slaughtered one,
and bundled the other.
Hujsa, drgunci,
three fat little steers:
we slaughtered one,
sold one,
and still have one,
but we won't give it away.
(Cvetko 2005: 45)[46]

It is strange that slaughter is mentioned while lulling, although until recently slaughter was a village holiday event with the promise of abundance. The lullaby is crudely direct: a "pig" (dirty child) or a "little steer", a young castrate (allegedly not sexually active yet), will be slaughtered or sold or "put in a bundle" (returned to the womb), so got rid of it in a more or less cruel manner. I speculate that the child, with cathartic relief, identifies with the one that is still on the farm and not given away.

There is another terrifying lullaby:

Bilen, bolen,
let's take a little girl to the mill.
Where did we leave her?
We sold her to my uncle.
(Cvetko 2005: 48)

or

Diren, diren, dalen
let's take a little girl to the mill,
didelon, cockroach.
(Cvetko 2005: 49)[47]

By describing the terrible fate, the singer is supposed to force the child to fall asleep faster, so she should escape from the horror to dreams. Bullying with the prospect of separation would have no effect if separation anxiety were not somehow necessary for the child's survival. Sell the girl to a miller? Is child grinding or child slavery suggested? A girl is a cockroach, an unwanted child (Freud 2000 [1899]: 333).

3.16 I will conclude the analysis with more explicitly sexual lullabies:

Tana, nina, tanana,
our boy is not at home.
There in the white little house
he blows porridge in a little pot.
Oxen moo in the stable,
girls turn the little boy around.
(Cvetko 2005: 35)[48]

The lullaby is in two parts: in the first one we meet the expectation of oral gratification (the porridge is blown) in a dream ("the boy is not at home"), followed by a racy scene where (older) girls seduce a little boy. Oxen symbolise violence and domination, but they are castrated, so the girls are dominant. Slovenian publicist Milena Miklavčič (2013) with her collection of sexual testimonies revealed how women in the recent past were as a little boy in the lullaby, an "unprotected child" in the realm of male sexual power, so the text of the lullaby can also be understood as a reversal with a contrary purpose of fantasy fulfilment, i.e., revenge.

Another one runs as follows:

Opsasa, saja, a pussy is merrymaking,
it knows it well, it knows it well in all three places.
Above along the little balcony in a rounded cardigan,
below along the little cave in a suitor's jacket,
inside the house in a red cap.
(Cvetko 2005: 46)[49]

It is a description of sex: "pussy" (symbol of the female genitalia) dances; first stops on the balcony (symbol of women's breasts), then a rounded cardigan, at the hole in the vassal's "jacket", and finally penetration: "red cap" (irritated head of the penis) in the "house" (symbol of the body) (Freud 2000 [1899]).

And here is the last one:

The bunny is running, the bunny is running on the green grass.
Run women, run women
he will beat you with his paw,
for the young boy, for the young boy
he will buy a horse,
young …
he will buy sugar,
young …

he will buy a hat… etc.
(Pisanec 2006: 50)[50]

The bunny symbolises a drive. "Beating with a paw (penis)" means having coitus; children interpret a coitus through their pregenital sexual experiences, that is, as a sadistic act (Freud 2006b: 25–40). It will provide the "young boys" with power ("horse"), energy ("sugar") and penis ("hat"), i.e., with potency (Freud 2000 [1899]).

Unfortunately, until now no research has been done to learn which of the listed songs are still alive in Slovenia. There are, however, field records of children's experiences of listening to lullabies. During his fieldwork in 2006, Mitja Gorjup, a student of ethnology and cultural anthropology, came across an informant who remembered "her father, who took care of her while her mother was in hospital. In the evening before bed, her father sang about a tailless dog. It was a funny song, but she was already so shocked by her mother, and then because of the dog… She experienced the mentioned lullings as painful" (Gorjup 2006: 59). It is evident that her father chose the lullaby for himself, he was like a castrated dog without a tail, helpless in relation to the child when his wife was in hospital. Lomax Hawes, in an analysis of folk lullabies from the archives of the University of California, Berkeley, found that more than half of them did not mention sleeping or admiring a child, but that the texts were intended for adults (Lomax Hawes 1974: 141, 146). I can conclude that the singer of lullabies releases her emotions (especially anxiety, fear, and anger), aggressive and sexual impulses in the intimacy of falling asleep, in a socially asymmetric situation, no matter how difficult the child experiences them.[51] The mental and social distress of the singer frightens the child, and the partially controlled (monotonous rhythm, simple melody) emptying comforts and calms the singer.

An artificial lullaby "denied the existence of resentment or dissatisfaction in the mother's attitude towards her child" (Pisanec 2006: 34) and "excluded poems with excessively cruel and realistic texts, which they [authors] assumed could have a harmful effect on the child's image of the world" (Močnik 2006: 40). In contrast, in folk lullabies, the singer expresses her uncensored thoughts about "the complexity of love, from which tensions, fears and even depression cannot be ruled out. … Women express strong emotions that are meant for themselves" (McDowell 1977: 205–206). The child is reduced to an object, a container for the singer's frustrations, which they cannot contain (Bion 1987 [1967]) and cannot interpret (Laplanche 2008), so they are "painful" for them. They are confronted with taboo contents that the singer cannot otherwise utter, which is one of the functions of folk oral expression, namely, to enable an individual to say what

otherwise remains unspoken in society (Bascom 1954). The ban provided the unifying mechanisms of language and used metaphorical strategies that Del Giudice linked to the dreaming process (Del Giudice 1988: 271). In fact, the work of dreams consists of a displacement (of an affect) and a condensation (of a representation) (Freud 2000 [1899]: 265–464), metonymy, and metaphor. The story of the lullaby is built in an associative process, not in a strictly logical progression, which is again characteristic of a dreamy process.

Liminal is not just sleep, it is not just the path to sleep, it is not just a singer. The lullaby is itself a product of the liminal state of a singer. The lyrics of the lullaby are exactly what Cvetko wrote: "The 'story' remains at the level of imagination, 'pictures', maybe a verbal entanglement, but no more" (Cvetko 2005: 67), only that he missed the conclusion, namely: "[Lullabies] do not have a real text" (ibid.). On the contrary, the "real text" is already present all the time, only its meaning has to be found yet.

The folk lullaby is not part of children's literary folklore (Sutton-Smith et al. 1999 [1995]; Kumer & Stanonik 2004), but it is connected with it by the "uncensoredness" of the texts.[52] They are created or recreated and used by adults to put children to sleep. During lulling, the child is reduced to an object. The lullaby is intended for a child but becomes an "opportunity" for the singer. It is created in relation to the child, it is a reflection of the singer's day, her social position, attitude towards the world, etc.; it is an emotional confession or meditation with the function of calming and comforting the singer. Only when the singer calms down, the small child can fall asleep. The singer's restlessness keeps them awake. This, in turn, excites the singer and the discomfort is circular until the singer enters a state of daydreaming (*rêverie*), halfway to sleep, and mentally moves away from the child, and her mental content floats into her consciousness (cf. Del Giudice 1988: 274, 286). In this sense, I could only partially agree with Lomax Hawes, who defines a lullaby as a communicative act (Lomax Hawes 1974: 143), or Igor Cvetko, when he understands it as a manner of communication (Cvetko 2005: 66); putting a child into sleep is not a mutual act as communication is supposed to be. But I agree to his definition of it as a play that is in many ways closer to an (intimate) theatrical event (Cvetko 2005: 68). In accord with Moreno psychotherapeutic spouses (Moreno & Toeman Moreno 2000), it could also be called a psychodrama. The singer's satisfaction with the final act of the monodrama is twofold: "the baby falls asleep, which frees her from direct pressures and responsibilities for a moment, and the singer vents stress and *angst* [anxiety]" (Del Giudice 1988: 286). The singer took a break from social and cultural norms for a while; according to Turner (1974), she had a liminoid experience.[53]

The liminality of the evening ritual brings the insecurities of the singer's life to the surface. While singing, she calms her anxiety and soothes emotional pain, which she projects into the lyrics of the lullaby. When a man is angry, it is an expression of his helplessness; anger empowers him mentally. Slovenian ethnomusicologist Katarina Juvančič thinks similarly: "Singing lullabies in private and public environments can help to strengthen the position of women, especially in an environment where women's creative potential is socially or ethnically marginalised, neglected or even politically controversial" (Juvančič 2009: 283). An issue that remains unclear is whether the singer even wants to decipher the meaning of the song. Or is the singer at a certain level always aware of the hidden meaning that her lullabies carry?[54]

CONCLUSION

The singing of lullabies socialises the child into a cultural richness of musical and conceptual codes and provides the singer with a way out for expressing otherwise forbidden emotions and desires. During the evening (re)creation, both are eventually in a liminal state: the child between waking and sleeping, the singer in (re)creative enthusiasm or meditation, which is enabled by the lullaby with its rhythm and melody.

The analysis of the texts of selected Slovenian folk lullabies has revealed that from the very birth the child participated in the singer's desire to protect their well-being and comfort, but also more or less hidden aggressive and sexual messages, feelings of fear, anger and hatred. These were the building blocks of lullaby lyrics, reflecting the wider social violence and sexual culture to which the singer belonged. Lullabies were only a part of the otherwise violent practice of socialisation in Slovenia in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (Puhar 1982; Huzjan 2021).

One cannot justify the text of the lullaby by explaining its origin, saying that this song was once a ballad, a church hymn, love or recruitment song, a drinking or teasing song, etc. The question is why it was chosen as a lullaby among the set of folk songs. On the other hand, it seems that the song was not selected, but transmitted and internalised, then further interpreted by social inertia. It seems as if the singer did not choose the lullaby, but that the lullaby chose the singer, even though she could have decided otherwise.

What at the beginning of the research seemed to be a great revelation – that lullabies do not express love and enthusiasm for a child – turned out to be a "discovery of hot water". Many researchers (e.g., Bascom 1954; Lomax Hawes 1974; Pisanec 2006; Juvančič 2009) state that the singer was able to release her

feelings of anxiety, anger, and hostility while putting a child to sleep, but they argue that most of the singer's emotions were related to the difficult social conditions of the majority population: hunger, the omnipresence of death because of misery, illness, and disasters, patriarchal armour, etc. These findings are true but not complete (cf. Del Giudice 1988). The singer could choose to interpret any other song from the wide repertoire of folklore. Why singers choose lullabies for their complaints remains an open question. Is it the intimacy of the evening? Or because a small child is passive but still present?[55]

The singers, with lullabies full of resentment, empowered themselves with the weakest social link – the child. In such a situation, it was not possible for complaints to be heard. Perhaps this was not the intention either, as any confrontation with the truth requires courage for pain. The child, reduced to a passively listening object, sooner or later fell asleep and took the lullaby with them to dream, to a new day, to their children, and they on to theirs, and so on. This is how folk lullabies reveal the foundations of contemporary family life in Slovenia.

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NOTES

[1] The text is dedicated to Dr Marko Terseglav.

[2] In the further text, I use the female gender to indicate the person who sings lullabies because putting children to sleep is mainly a female activity. I do not deal with the issue of gender in this text.

[3] The maids were mostly peasant girls who went to the city for better and "cleaner" earnings (Žagar 1986). Through their visits, they brought cultural elements of the bourgeois population to the countryside, including artificial lullabies. Marko Terseglav

stated three conditions for the receptivity of artificial poetry among people: "A piece of elite poetry … moved with the mediators among the people if the song was to their liking, if it could be sung, and if it suited the already established but unregulated poetics" (Terseglav 1987: 22).

[4] The transitional object is important for the child because it represents an important calming and comforting adult, and at the same time the children themselves when they are in the role of an adult. The importance of the transitional object communicates the fact that people often store this toy when they no longer need it. (cf. Tomažič 1999; Križ 2002).

[5] I wish to thank my colleague Dr Špela Ledinek Lozej, who added that with the rite of crossing the parent hands the child over to God's protection and prosperity, thus freeing the child from parents and parents from the child.

[6] Katarina Juvančič stated the reasons for the academic and public oversight of the phenomenon of sleep as an everyday cultural practice in detail (2009: 277–279). I wish to add that until recently, women's housekeeping and nursing work was completely invisible, so male researchers could not notice them. I am glad that women won the right to enter a university in the past, but paradoxically, until the publication of *Al ,že spiš?* (Are you already sleeping?) (Juvančič & Šetinc 2006) only male names were found under selected folk lullabies.

[7] It is generally known that adults in the Slovenian countryside after World War II occasionally gave children sugar or poppy seed milk wrapped in a linen pacifier before bedtime, or soaked it in brandy, etc. Bourgeois children became acquainted with the pacifier between the two world wars: "If we give a child a pacifier, which is sometimes really necessary for nervous children, it should not be punctured and it should be boiled two or three times a day in boiling water!" (Derč 1921 [1919]: 19) By "licking the pacifier" parents pass tuberculosis on to the child, and syphilis is transmitted by kissing; "every pacifier that is not sterilised is poisonous and deadly!" (ibid.: 20)

[8] The original reads: Kirmu se drejmle, naj gre spat, naj gre spat. / Meni se ne drejmle, pa ne grem. / Aden je drejmov tri noči, tri noči, / pa so mu zlejzle v vrat oči.

[9] In this part of the article, every time I use the word "lullaby", I have in mind a folk lullaby, unless stated otherwise.

[10] Freud also writes about typical fantasies in one of his notes in *Tri razprave o teoriji seksualnosti* (Three essays on the theory of sexuality). Fantasies refer to eavesdropping on parents' sexual intercourse, early seduction by loved ones, the threat of castration, the uterus (the content of these fantasies regards remaining in the womb and even experiences in it) and a so-called "family novel" in which a teenager reacts to the difference in his or her attitudes toward parents now and in childhood (Freud 1995 [1905]: 103).

[11] Unfortunately, Freudian psychoanalysis has become marginal in science within the neoliberal paradigm, in which it is uneconomical in time and content; it lasts too long and discovers the causes the consequences of which could be subversive.

[12] The original reads: Cuna, nana na polju. / Vuk ti nano zakolja. / Nemoj, vuče nane, / nana mi je draga, / sisu mi je dala. / I drugu će dat / kada pođem spat.

[13] The originals read: Aja, tutaja, zibka se maja, / v zibki pa mali fantek [ali maček] leži; Nina, nana, nana, / naš fantek pa aja.

[14] One of the reviewers reminded me that the apotropaic function of lullabies is also applied to texts created by other Slavic nations, e.g., Poles, Slovaks, Ukrainians,

etc. Well-known Russian folklorists Tatiana Agapkina and Andrei Toporkov (2020) analysed magic spells for children's insomnia, which seem to have existed already in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, and were widely spread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the vast territory where Eastern, Southern, and Western Slavs lived. Given that Del Giudice (1988) also found remnants of magic spells in Italian lullabies and Ikegami (1986) in Japanese lullabies, I can conclude that the protective function of lullabies is probably universal.

[15] The original reads: Tutaj, ninaj, dete mlado, / da bi rado zaspančkalo! / Da te bi varval večni Bog, / Bog Oče, Sin in Sveti duh! / Jest tebe bom zazibala, / Marija te bo prekrižala. / Sveti angel varuh naj varje te, / Sveta trojica vari te!

[16] The original reads: Aja tutu, / spančkaj sladku, / angelček božji zazibal te bu.

[17] The original reads: Tutaj ninaj, / Tutaj, ninaj / dejte mladu! / De bi skorej velku blu. / De bi služilo Bogu, / Devici Mariji in Jožefu! / Tutaj, ninaj, nač. / Tutaj, ninaj, nač!

[18] The original headings are: "Žlahtna gospa zakolje majarici sinka", "Nevesta pogubljena, dete vzveličano", and "Nezakonska mati umori svoje dete".

[19] Such is, for example, Žižek's interpretation of Seth's action from the novel *Ljubljena* (Beloved) by Toni Morrison (Žižek 1999: 29–30).

[20] Freud in his discussion of the taboo of virginity (2003 [1918]) problematises this demand.

[21] The trend of high mortality of mothers, infants, and children due to hunger, general deprivation, poor hygiene, and inadequate health care began to reverse, especially in urban areas, between the two world wars (Huzjan 2020).

[22] The original reads: Mati ziblje, lepo poje, / dete milo se smehlja. / Saj ne ve za tuge svoje, / ne za žalosti sveta. / Mati umrje, zlata mama, / milo joče deklica. / Po širokem, širnem polju / se ozira Milica.

[23] The original reads: Tiho, tiho Tonček mali, le ne jokaj se tako. / Mater so ti pokopali, to pač strašno je hudo. / Zibaj ga, zibaj ga, da ne bo jokau, / gore bo zrasu, piške bo pasu.

[24] The original reads: Mičkenu, malu, v zibki ležalu, / zibka se majala, pa je zaspalu. / Mičkenu, malu, v zibki ležalu, / trikrat je prdkalu pa je zaspalu.

[25] A role model of a concept of drive is sexual drive. The body is represented in the concept of drive, but the drive itself is represented by a representation that stems from the experience of satisfaction. The representation can hit the fates of the drive: repression, reversal into opposition, sublimation, and turning around upon the subject's own self. At the heart of Freud's drive theory is the conflict between sexual and self-preservative drives, which are ego instincts (Lešnik 2009: 57–59). They are the energy basis for defense mechanisms, e.g., a projection, a negation, a disavowal, an identification, an intellectualisation, etc. (A. Freud 1946 [1937]), of which some, along with the fates of drive, we also encounter in this article.

[26] The original reads: Aja, aja, aja [ali nina, nana], / muca [ali pupa] je zaspana; Ninaj, nanaj, /detece, zasanjaj, / ninaj, nanaj, / detece, zasanjaj!

[27] The originals read: Lačna nejsi, žejna ne, / mlečka sem ti dala. / Malo bom zapojčkala, / ti boš pa zaspala. /Tutikaj, oj, ninaj ninikaj; Zaspi, zaspi, sinek moj, sinek moj. / Vtišaj ti jok svoj. Jaz te bodem zibala, / lepo ti bodem spevala.

[28] The original reads: Ajaj, ajaj ljubček moj, / dete trudno si nocoj, / ajaj, ajaj dete moje, / ziblje mati, eno poje. / Pridi, pridi grlica, / boš mi dete zibala, / dete mehko spalo bo /

in ne bode se jokalo. / Zunaj je no jagnče, / jagnje lepo belo je, / jagnje bo mi priskakalo / moje dete pozibalo. / Lepe rožice cvete, / bele ino pisane / zjutraj boma zgodaj vstala, / boma lepe rože brala.

[29] The originals read: Aja, tutaja, fantek nagaja, … zda‘ pa sladko spi; Aja, tuta, naja, / fantek nagaja, / došel bo maček, / pa ga bo poscal; Aja tutaja, Franček nagaja, / prišel bo bav bav bav in ga bo v vrečo dal; Aja tutaja, Franček nagaja, / spančkati noče, vedno se joče, / prišel bo bav bav bav in ga bo v vrečo dal; Aja, tutaja, / Marija nagaja, / Marija se joče, / spati še noče; A-a, tutu, / le spančkaj sladku. / Marija zibala pa pela lepu: “Če hitro ne zaspiš, po riti jih dobiš”; Aja, tutu … če pančkal ne boš, / po ritki dobil boš.

[30] Connected with the well-known curse in former Yugoslavia region, namely that man should return to where he came from.

[31] Barbara Turk Niskač found that Slovene ethnological works, which mostly concerned childhood in the countryside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, show that any objection or disobedience in other forms was consistently punished with beatings (Turk Niskač 2021: 59). The noble children mostly met their father with a whip in his hand (Potočnik 1994: 60). As a rule, the children of wealthy citizens were not physically punished, but suburban children, regardless of age or gender, were beaten, kneeling, isolated and deprived of some of the material elements, most often food (Huzjan 2021). What does this mean for the foundations of the culture we live in today?

[32] For the connection between rhythm and sexuality, see the section on the liminality of sleep.

[33] The originals read: Štuoka, štouka, mouka, [Sika, sika, moka], / naš dekliček jouka. Jest‘ mu dajte, pet [piti] mu dajte, / pa bo, pa bo set [sit]; Ovbe, oča Čamer, / v hiši je velik jamer: / otroci so pomrli, / so vrele kaše žrli. / Za pečjo raste praprota, / po hiši skače lakota! / Oča Čamer! / V hiši je velik jamer!

[34] See https://fran.si/iskanje?View=1&Query=%C4%8Damer, last accessed on 25 April 2022.

[35] The original reads: Tajnonina, tajnona, / mojga moža ni doma. / Kam je šo? V Ižolo, / po no pinco kiselo!

[36] Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins.

[37] The analysis of depictions of dishes and eaters in Slovene literature showed that “depictions of happy eaters and richly lined tables are few, writers with food descriptions point to social differences in an unjust society” (Mihurko Poniž 2008: 31). Tomažek dies of hunger in Tavčar’s *Tržačan* (A Man from Trieste), children are hungry in Kosovel’s poem “The old woman behind the village”, in a series of Cankar’s short literary works, and undernourished in Miško Kranjec’s works (Mihurko Poniž 2009).

[38] The original reads: Tana, nina, nena, / krava neče sena. / Krava če krepati od velike lakoti. / Krava če zelenobe [zelenje]. / Zelenobe ni, / jesk‘t nje b‘mo šli.

[39] Compare with the narrative song “Mother sells a child to the devil” (Huzjan 2008: 10–11).

[40] The original reads: Tona, nina, tonana, / t-u sakete [žep] jabuka, / t-u te druzi lješnike, / t-u te druzi fruškice.

[41] The originals read: Aja, tutaja, / zlata tečaja [kolesca], / srebrna zibka, / sinek v njej spi; Huha, huhoka, / na polju ziboka, / rdeči so zvončeki, / srebrni potačeki [leseno kolesce]; Aja, tutu … je zibelka zlata, / v njej dete mladu.

[42] The original reads: Nina, nana, / pupa je usrana, / fantič je ljep.

[43] The original reads: Tajna, nina, nena, / rožica rumena. / Priletela tičica, / vej'co je zazibala. / Jabuka je pala, / pupka je pobrala.

[44] In the Slovenian language "ptič" (a bird) is shorter called "tič", which colloquially means a penis.

[45] The originals read: Ajčka, tutajčka, / piška nese jajčka, / meni štiri, tebi pet, / to jih pride glih devet; Ujsa drajsa, ujsa drajsa, / čiba [kokoš] nese jajca. / Meni pet, tebi pet, / pa jih je deset. /Anica, le sladko zaspi, / le poglej, spanček že leti. / Mamica pa ujčkala te bo, / Anica, zaspančkaj zdaj sladko.

[46] The original reads: Ujsa, ujsa, ujsa, / dva debela pujsa. / En'ga smo zaklali, / druzga pa prodali ali Hujsa, drgunca, / dva debela junca: / en'ga smo zaklali, / en'ga v punkelj djali. / Hujsa, drgunci, / trije debeli junci: / en'ga smo zaklali, / en'ga pa prodali, / en'ga pa še ‚mamo, / tega pa ne damo.

[47] The originals read: Bilen, bolen, / ne'smo pupo v malen [mlin]. / Kam ‚mo jo dali? / K stricu prodali; Diren, diren, dalen, / pupo nes'mo v malen, / didelon, bacolon [ščurek].

[48] The original reads: Tana, nina, tanana, / naš'ga fanta nej doma. / Tam na beli hišici / čuha [piha] kašo v piskrci. Volki [voli] v štalci mučejo, / dekleta fantka sučejo.

[49] The original reads: Opsasa, saja, mucika raja, / lepo zna, lepo zna, na vse tri kraja. / Gorta [zgoraj] po gankici [balkon] v rajdasti [zaobljen] jankici [jopica], / dovta [spodaj] po ropici [jama] v vešnjevi [vasovalčevi] jopici, / notri v hišici v rudečoj kapci.

[50] The original reads: Zajček teče, zajček teče po zeleni travi. / Bejžte ženske, bejžte ženske / vas bo s tacom tepel, / mladim fantkom, mladim fantkom / bo konjička kupil, / mladim… / bo pa cukra kupil, / mladim… / bo klobučka kupil… itd.

[51] The experience is always traumatic in retrospect. It is twofold: the first experience is potentially traumatogenic, the second evokes the memory of the first and requires repression. A repressed memory becomes a trauma for the past (Freud 1977: 342).

[52] It is not surprising that a cursory overview of the types of children's folklore (see Sutton-Smith et al. 1999 [1995]) reveals the themes of lullabies.

[53] In his article titled "Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual", Turner said that ritual in secularised, industrial societies was not a necessary condition for social continuity. He thus distinguished between the liminal, which is necessary for ritual activity, and the liminoid experience, which is only a transitional moment in time, a break from usual social norms, a kind of playing or play. For Turner, the liminoid can be a transgressive alternative to the liminal, as it allows for lasting social changes (Turner 1974).

[54] Marjetka Golež Kaučič discusses these issues in the last section (Woman – the subject of singing) in the article "Odsev pravnega položaja in življenjskih razmer žensk v slovenskih ljudskih pesmih" (Reflection of the legal status and living conditions of women in Slovenian folk songs) (Golež Kaučič 2001).

[55] The situation is similar to a therapeutic one, except that the psychoanalyst actively listens to the client.

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Mrs F., interview, Ljubljana, 22, 30 March 2015.
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DISCUSSION

AN EXPERIENCED ETHNOLOGIST'S THOUGHTS ON DIGITALIZATION, OPEN ACCESS, AND OPEN DATA AS NEW RESEARCH ASSETS

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During the last two years of Covid pandemic we have seen the issues related to digitalization, Open Access, and Open Data (meaning open access to research results and research data) become more salient. Scientists have been unable to access archives and libraries in person, or to meet colleagues and students in physical meetings in the form of seminars, conferences or congresses. Distance has become the key word. Digital contacts have become the norm that shapes the scientific working day. In this subjectively oriented article, I intend to describe and comment on the new situation scientists have to face. These comments are based on my own background as a scientist since the 1970s. Scientists need to recognize the new opportunities that are offered by the new digital tools. This became particularly important in the conditions of the sudden pandemic outbreak in the early 2020s. What can we, scientists, learn from this development?

OPEN ACCESS AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

I was educated as an ethnologist during the late 1960s, and defended my doctoral thesis in 1972, and then served as an associate professor during the remainder of the 1970s. The only means to present academic accomplishments was through analogue publications. My career as a scientist continued in Bergen, Norway, and then as a professor at Uppsala University from 1987.

While working on my thesis, I learned about the importance of establishing an international professional network. This led to many contacts with both West and East German ethnological institutions from the 1970s onwards. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 occurred during my professorship in

Uppsala. This led to the reestablishment of the three Baltic nations – Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians – as independent states. Being the head of the Department of Ethnology at Uppsala University, it was a natural step to assist in the reestablishment of the institutions of ethnology and folkloristics that had been discontinued during the Soviet era, from the 1940s onwards. Young Baltic scientists were invited to participate in a number of Nordic postgraduate courses in ethnology. Some of these scientists learnt Swedish so as to be able to participate in the scientific debates in the Nordic countries.

From the mid-1990s onwards, the focus for these scientists shifted away from learning Swedish. Instead, they turned towards the Anglo-Saxon world, preferring to work in ever-better English. This had not been possible during the Soviet era when contacts with the West were regarded as a political threat. I saw the same Anglo-Saxon and anthropological change in Sweden during the 1970s.

Prior to this, contacts with German ethnology had been more important, and I have maintained these contacts throughout the following years along with my connections with Anglo-Saxon anthropology.[1] The historic dimension has been more important in German ethnology than in Anglo-Saxon anthropology. Nordic ethnology is not common in the Anglo-Saxon world, whereas anthropology and folkloristics attract more interest – particularly the latter in the US.

One indication of this growing interest in contacts with the Anglo-Saxon world was the establishment of the Open Access academic journal *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* in Tartu, Estonia, in 1996, published in English. Publishing in digital form as was done in Tartu was not known in ethnology in Uppsala, but I was very much impressed by what I saw. The Baltic states had suddenly overtaken Sweden in the field of new technical tools in ethnological research. I have had several opportunities to publish in this journal.[2]

Online publication allows scientists to reach the world fast and develop new research networks at no cost. It is possible for me to see how many views and downloads my texts have received/attracted. Scientists from the whole world have contacted me regarding these texts.

In 1997 I moved from Uppsala to Oslo to work at the University of Oslo as professor of ethnology. This helped me to develop broader contacts with Scandinavian research outside Sweden. As an ethnologist, I find it important to understand developments outside Sweden and to participate in international projects and networks. In the early 2000s, the issue was raised in Norway whether research which had received government funding should be made freely accessible to society at large.[3]

Today, publications should appear in both print and digital form. In the beginning, this raised objections from some scientists. It might make publishers less interested in publishing research reports since they might make less money. During

the two first decades of the twenty-first century, I published nine books through the publishing house Novus Press in Oslo.[4] The empirical material was collected from Norway as well as Sweden. Six of these publications are written in English in order to develop international research contacts outside the Nordic countries.

During the years I have been working at the University of Oslo, a digital register has been established, covering all peer-reviewed research reports as soon as they are published in printed form or digitally.[5]

During the 2010s international journals made a growing number of offers to publish articles soon after the peer review. This meant a certain cost for the author. In 2014, I published two articles in the *Open Journal of Social Sciences* (JSS).[6]

When in 2011 I became senior professor at the University of Oslo, I became a member of Strömstad Academy. The Academy is meant primarily for scientists who have left their university positions. In the same year, the Academy started a digital series of reports, *Acta Academia Stromstadiensis* (AAS). Fellows of the Academy can publish, without any cost, reports which are peer reviewed (anonymously).[7] Since 2016 I have been responsible for editing or co-editing five interdisciplinary anthologies which have been issued in digital as well as hard cover book form by the Strömstad Publishing House, a non-profit organization focussed on spreading current research information.[8]

I was elected a Science Fellow of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture in 1987. The Academy issues the journals *ARV: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, *RIG: Kulturhistorisk Tidskrift*, *Saga och Sed*, and *Svenska landsmål och Svenskt folkliv*. The latest issues are freely available as PDF files. Earlier issues are being digitalized. The series *Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi* has been issued in 162 volumes from 1933 and is now digitalized.[9] Responsibility has been vested with the Academy's Secretary Fredrik Skott and also Gunnar Ternhag.

The Folk Life Archives in Lund also include digitalized publications in the series *Skrifter från Folklivsarkivet i Lund.*[10] This digitalization of old publications makes the ethnological history (which tends to be forgotten among today's ethnologists) easily available, enriching their work and contributing to the universities' third task, giving a broad public access to ongoing research.

The research pursued at universities is largely financed through taxpayers' money, which is a strong argument for making the results available to the public as it contributes to the financing of that research. It is my impression that at least humanistic scientists do not envisage making money through publishing. Instead, they focus on reaching their peers as well as the interested public. Research findings in ethnology should, when published, be written in a language that is interesting and easy to understand.

It is also becoming increasingly more important to publish reports in English so as to reach far outside the borders of Sweden and the Nordic countries, in books and English-language journals such as *Ethnologia Scandinavica* and *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*. I have spent an increasing share of my time on these matters. Digital publication becomes ever more important in this context, allowing me to broaden my contacts with scientists working in many different parts of the world. International databases such as *researchgate.net* and *academia.edu* give me continuous updates on how my books and articles have been noted by scientists around the world.

OPEN DATA – ACCESSIBLE RESEARCH MATERIAL

It is important that a scientist can publish research findings digitally, but equally important is that research findings made by other scholars are becoming accessible on the web. It is a very positive development that cultural science archives have arranged digitally published older material. This rarely causes difficulties with regard to research ethics and respect for the personal integrity of the informants. The situation is different with current material on sensitive issues. I faced that difficulty when working on the answers in questionnaire 236 of the Nordic Museum, under the heading "Alcohol in my life". The questions were posed to informants in the early 2000s, and the answers contained information about the misuse of alcohol that could not be published in a digital form. In a letter dated 23 February 2022, the archivist told me that "due to the sensitive – and the relatively current nature" of the information, it could not be published. Matters concerning sensitive issues of a relatively current date raise the importance of anonymity or pseudonymization of material in cultural science archives before digital publishing. This is also valid for the publication of ethnological studies based on the collection of data through interviews. At the same time, making archival material available saves a tremendous amount of time in collecting information as compared to my own experiences as a young scientist. I had to travel to each archive, spending days searching for and then transcribing or copying material. Digital publishing became even more important during the pandemic, which made physical visits impossible.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

The scientific discourse has been forced to find new approaches during the pandemic. Thanks to Zoom meetings, the individual scientist has been able to participate in conferences worldwide – without having to travel. This saves both

time and money and makes it possible to participate in seminars, conferences, webinars, and theses defences in and outside of Sweden, sometimes all in the same day. Scientists from different institutions can all participate in seminars without having to leave their own department or their home. Requests for travel financing have been far fewer. I hope that there will be a large number of Zoom meetings once the pandemic has abated. The new digital tools have helped widen the scientific contacts, thus broadening the scientific discourse. It is my impression from digital seminars and conferences that willingness to participate and openness remains at least as high as during physical meetings around a table in a seminar. During 2022, I have experienced a hybrid form, with a few participants being physically present and others participating digitally via Zoom. This widens contacts outside one's own department and I hope that this will continue.

A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

I have written this article based upon my own research experiences over many years, to emphasize the immense value that digitalization offers for obtaining material and maintaining contacts with the scientific world. I find that a great deal of value is added through Zoom meetings between scientists from different institutions and nations to discuss research reports and themes. Regardless of whether the scientist sits alone at home or at work, they are able to interact with others across the world both visually and aurally. You can hear and see well in front of the screen. The sense of distance actually diminishes and the perspectives widen. Digitalization also offers new means of communication with a broad public. This can be achieved through Open Access and presentations through webinars. The rapid development of Open Data over the last few years will, I am certain, continue on a large scale to the benefit of science. I can see no negative consequences for science in such a development.

NOTES

[1] On 4–7 April 2022, I participated on Zoom in the 43rd congress arranged by Deutsche Gesellschaft für empirische Kulturwissenschaft on the theme "Zeit: Zur Temporalität von Kultur". The issue of Open Data was raised in some of the presentations.

[2] This touches upon my research within a network which studies conceptions and rituals connected with dying and death (Gustavsson 2013). It is possible to obtain a printed version of the different volumes.

[3] Swedish contributors now have the same obligations as the Norwegian ones.

[4] The agreement with this commercial publishing house during the 2010s was that I was allowed to publish my texts as PDF files one year after the printed version had come out.

[5] The research archive is available at duo.uio.no. DUO stands for the Digital Library of the University of Oslo. Most of the publications can be reached as PDF files.

[6] The article on cycling as an innovation in Sweden and Norway (Gustavsson 2014a) has been downloaded 4,580 times since the time of publishing. Another article under the heading "Swedish Belief Narratives on Afterlife Earlier and Today" has been downloaded 3,962 times in 2022 (Gustavsson 2014b).

[7] One of my studies concerned alcohol-related contacts over the Swedish-Norwegian national border from a historical perspective (Gustavsson 2018).

[8] The most recent anthology (2021) was a study of pandemics. I studied several cholera outbreaks in the nineteenth century (Gustavsson 2021).

[9] This relates to the anthology titled *Döden speglad i aktuell kulturforskning* (Death Reflected in Current Cultural Research), edited by me (2009).

[10] It contains my doctoral thesis titled *Kyrktagningsseden i Sverige,* which is dedicated to the custom of churching of women after childbirth in Sweden and was published in 1972.

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DISCUSSION

FOLKLORE AND GREEK HAGIOGRAPHY: SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES

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Abstract: Based on personal experience and previous academic research, this article aims to lay the foundations for an interdisciplinary approach to Greek hagiography. It represents the first attempt to define the coordinates of the study of ancient hagiographical texts (lives of saints, collections of miracles, praises, etc.) through methodologies from folklore studies. By presenting a concrete example from a collection of miracles of healing dreams, I hope to show the potentialities of such an approach to scholars of my field, who are generally unaware and skeptical of it. At the same time, I would like to outline the richness of data that Greek hagiography has to offer to folklorists. To sum up, mutual exchange is expected (and needed) in the future.

Keywords: Christian saints, folklore of the ancient world, Greek hagiography, index of motifs, Thompson classification

INTRODUCTION

When talking about folklore studies among scholars trained as classicists, one needs to make do not only with a general ignorance of the topic but also with a remarkable academic prejudice. And in fact, methodologies from folklore studies are absent from almost every degree in Classics available in the international scene. Therefore, even only learning about them is not easy at all as a student. As far as I am concerned, I was lucky enough to meet a particular inspired professor, who is able to combine the philological expertise and innovative interpretations of the ancient (especially Greek) texts. His open-minded approach to Greek and Byzantine literatures and his consistent attempt to make folklore studies accepted in our academic field are starting to bear fruit. Indeed, during this academic year (2021/2022) the institution, with which he is affiliated, offers the first ever (at least in Italy, but I suppose at the international level)

teaching "Folclore dell'antichità e del Medioevo greco" (Ancient and Medieval Greek Folklore) within the master's degree in Classics. I believe that this is the right recognition for his academic efforts and at the same time a first message of change, but for sure it is not enough, mostly because it is – as much as illuminated – an isolated case.

In such an academic context, I decided to follow this professor's footsteps, so that for my master's degree I worked on the (Greek) hagiographical collections of healing miracle performed by saints Cosmas and Damian, combining the more traditional philological study – which a graduate student in Classics is commonly required to do – and a more original commentary of the text focused on the folkloric elements rather than on the historical-religious ones. Starting from my personal experience, in the next pages I will develop some considerations: which are the main methodological issues in applying the methods from folklore studies to hagiographical texts; to which extent such approach can contribute to their interpretation; and finally, I will make an example from the miracles collection I have been working on as a case study, offering the first-ever translation into a modern language of the passage in question.

Before going into the topic, I would like to preface that I do not pretend to draft a complete and detailed vision of the theme; rather I aim to offer a different point of view, which I hope that could – even if minimally – contribute to the scientific debate.

FOLKLORE AND GREEK HAGIOGRAPHY: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Greek hagiography and folklore constitute a theme of great interest, but still too little valorized. Or better, we should admit that already the Bollandist fathers – the first among all Hippolyte Delehaye – recognized that the folklore milieu, even if it was addressed with disregard as "fantastic" and "invented", was an important factor in the formation of the hagiographical legends. Nevertheless, according to his "orthodox" point of view, it was exactly that kind of cultural matrix that had been damaging to the documentary value of the hagiographical texts towards the history of Christianity. Therefore, he put efforts into purifying the texts from such elements. Even if his too rigid method was highly overcome during the twentieth century and hagiographical texts have been studied for their literary value too, the folkloric richness of such texts still remains neglected.

Only few sporadic attempts can be enumerated. Firstly, in 1960 A.-J. Festugière came out with the pioneering article entitled "Lieux communs littéraires

et thèmes de folk-lore dans l'Hagiographie primitive" (Festugière 1960). Nevertheless, in spite of the promising title, it consists of a brief presentation of some "folkloric-looking" themes detectable in some hagiographical sources. The second example I would like to mention is the volume by E. Ziolkowski devoted to the fortune of the biblical episodes in modern and contemporary folklore (Ziolkowski 2017). Instead, a recent article by P. Boglioni is noteworthy for its capacity of outlining the specificities of the ancient folklore as compared to the modern and contemporary ones. Indeed, since the outcome of a folkloric survey on ancient texts more often provides not social but spatio-temporal information about the different narrative units, it seems to be not useful in the concept of popular culture, elaborated on sociologic opposition. Rather, the definition of "ethnic culture" is more interesting and finds confirmation in the texts (Boglioni 2005: 9). Nevertheless, its main drawback is to remain on the theoretical level.

Beyond their peculiarities, all these essays have something in common: they are scientifically unfounded. This is mainly due to the fact that folklore is approached not as a discipline with its own scientific status – and therefore with its technical language, method, and fields of research – but as an easily approachable tool by which to supplement the commentary discourse. The problem is precisely this one: everything is limited to the *discursive* level, without really going into it. In this way, classicists, on the one hand, do not do justice to folklore studies and do not really take advantage of methodologies from folklore studies in interpreting and understanding the texts and their cultural content, on the other.

Quite the opposite, the scientific potentialities of such methods are impressive, as showed by T. Braccini in several essays (Braccini 2018b, 2019, 2020, 2021). Even if dedicated to the Greco-Roman world, his monograph *Lupus in fabula: Fiabe, leggende e barzellette in Grecia e a Roma* is particularly worthy of attention (Braccini 2018a). He offers an overview of the main narrative folkloric categories, providing examples from Latin and Greek literature, referring to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification by motifs and types (Thompson 1989) and to other catalogues.

Nevertheless, nothing similar has been done for Greek hagiography yet, either on the theoretical or on the application level. The main difficulties related to such a task are the following:

- Working on hagiographical texts means to deal with an apparently homogeneous literary category – concerning the typical (but general) features, such as the religious relevance of the textual subject and the "author-less tradition of storytelling" to which it belongs – but which proves to be extremely various with regard to both the form and the content. Therefore, a sophisticated method of analysis and classification needs to be developed, while just applying the traditional models to the

whole mass of textual materials is sterile and generates confusion and skepticism among scholars.

- Even if some significative research tools are available, this enormous amount of textual material needs to be, firstly, edited and then compiled, studied, and interpreted. A number of these sources have not been published yet and/or still remain without any available translation into a modern language, whereas a broad accessibility both for specialists and for scholars from related fields would be extremely useful for increasing our understanding of the Byzantine world. At the same time, more thematic-based dossiers of passages from different hagiographical sources should be compiled, taking what J. Wortley did concerning the "beneficial tales" as an example (Wortley 2010).
- The very essence of the hagiographical texts (especially the Christian miracles collections) – they indeed uprooted themselves from the original place of worship (and composition) and started circulating and being modified and multiplied – makes them difficult to be interpreted. Firstly, because those intercepted on the written page were just a few among the circulating miracle stories, which were part of an ever-changing cultural tradition. And secondly, because they often survive in multiple versions or, when unique, they are "stratified" texts. The positive side of such a peculiar process is that they are a cultural product of great interest for their richness and complexity of contents.

As it is evident from what is written above, there is plenty of work to be done in this field, and a broad and common (i.e., multidisciplinary research projects) effort is expected.

I am certain that a good starting point could be to identify different subcategories of themes that recur in Greek hagiography, in order to develop a common grid of analysis based on the Thompson classification, but then adapted, from time to time, to the Greek narratives, with specific entries and collected data. This would enable us to handle an otherwise unmanageable mass of texts and, at the same time, to employ a scientific and valid approach.

FOLKLORE AND GREEK HAGIOGRAPHY: NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

So, the use of methodologies from folklore studies represents an original perspective of inquiry that could, in fact, prove extremely productive, providing new interpretative avenues for the texts in question. I will mainly refer to the

category of the collections of healing miracles because this is the field I have been working on. Anyway, I believe that they stand out among the hagiographical production for the folkloric materials offered.

Indeed, this typology of texts is characterized by a peculiar genesis. Born from the ritual practice of collecting brief registrations written inside real *libelli* by the recipient devotees of the prodigious healings at the place of worship (Delehaye 1910), they then developed as textual tradition formed by addition and stratification of witnesses, generation after generation, until becoming narratives for all intents and purposes, characterized by a specific (and repetitive) pattern (Csepregi 2007: 193–194; Constantinou 2014). Therefore, oral tradition strongly influenced the deep framework of these narratives both in their forms and in their content. To sum up, the typology of saints involved in these hagiographical texts – that of the healing saints – is particularly suitable for developing such studies, because it would allow to both introduce the methods from folklore studies in hagiography and renew the knowledge of *folk-medicine*.

Differently from what one might imagine, the folkloric inquiry can be extremely useful also for philological and literary purposes, in particular:

- to place the ancient text in its *chronological and geographical context* of composition. Indeed, the reconstruction of a narrative field modelled on some specific folkloric motifs provides relevant information about the cultural path made by a narrative unit. Even if it is not diriment alone, this kind of outcome is great evidence if integrated with other data, such as the comparison of the employed terminology in the texts in question.
- At the same time, I believe that, as far as this typology of texts is concerned, the folkloric analysis can be employed as a criterion, in order to evaluate the literary value of such texts and to answer – at least partially – the question whether it is possible to speak about the *literary genre* of Byzantine incubation literature (i.e., the collections of healing miracles as a whole) and – if yes – which are its main features.
- Finally, it helps to unveil the cultural model integrated in the examined literature, in the specific case of the collections of healing miracles, the very Byzantine perception of incubation as a religious ritual which consisted in sleeping in a sacred site and receiving the healing by one or more holy saints through the medium of dream.

After considering the aspects that pertain to the philological and literary studies of the ancient texts, let us move to those that involve folklorists more directly. Indeed, Greek hagiography – as well as Greco-Roman literature in general – has plenty to offer. Most of the Mediterranean folklore plunges its roots in the ancient world, but even more in the Byzantine one, which firstly – thanks to

the language – easily flew into the rich tradition of the Modern Greek folklore. Greek hagiography then is even more valuable, because religious and profane are perfectly mixed together. In healing dream miracles, for example, Christian orthodoxy needs to cope with profane medicine and popular beliefs and the border between official and occult is often very labile.

In the next and last paragraph, I will present an example from the collection of healing miracles I have been working on as a case study.

A CASE STUDY: THOMPSON MOTIF B784 IN THE COLLECTION OF HEALING MIRACLES PERFORMED BY SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

The Thompson motif B784, 'Animal lives in person's stomach', is largely attested in the hagiographical literature, both the Latin and the Greek one, but the latter constitutes just a part of a global lively tradition centered around this folkloric motif. As masterfully showed by D. Ermacora in his numerous papers, the popular belief according to which snakes can crawl into somebody's mouth while they are sleeping clearly reflects the most widespread fear among humans (Ermacora 2015: 101).

In the Greek collection of healing miracles performed by saints Cosmas and Damian (contained in manuscript Lond. Add. 37534, which is datable back to the eleventh century CE, while the most ancient narrative nucleus was probably composed between the second half of the fourth and the second half of the fifth centuries CE), we find this passage:

> *γεωργός τις ἐν τοῖς μέρεσιν ἐκείνοις διατρίβων, ... ἐθέριζεν. τῆς δὲ μεσημβρινῆς ὥρας ... καὶ δὴ κοιμηθεὶς πρὸς ὀλίγον ἀφαρπάσαι τοῦ ὕπνου ... καὶ τὸ στόμα κεχενὼς τὸ συμβαῖνον οὐκ ᾔδει. ὅφις δὲ ἕρπων ἔφθασεν αὐτὸν καὶ, καθὼς ὅπλον ἐστὶν ἀπ› ἀρχῆς τοῦ ἀντιπάλου, ἐνεργηθεὶς ὑπ› αὐτοῦ ὡς εἴς τινα φωλεὸν χαλάσας ἑαυτὸν διὰ τοῦ στόματος κατέδυ εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. καὶ τοῦ ὕπνου κόρον λαβὼν ὁ γεωργὸς ἠγέρθη μηδὲν κακὸν ὑποπτεύων ... ὅτε ... νυκτὸς καταλαβούσης πρὸς κλίνην ἑτράπη καθευδῆσαι ... ἤρξατο κινεῖσθαι ἔνδοθεν ὁ ὄφις. ἀλγήσας οὖν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ... τοῦ ὄφεως δάκνοντος ἔνδοθεν καὶ σπαράττοντος ... ἀπαχθῆναι πρὸς τέμενος σωτήριον ... οἱ δὲ ἅγιοι ἐπ› αὐτῷ ἐσπλαγχνίσθησαν ... τοίγαρουν διωχθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἁγίων ὁ ὄφις τοῦ στόματος ἐξελθών.*
> (Greek text revised by me, based on Rupprecht 1935: 10–11).

> A peasant, who lived in those lands, … was dedicating himself to the harvest. At midday, … he lay down to rest a bit and then … since he had the mouth open, he didn't realize what was happening. A snake, crawling,

> reached him and, as if it was a weapon sent by the army of the Enemy, animated by the devil, as if going down a lair, entered, through the mouth, the guts of the man. After having slept enough, the peasant woke up, without suspecting anything bad … When … it was getting dark, he headed towards the bed to sleep … the snake started moving inside. So, because the man felt pain … while the snake was biting and ripping the man's guts … he arrived at the sanctuary … the saints felt compassion for him … expelled by the saints, the snake crawled out the mouth of the man.

It is a wonderful example of the so-called *bosom serpent* motif, which is extremely widespread both geographically and chronologically. Our instance, to be placed within a medical-folkloric imaginary of prodigious healings performed by saints, conveys also a strong Christian message. In the Christian world, that of snake-demon is a privileged association. Indeed, the animal represents the sin or the missed adhesion to Christianity in several narratives, such as the story reported by the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon in his work (thirteenth century): according to him, a snake was found inside the body of a dead knight, who had refused the Christian burial. In the case of our specific narrative, where a snake (defined as ὅπλον ... ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τοῦ ἀντιπάλου, the weapon of devil) enters the body of a man causing a disease, this privileged association of snake-demon has a precise and strengthened function. Indeed, in collections of healing miracles performed by Christian saints, the snake is the *demoniac cause* par excellence of the disease which the *saints* are going to heal. In this way, the very Byzantine conception according to which demons were the origin of all the diseases is strengthened (Vakaloudi 2003: 173).

I will not go into a detailed description of the fortune of this motif within other folkloric traditions. In order to give an idea of how popular this motif is, I just mention: the story transmitted by the African tradition of the Ekoi, according to which each night a snake comes out of the mouth of a woman, whose husband suffers from an ankle problem, and licks him, so that he cannot heal (Talbot 1912: 83); several bosom serpent narratives are transmitted by the Japanese collection of miracles from the nineth century (Motomochi Nakamura 1973: 213–215); and finally, the Scandinavian saga of Olaf Tryggvason from the late twelfth century, where a bosom serpent is the author of the execution of the king (Andersson 2003: 106). All these references are taken from the work of D. Ermacora (Ermacora 2015; Ermacora & Labanti & Marcon 2016).

Clearly, each of these narratives, even if based on the same popular belief, conveys different cultural meanings, and the goal is to recognize similarities but also differences. In this sense, our hagiographical instance can be placed within a broader tradition, but it keeps its specificities which stem from the

different cultural context where the motif settled in, and result in additional messages to be conveyed, beyond the basic scheme of the folkloric motif.

As said before, folklore can be deemed as a criterion to evaluate the literary value of the Greek hagiographical texts. The comparison with a passage from the *Life of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger* (commonly datable to a period between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century) seems to be particularly interesting (Life of St Symeon Stylite the Younger 136; Van den Ven 1962: 153). A Georgian peasant (βηρός τις), tired from working in the fields and because of the drunkenness (ἐκ πολλῆς οἰνοφλυγίας βαρυτάτῳ), fell asleep in the countryside with his mouth open (τῷ αὐτοῦ στόματι ἀνεῳγμένῳ), so that a snake could easily slither into his intestines, attracted by the smell of wine (διὰ τῆς ὀσφρήσεως τοῦ οἴνου εἰσδύναντος ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις αὐτοῦ). Only the intervention of Saint Symeon Stylites the Younger could heal the man, who expelled the live snake from his anus (τὸν ὄφιν διὰ τοῦ ἀφεδρῶνος ζῶντα κατήγαγεν), after the saint had marked his belly with the sign of the cross (σφραγίσας τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτοῦ).

Indeed, the common and immediately identifiable rural setting of the story strikes the reader. In addition to the common framework of the narrative, the way of healing (through the intervention of the holy healer) is the same, too. Nevertheless, a big difference is noteworthy. In this story, the man had drunk too much wine, and the snake had been attracted exactly by the smell of wine (διὰ τῆς ὀσφρήσεως τοῦ οἴνου εἰσδύναντος). The latter is one of the most typical components of the story type ATU 285B: snakes are often attracted by the smell of food or beverages coming from inside the human body. Even the most ancient surviving western variant of this story type (Ermacora 2015: 81–83) – a Hippocratic passage (Hp. *Epist*. 5, 86) – contains a reference to wine as the main cause of the snake approaching the young man while he was sleeping. Taking into account the impressive similarity between our passage and the one contained in the *Life of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger*, I believe that this difference needs to be valorized. Indeed, to assume the complete absence of the element of wine from the (oral) tradition of saints Cosmas and Damian would be inconsistent with the features of motif B784. Rather, it corroborates the hypothesis of the epitomization of the (written) version preserved in the *London Codex*.

At the same time, the employment of a folkloric perspective helps us not only to enhance the cultural vitality of the narrative in question but also to understand why it is placed as the opening of the collection of miracles. If the bosom serpents work as a language "that enables people without formal knowledge of disease to understand and communicate what is wrong with them" (Bennett 2005: 23), such a narrative represents the most suitable theme to inaugurate a collection of miraculous healings.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

In this brief paper I mainly aimed to draw attention to an almost completely ignored research perspective, which has plenty to offer in terms of interpretative sparks.

Even the more recent essays devoted to Byzantine dreaming completely neglect folklore studies, despite calling for interdisciplinarity to work on such a topic (Angelidi & Calofonos 2014). As I tried to show, methodologies from folklore studies could be a real turning point in the study of Greek hagiography, with regard to both the compilation of the textual materials and the overall interpretation of these narratives. Looking for motifs and types (the main components of a folkloric tale) will also encourage a narrative and narratological analysis, leading to the de-construction of the narratives in several significative units. At the same time, dealing with folklore means to come into contact with one of the society's deepest cultural layers.

This research perspective alone is certainly not enough. When approaching Greek (or rather, ancient) texts, philological attention and historical-literary expertise are absolutely needed. Therefore, besides being impossible, we cannot entrust folklorists with such a study and wait for the results. Scholars primarily trained as classicists should be involved, together with experts on folklore: collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and open-mindedness are undoubtedly the necessary requirements to make this possible.

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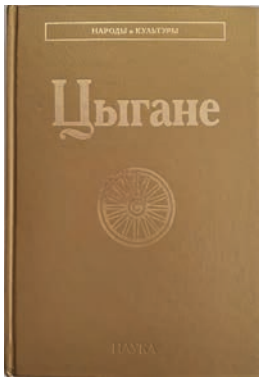
REVIEW ESSAY

THE ROMANI IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, THE SOVIET UNION, AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

N. G. Demeter & A. V. Chernych (eds.). *Tsygane*.
Moscow: Nauka, 2018. 614 pp. In Russian.



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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to present a comprehensive review of the collective monograph *Tsygane* (The Romani), published in 2018 in the series *Narody i kul'tury* (Peoples and Cultures). The authors give an overview of the modern developments in Romani studies to acquaint the reader with the background of the reviewed monograph. Every chapter of the monograph is analyzed in detail, taking into account the most recently gathered ethnographic and folklore materials, such as the data recorded by Aleksandr Rusakov and Aleksandr Novik in Leningrad region and in the Balkans (Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Turkey) in the late 1980s and early 2000s–2010s, and the newest publications on the subject, such as a monograph by Evangelia Adamou and Yaron Matras on language contacts, published in 2021.

Keywords: ethnography, popular beliefs, review, Romani culture, Romani folklore, Romani languages, Romani of Eastern Europe, Romani of Russia, Romani studies

The collective monograph *Tsygane* (The Romani) was published in the academic series *Narody i kul'tury* (Peoples and Cultures), founded in 1992 (editor-in-chief V. A. Tishkov, executive secretary L. I. Missonova). It is a significant event for the ethnological Romani studies in Russia and, we are not afraid to say it, the whole of Europe. In Russia and other countries (first of all, France, the United Kingdom, Serbia, etc.), there are quite a few papers dedicated to separate Romani groups getting published every year (Stewart 2013; Oslon 2018), but most specialists focus on particular matters of language, cultural and social anthropology, sociology, etc., and, with very few exceptions (see, e.g., Tcherenkov & Laederlich 2004), no studies are published that would be dedicated to a wide complex of problems with a summarizing analysis of the entire thesaurus of ethnohistorical, ethnographical and folklore materials.

Every ethnologist doing research, in Europe or on any other continent, gains some knowledge about the Romani. Whether one studies a single region or ethnos or dedicates oneself to an anthropological topic from an objective 'super-ethnic' position, one would inevitably touch upon the Romani-related topics. With any ethnos or a social, confessional, or any other group, there would sooner or later be a question of their contacts with the Romani. Among the ethnogenetic legends, memorates, prejudices, xenonominations, etc., there would always be the question: who are they, the Romani (*tsygane*, *gypsies*, *jitanos*, *jevgjit*, etc.)? The aim of the collective monograph is to give a full answer to this difficult question.

The issue of the volume titled *The Romani* is therefore very important and timely. The group of authors led by editors-in-chief Nadezhda G. Demeter and Aleksander V. Chernykh were able to professionally display the wide palette of history, folklore, mythological and religious views, cultural diversity, language, and identity of the Romani of the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, modern Russia, and other countries – the former Soviet republics as well as others (first of all, Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc.). The large volume of the publication (53.3 standard quires) has allowed them to include widely different topics traditional for the *Peoples and Cultures* series. The book, as a planned encompassing work on Romani ethnography, is informative, detailed, and highly sought-after in modern academic circles.[1]

The collective monograph (in total, 17 authors, both from Russia and from other countries, have taken part in writing it) is divided into 14 chapters, with an introduction, a glossary, and a highly informative row of illustrations, including a large colored inset (56 photographs). The monograph overviews various topics of history, languages and dialects, traditional culture, rituals, marriage traditions, folk beliefs and secret knowledge, calendar festivals, folklore, folk

art and professional culture, and modern ethnocultural processes in the post-Soviet space and abroad.

Concerning the methodological aspect, we should note the high level of use of field materials in almost every chapter of the book, which increases the quality of the research. The authors do not 'encode' their informants, as it has been common among Western anthropologists, instead giving their names, age, and place and time of data recording, which serves in favor of the reader's trust in the presented materials. The fieldwork dedicated to collecting data for the book has taken Nadezhda G. Demeter, Aleksandr V. Chernykh, and other members of the group of authors several decades. This is a guarantee of the quality and authenticity of both the field observations and their analysis.

However, in most collective monographs we find a regrettable dissonance in theoretical approaches, terminology, or study methods. In *The Romani*, despite the editors' careful work, such discrepancies are also present. For example, the approach to defining Romani groups in the time of their migration from the northwest regions of Hindustan: they are alternately called castes, caste groups, *jāti*, ethnic groups, etc. We are not talking about the Romani ethnogenesis in the first centuries AD, but rather about the situation and time when their groups began to move west from the area they had occupied before. Elena N. Uspenskaia, a well-known Russian Indologist, has suggested an Indian caste theory; the authors of the reviewed volume often cite her monograph which became the basis for a doctor habilitation dissertation, presented at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences (MAE RAS) in 2010 (p. 590). It is left unclear why they do not accept the established specialist's point of view:

> *Castes did not exist in traditional Indian society. The caste (isolationist, segregation) social interaction between specialized clan structures has existed and still remains essential. The highest of said structures is* jāti *(Sanskr. 'birth, origins, breed'); it has become the 'prototype' of caste, being the basic functional unit of the traditional Indian society and giving it the 'caste' features, making it segmented …* Jāti *is typologically an analogue of the tribe, has an ethnic and social capacity, is an essential form of ethnic consolidation and the basic structural module of social organization in India. The diversity of* jāti*, ranged by status, forms the 'caste society' (traditional organization of* jāti*), having its own laws of structure, functioning and reproduction. The segregation-complementary way of social interaction between capsulated clan structures gives the characteristic caste nature to the traditional Indian society.* (Uspenskaia 2010: 6–7)

Turning back to the text of the reviewed book itself, we should enumerate the most important topics brought up in its historical, ethnological, folkloristic, linguistic, and 'peri-linguistic' chapters.

First of all, it is the highly significant question of *ethnic identity and self-identity* of the Romani (this chapter is written by major Bulgarian ethnographers Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov[2]). This conceptual and particularly important chapter (standing somewhat apart, in terms of methodology and style, from the rest of the book) brings up some details which are essential for the Romani as an ethnic society. In particular, we can point out that, as the authors justly remark, "an exact group's identity reveals itself only when one group's members meet other Romani groups" (p. 517), otherwise it only exists in a sort of latent form.

We also agree with the distinction – in the aspect of identity – between the Romani of Western Europe on the one hand and the Romani of Eastern, especially south-eastern Europe, on the other. In Western Europe, the Romani are more separate and marginalized (in addition, their population is smaller), and it has led to them mixing with other nomadic groups of non-Indian descent.

It should be noted that the authors are firm opponents of the constructivist approach to determining Romani identity, which is actively developed in Western anthropology. While we agree with some of their arguments, we have to remark that when it comes to the countries of south-eastern Europe, it is the constructivist approach that yields the best results: the groups which are originally Romani but have switched to their country's dominant language (first of all, Albanian) identify as separate ethnic groups with their own history. Among such groups there are the Egyptians (Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro; they identify themselves as descendants of the Ancient Egyptians) and the Ashkali (Kosovo; they believe themselves to be descendants of Iranian settlers who moved to the Balkans in the fourth century, other legends of ethnogenesis are also recorded). Thus, it is interesting that the classic 'primordialist' signs – common origins, etc. – become important details of constructing ethnic identity.

Language is also a principal component of the Romani communities' identity. However, various Romani groups have significant differences between them in that aspect. There are communities that have switched to the surrounding population's languages but have preserved their 'Romani identity'. Among the groups that retain their mother tongue, the latter can play different roles – from the linguistically dominant language to a subdominant one (the second possibility, as it seems, is characteristic of several groups of 'the Russian Roma'). Finally, there are Romani dialects that have switched to the grammar of the neighboring population's languages and are sociolinguistically similar to argot

(there seem to be no such dialects on the territory of Russia). Perhaps the collective monograph's chapters dedicated to the Romani language should have been slightly more detailed on the questions related to its sociolinguistic status.

Due to the very nature of the reviewed book, the problems related to the Romani language are in some measure on its periphery. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they are discussed succinctly and at a high academic level. The language is in the focus of a special chapter, "The Romani Language and Its Dialects", written by K. A. Kozhanov and V. V. Shapoval (both authors are eminent researchers of Russian Romani dialects). Furthermore, linguistic problematics is touched upon in the edition's other parts (section "Ethnogenesis and Early Ethnic History" in the chapter "Main Stages of Ethnic History" by G. N. Tsvetkov; section "The Identity of the Romani between West and East" in the chapter "Modern Ethnocultural Processes" by E. Marushiakova and V. Popov). A special section is dedicated to Romani-language fiction literature (I. Yu. Makhotina).

Russia is a unique country, in the sense that all four Romani dialectal macrogroups acknowledged in modern Romani studies are represented on its territory. The reviewed book contains a very informative survey of Romani dialects on the Russian territory, describing the larger dialect groups in more detail and enumerating the smaller ones. The survey is particularly valuable due to it being based on its authors' professional fieldwork (see, e.g., K. A. Kozhanov's paragraph on the dialect of the *Plashchuns* (плащуны) – the only group in Russia whose idiom belongs to the Central macrogroup of Romani dialects (p. 167)).

Over the last two decades, linguistic Romani studies have been undergoing intensive development. To understand the processes occurring in this research field, we need to turn to the history of studying the language of the people that have moved to Europe more than a thousand years ago.

Academic interest in the Romani language appeared in the late eighteenth–early nineteenth century as a result of the introduction of comparative and historical linguistics. Practically during the entire nineteenth century, the Romani language has been studied by the most prominent linguists of the time, such as A. Pott, F. Miklosich, and G. I. Ascoli. In the first half of the twentieth century the situation changed (mostly due to the linguists' interest switching to the systematic study of language structure), and the research of the Romani language was mostly done by amateurs – some of the latter, however, were quite talented and achieved impressive results (see, e.g., the monumental study of the Welsh Romani dialect by J. Sampson, which has been the largest and most detailed description of a Romani dialect until recently (Sampson 1926)).

The return of professional linguists' interest to the Romani language started in the 1960s as linguistics turned towards anthropocentrism, in particular

when it became clear that bi- and multilingualism is the norm itself rather than a deviation from the norm. Naturally, the Romani dialects that have been influenced by languages of different typological structure and different genetic origins could not help but rouse intense interest in that regard. This led to the need to study these dialects using the methods and approaches of modern linguistics.

The rise in the quantity of studies led to the rise in the quality in the research in Romani studies. Among the many modern Romani researchers, we should name Yaron Matras (particularly, Matras 2002; Adamou & Matras 2021; etc.) and Norbert Boretzky (Boretzky & Igla 2004; etc.), who can be considered the founders of modern linguistic Romani studies.

In Russia, the academic study of Romani dialects had its specific features. Apart from a small book by K. Patkanov (1887), the first academic papers on Romani studies appeared in the late 1920s – early 1930s (Barannikov 1934; Barannikov & Sergievskii 1938), which was related to the project of creating a standard Romani language. In 1938, that language was officially (though, of course, tacitly) forbidden, the result of which was a decrease of papers dedicated to the Romani language in general (with the exception of T. V. Venttsel's publications: Venttsel 1964, etc.).

The situation began to change on the brink of the 1970s and in the 1980s, with the publication of papers of noted Romani scholars, such as L. N. Cherenkov, V. G. Toropov, Lexa Manush (A. D. Belugin), V. V. Shapoval, etc. During the recent decades, they have been joined by K. A. Kozhanov and M. V. Oslon, the latter the author of a monograph on the Kalderash dialect, unique in its high academic level and detailedness (Oslon 2018). Undoubtedly, a special part in the development of Romani studies in Russia was played by L. N. Cherenkov (1936–2018) – an unmatched scholar of Romani dialects in Russia and in the world, the author of a fundamental ethnographic and linguistic survey of the European Romani (Tcherenkov & Laederlich 2004).

In the collective monograph, a separate section of the 'linguistic' chapter is dedicated to the literary Romani language, created at the end of the 1920s and, as mentioned above, liquidated as a project in 1938. During that period, about three hundred books had been published in Romani (sociopolitical literature, study books, fiction) and two social and literary journals were being issued, even if irregularly. That experiment, it seems, should rather be viewed as a failure: not just for the external reasons (it was quickly shut down!), but for the internal ones as well – a North Russian Romani dialect was chosen as a foundation for the standard language. This dialect, however, had been very strongly influenced by Russian, and the majority of the Roma population of the USSR could not understand it. When one of this review's authors, Aleksandr

Rusakov, worked on a field expedition among the Romani of Leningrad Oblast in the 1980s, he ascertained that the speakers of the North Russian dialect had no inkling of the existence of the literary Romani language and of the books that had been published in it.

Nevertheless, the literature published in the standard Romani language is a rich, if rather specifical, source of language data. In the last few years, a linguistic corpus has been created that includes the majority of the texts published in that period. For example, the scans of Romani-language books are available on the site of the National Library of Finland (Fenno-Ugrica 2016), while the corpus of Soviet Romani texts with morphological tagging is available in the *Korpus tsyganskogo iazyka* (Corpus of the Romani Language) (Corpus 2020) (which is mentioned in *The Romani* on p. 168).

In the collective monograph, in the special section "Literature" of the chapter "Professional Culture", the authors I. Yu. Makhotina and G. N. Tsvetkov make an overview of Romani-language fiction – both the books written in the 1930s in 'literary' Romani and the ones of more recent and modern authors that have been appearing since the 1960s and are written in various dialects of Russian Romani. They describe around twenty Romani writers. Some of these descriptions can rightfully be called complete essays on the writers' creative work (see, for example, the essay dedicated to the classic of Russian Romani literature, A. V. German (pp. 475–476)).

Considerable attention in the book is given to the traditional crafts of the Romani. In the chapter "Trades and Crafts", Nadezhda N. Demeter rightly notes that "over their one-thousand-year history, in all countries and at all times, the Romani have preserved the traditional activities they brought along from India (trade, acting, different handicrafts, fortune-telling, performances with trained animals, and beggary)" (p. 170). We should underline that all these activities can be traced starting from Byzantine written sources. "The unifying role, played, for example, by religion among the Jews, is given to traditional crafts among the Romani" (ibid.). Since their appearance in Byzantium, the Romani had been known as excellent metalworkers, settling down in entire metalworkers' villages. Likewise, they were immediately famed for metalwork in Hungary, where they were given privileges. As they played an important role in the country's defenses, King Matthias Corvinus made the Romani settlements exempt from taxes (p. 173). When the wide territories of the Carpathian-Balkan region were conquered by the Ottomans, the situation for the Romani did not change. According to Turkish sources, the Romani began to supply the Ottoman army with weapons and for that were made exempt from taxpaying again.

One of the ethnic groups of the Balkan Romani, living in Romania and the neighboring countries, is called Rudari or Lingurari. Their occupation was placer

mining for gold on riverbanks, leading to the origins of one of their ethnonyms (Rom., Serb. *ruda* 'mine, digging pit'). The second ethnonym stems from the Romanian word *lingura* 'spoon'. The reason is that in wintertime, when the rivers were frozen or too cold for placer mining, the Romani carved and sold spoons, ladles, spindles, and troughs (Vossen 1983: 145–146). When by the beginning of the nineteenth century the gold in the riverbeds had depleted, the spoon-making became their main profession. The Lingurari migrated in covered ox-driven wagons and carried everything necessary for woodwork with them: they produced troughs, tableware, spindles, etc. (p. 174). In eastern Serbia, the Rudari have preserved their distinctive character and a certain insularity up to the present day. For example, metalwork remains one of their occupations, as recorded by Aleksander Novik during expeditions in the Balkans (MAE Archive 2017).

The Romani have often retained such specializations until the present day. It is shown by our own results of archive research and field materials collected in 1990–2019. In the Balkans, the Romani population traditionally had the occupation of cleaning the streets and public spaces, which was permitted to them by the decrees of the Ottoman administration. Interestingly, in Albania the Balkan Egyptians made their living by cleaning streets both during the reign of King Ahmet Zogu (1928–1939) and during the communist period (for all that, during the building of socialism, it was declared that all the class and social barriers had been removed in the country and labor was promoted as the highest value!). The situation had not changed after the advance of democracy in the country in the 1990s, either. As our informants, interviewed by us during expeditions, told us, the leaders of Romani communities managed to make arrangements with the governments of the largest towns about establishing contracts for street cleaning (MAE Archive 2019). They were also responsible for garbage-sorting that brought them considerable additional profits.

Another Romani group from the western Balkans, called the Gabeli, mastered cottage industry as early as in the nineteenth century. Among their main occupations were basketwork, making of kitchenware, lamp shades, etc. The local population treated them with more respect than the Egyptians or members of other Romani groups (MAE Archive 2008). Starting from the 1930s, the Gabeli have mastered driving lorries. For example, among Albanian drivers (automobiles were, after 1944, mostly state-owned) many, if not the majority, of lorry and bus drivers were Gabeli Romani. Further on, starting from the 1960s, the situation changed, as the Albanians and representatives of other groups began driving actively as well. However, the 'Romani occupations' and specialization are well-known to the country's population.

> Informant: *I'm going to Durrës tomorrow, to meet an Egyptian. I want to buy a* damaxhan *from him, do you know what it is?*

> A. N.: *Of course I know! It's a braiding for bottles.*
> Inf.: *Yes, exactly! You know everything. And many among us have already forgotten what it is. I want to buy that* damaxhan *for a* rakija *bottle. I think that good* rakija *needs to be stored only in the proper bottle with a* damaxhan*, as they used to do before.*
> A. N.: *But can't you buy one in a shop? Or is it too expensive?*
> Inf.: *Why not? You can buy anything in some IKEA or other. But it's not the same! Everything's artificial. Or Chinese… And that Egyptian does everything properly, as it used to be in the old times. His work is not cheap, by the way, 20 euros for such a braiding. I have already paid him in advance, too. He has a queue of clients; everyone wants a good product. There are no masters at all left today.*
> A. N.: *Is he an Egyptian or a Gabeli? The Gabeli used to do such things before.*
> Inf.: *I know. But this one is an Egyptian. He works in Plepat, right under the bridge, just sits and braids there. He makes good money, by the way. A* damaxhan *doesn't take him all day, he manages to make many of them over a day. A business, in short.*
> [The informant is an Albanian, 48 years old, resident of Tirana, businessman; the interview was recorded in Albanian in Tirana in September 2019] (MAE Archive 2019).

The business talents of the Gabeli are well-known in different regions of south-eastern Europe. For example, in the mid-1990s one of the authors of this review, Aleksander Novik, went, together with his colleagues, to a large, brightly lit store in Istanbul. After an exchange of long greeting formulas in Turkish, common for these situations, with the shopkeepers, the shop owner entered the hall to find out where the potential buyers were from. As he heard phrases in Russian exchanged among them and sized the possibility of good earnings (the Russians were always welcomed as clients), he ordered his employees, in Albanian, to bring traditional Turkish tea. It turned out the shop's personnel came from Kosovo. Quickly switching to Albanian, the guest made the hosts feel awkward; they were embarrassed and asked: "Je gabel? – Pse? – Sepse vetëm gabelët flasin në të gjitha gjuhët!" (Alb. "Are you a Gabeli Romani? – Why? – Because only the Gabeli speak all the languages!"). In the end, they never believed their visitor, deciding he was definitely a Balkan Romani, who was also hiding his origins. The light skin, European clothes and manners of the guest could not convince the hosts otherwise (while usually shopkeepers are excellent psychologists!) (FWMA 1995).

In the collective monograph, a relatively large chapter, "Folk Culture", is dedicated to folklore (I. Yu. Makhotina) and folk knowledge (I. Yu. Makhotina[3],

O. A. Abramenko). For the *Peoples and Cultures* series such attention towards folk heritage is an agreeable exception (since most of the volumes are focused mainly on the ethnographic description of peoples). The section "Folklore", consisting of subsections "The Genesis of Musico-Poetic Folklore of the Russian Romani" and "Folklore Prose and Phraseology of the Russian Romani", is written by excellent specialists, which can be seen from the high-quality analysis of texts.

The authors' whole study has a definite and detailed structure and is presented in a concentrated manner, which allows the reader to get acquainted with all the folklore genres. They do not only list the folklore texts recorded among the Romani, but also, in most cases, suggest the source of their origin or borrowing.

> *Approximately since the 17th century folk poetry of the Russian Romani has been developing as a result of assimilation of the song culture of the surrounding ethnic group. Russian folk songs and romances have entered the Romani everyday culture, both from the repertoire of Romani choirs and through communicating with different groups of Russian society.*
>
> *Despite considerable mutual influence, variety repertoire (for choirs) and everyday repertoire developed differently. The latter was more influenced by Russian peasant songs, which can be observed by the fact that they were mastered in their original shape and in paraphrases, in the Romani and mixed Russo-Romani languages* (p. 394).

The researchers who believed the music of the Russian Romani to be the most complex among the Romani cultures of Eastern Europe, connected the secondary role of the song lyrics with the ethnic group's 'musical focus', which made the lyrics a sort of aesthetic improvisation (Shcherbakova 1984: 51; Druts & Gessler 1990: 152). The Romani interpretations of Russian songs or romances have a sociocultural nature: the interpretation that took root was the one that corresponded to the "ethnopsychology, values, realities of life, etc." (p. 392). Thus, the Romani borrowed the well-developed image of the horse from ritual poetry (the establishment of modern authors' songs in Romani folklore is recorded up to the present day). The male character often acquired the features of a horse-dealer (ibid.). For example, Pantelei, the hero of a song of the same name that stems from the folk interpretations of "The Quarrel", an 1856 poem by I. S. Nikitin, became an unlucky horse-trader (Makhotina 2010: 86–95).

The authors also present conclusive proof of the origins of a narrative song "Dadivès" (Today), explaining the incoherence of its lyrics by the shortening of its source – a Russian robber song, which they cite from an eighteenth-century

source (Chulkov 1780: 169–170). I. Yu. Makhotina and O. A. Abramenko conclude:

> *Though the recorded versions are separated by two hundred years, the contents of the Romani version correspond quite well with the plot of the original one; the extended beginning of the prototype is replaced by lines that are lexically close to the beginning of the soldier song* "Во субботу, день ненастный" *(On Saturday, a rainy day); the repetitions are shortened; the text is almost fully translated into Romani; many lines have parallels in the prototype's text.* (p. 400)

The authors of the collective monograph managed to brilliantly interpret the folklore materials recorded among the Russian Romani (one can feel their many years of experience of dealing with the topic). However, when they turn to folk and similar plots, recorded by other researchers among the Romani of Western Europe, their writing has certain gaps present in it. Among them we can name the quick enumeration of healing and charm practices in the paragraph "Medicine" of the section "Folk Knowledge", referring the reader mainly to the studies of the English Romani's herbalism by T. Thompson[4] (p. 418); there is nothing more said about Thompson's research of the Romani in the monograph.

The musical, singing and dancing culture is one of the chief markers of the Romani common identification and self-identification, regardless of where they live – in Eastern, Southern or Western Europe. In many regions playing musical instruments and singing are among the main sources of income for the Romani population. For example, in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, Romani musical ensembles are traditionally invited for weddings (Fig. 1), circumcision rituals, etc. Romani musicians walk around towns and villages, playing their instruments, during the main Muslim festivals – Eid al-Fitr (Alb. *Ramazan bajram*) and Eid al-Adha (Alb. *Kurban bajram*) (Fig. 2). By playing the drums, they announce the start of *iftar* (the breaking of the fast, the beginning of the evening meal, taken before or after the evening prayer) during the holy month of Ramazan (Fig. 3).

In the collective monograph, in the chapter "Professional Culture", the substantial section "The Romani Choir as a Phenomenon of Russian Culture in the 18th–20th Centuries" is written by Ilona Yu. Makhotina, and the in-depth section "The Dance Traditions of Russian Romani" is written by the excellent specialist Marianna V. Smirnova-Seslavinskaya. In these sections the authors make a detailed analysis of the music, song, and dance culture of the Romani on the Russian territory, pointing out the fact that this field demonstrates mutual influence of various ethnic groups' cultures. Until today, phenomena such as

Figure 1 (above left). *A Romani musician playing at a wedding. Trebisht village, Golloborda, Albania. Photograph by Aleksandr Novik, September 2009.*
Figure 2 (above right). *A Romani boy playing the drum during the holy month of Ramazan. Tirana, Albania. Photograph by Aleksandr Novik, September 2008.*
Figure 3 (below). *A Romani musician, signaling the start of iftar in the holy month of Ramazan. Trebisht village, Golloborda, Albania. Photograph by Aleksander Novik, September 2008.*

Romani choirs, Romani romances, Romani ensembles and Romani dancing have remained very popular on the whole territory of modern Russia.[5]
The chapter "Calendar Festivals and Rituals" (A. V. Chernykh, K. A. Kozhanov, G. N. Tsvetkov, I. Yu. Makhotina, Ya. A. Panchenko) could have been longer, considering the ethnological specificity of the entire *Peoples and Cultures* series. But the readers are presented with rather compressed information on the topic, segmented according to the respective Romani groups, with an obvious focus on the Orthodox Christian ones (which is explained by the fact that they form the majority in Russia). The authors mainly touch upon the rituals of the winter and spring cycles, whereby the celebration of New Year's Day, decoration of the New Year tree, etc., are presented without any stipulation that it is a fairly recent tradition, starting only in the twentieth century and mostly spreading among the peoples of the USSR only in the period following the Great Patriotic War. In the entire collective monograph, there is little information on the Muslim Romani. In the chapter dedicated to the calendar rituals there is only one small paragraph about the traditions of the Crimean Romani.

The chapter "Family and Daily Family Life" (N. G. Demeter) is more detailed, but it also mainly deals with Orthodox Christian Romani. A study of the occurrences in the Muslims' family ceremonial remains, as we must suppose, in the plans for further research. For example, among the rites of passage, important for anthropological descriptions, there is no mention of the rite of circumcision. This topic has generally been described to a very small extent and would have been highly relevant for such a multidisciplinary study.[6]

In general, the religious affiliation of the Romani and folk beliefs spread among them are given much attention in different sections of the monograph, as well as in a separate chapter titled "Religious and Mythological Beliefs" (A. V. Chernykh, K. A. Kozhanov). Extensive data, from both the archives and the field materials, are analyzed there. However, the authors never give a clear conclusion: the Romani mostly adopted the dominant ethnic group's religion. Thus, in the Byzantine Empire the Romani were Christians, with the arrival of the Ottomans and the establishment of a five-hundred-year Turkish reign on the Balkans the Romani massively converted to Islam (the Turks as an ethnic group did not form a statistical majority in the local population's structure, but being Muslims, they automatically belonged to referent groups of an enormous empire, having a direct bearing on various administrative resources). Unwilling to be pressed by the state, the Romani, who were heavily discriminated in the feudal society as it was, converted to Islam, wishing to free themselves from the huge taxes and other duties for non-Muslims, which existed during all the periods of the sultans' reign. Likewise, in the Russian Empire the Romani adapted quickly in the religious aspect, adopting the faith of the Orthodox

majority. It is proved by the fact that the Romani groups who lived in Poland and were Catholic Christians quickly converted to Orthodoxy after moving to Russia (it is mentioned in the collective monograph on p. 364).

For the Romani it was important to retain their mythological ideas and their belief – if possible, we may call it the 'Romani-ness', or the 'Romani soul'. Perhaps this is the reason why the authors of this review, asking various MA and PhD students (not even students at the BA level!) in the main universities of the country about the religious beliefs of the Romani, never get an answer that would be even near the truth. "They probably have some religion of their own!" is usually heard from the lecture hall. Considering this fact, the collective monograph *The Romani* is very relevant and necessary for modern society.

A book that presents itself as a full overview of Romani topics is difficult to imagine without a special section dedicated to gold in culture and mythological beliefs. In this volume, in the chapter "Religious and Mythological Beliefs", in the section "Concepts of Luck in Romani Culture and Luck Talismans" the paragraph "Gold in Customs and Rite" (A. V. Chernykh, K. A. Kozhanov) is significantly present. Moreover, the design of the book itself – shiny gold text on the dim gold background of the cover – symbolizes the special role of the precious metal in the system of Romani traditional values. In the *Peoples and Cultures* series such an approach is clearly new (one can only recall the volume *The Jews*, which had its title written on the cover in both Russian and Hebrew (Emelyanenko & Nosenko-Shtein 2018)). Gold, as the paragraph's authors rightly remark, served as a store of value, a means of increase of wealth, a measure of values and a mythologized precious metal, firmly ingrained in the beliefs and culture of the Romani (pp. 381–385). This metal has been playing this part until today; the majority of the Romani population on the vast territories of the former Russian Empire / Soviet Union and modern Russian Federation prefer gold as a store of value to all currencies and other assets. Likewise, the authors suggest correctly that the origins of such a hypertrophic treatment of gold are to be found on the territory of Hindustan, from which the Romani have come. (We should add that it was among the Indians that the gold had been the measure of values for millennia – in contrast to, for example, China, where silver was the main payment equivalent and store of value, and gold was merely an item of goods, its price changing depending on the situation at the market). But the influence of the system of values formed in Byzantium and later in the Ottoman Empire was no less important and evident. The Oriental passion for luxury and demonstration of wealth, common to the referent groups of states that followed each other in south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor, influenced the Romani no less strongly than the traditions brought over from India.

To conclude, we would like to note that the book is supplied with many high-quality illustrations which allow one to see the world of Romani culture in its entire richness and diversity. The photographic illustrations (from archives and museums, from family albums, pictures taken by the authors A. Chernykh, D. Vayman, etc., on expeditions over many years) enrich the book exceptionally and make it informative and valuable.

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NOTES

[1] A review of the book in question has already been published by Ivan Duminika, a researcher from Moldova: (Duminika 2020). In our study we have tried to highlight important topics that have not been analyzed in his review.

[2] Both researchers currently working at the University of St Andrews, United Kingdom.

[3] In the table of contents, it is erroneously noted that one of the authors of the sections is I. Yu. Matyukhina rather than I. Yu. Makhotina.

[4] See Thompson 1925: 159–172.

[5] On carnival culture and European carnivals, where the Romani or people dressed as Romani also participate, see the comprehensive work by Testa (2021).

[6] On circumcision among the Balkan Muslims see Novik & Rezvan 2019: 119–134.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

THE 35TH NORDIC ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE CONFERENCE "RE:22"

The 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference took place between June 13 and June 16, 2022, in Reykjavik, Iceland. While this series of conferences has been running for more than a century now, this conference was unique in many respects.

Firstly, Nordic ethnology and folklore researchers had to wait for an extra year to reunite at this academic event: the usual three-year gap between the conferences was supplemented by the COVID-19 pandemic, so the meeting was even more long-awaited than in the former (pre-pandemic) days. This was probably one of the factors that contributed to another prominent feature of the event – the number of participants skyrocketed compared to the previous Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conferences, with around 350 researchers attending the conference on site and 70 more joining online. The conference featured more than 80 panel sessions which meant that choosing what presentations to attend was not an easy task. Thirdly, the prominence of hybrid format – another contribution (or curse?) of the pandemic – ensured a wider and more flexible access to the conference presentations.

Figure 1. *Conference participants at the Open Air Museum. Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.*

Figure 2. *An art piece from the workshop on DIY as art-based methodological practice in ethnology. Photograph by Anastasiya Fiadotava.*

These formal peculiarities of the 2022 Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, important as they are, did not overshadow the conference's curious content. The conference topic consisted of just one syllable – "re:". It invited the participants to reflect on repetitions, remixes, reuses, and multiple other theoretical concepts that play a crucial role in defining folklore and ethnological research as they allow scholars to trace patterns of human culture and approach them from a perspective that highlights both their traditionality and variation. As "re" words featured prominently in the conference call for papers, it came as no surprise that they were also integrated in many of the panels' titles shaping the participants' presentations and discussions.

However, the recurrent use of "re" concepts did not limit the variety of the conference presentation topics. They ranged from general reflections on modernity to very mundane engagements with money, food, or other everyday objects; from the historical overviews of the development of disciplines to the reflections on how contemporary digital technologies define our culture; from the focus on materialities to the discussion of narratives. The geographical scope was also not limited to Nordic countries but included other countries of Europe as well as more distant locales.

Alongside the regular panels the conference also featured workshops and plenary talks. Some of the workshops tried to breach the gap between scholarly work and art – for example, the participants of the workshop under the heading "Recycling and reimagining

materiality – DIY as art-based methodological practice in ethnology" were using recycled artifacts to create art pieces related to their personal (academic) experiences. The plenary talks shed light on two very different sides of ethnology and folkloristics. Tine Damsholt from the University of Copenhagen looked at how COVID-19 pandemic has affected our everyday temporalities, and Terry Gunnell from the University of Iceland reflected on the ways the 19th-century folklore collectors used the illustrations in their books as well as the connections between the collection of folklore and the creation of national culture in the Nordic countries.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the conference was the fact that it did not just remain a "thing in itself" but was rather a milestone marking the existing and potential future collaborations. For example, the conveners of the panel "Symbiotic living: Human-microbial relations in everyday life" explained that it is a part of a larger interdisciplinary project that they take part in, and the organizers of the panel "Re:producing and re:presenting the family & kinship in a digital age" suggested that the panel participants compile a joint publication. The conference also included a discussion meeting on the Nordic cooperation in ethnology and folklore and a planning session for a new SIEF working group ("Feminist approaches to ethnology and folklore"). All these initiatives – as well as the number of conference participants and their diverse research interests – showed that folkloristics and ethnology are thriving in the Nordic countries, and there are plenty of opportunities for scholarly work in these disciplines.

Anastasiya Fiadotava

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ON THE TRADITION OF MAJULI SATTRAS

On 21 June 2022, Baburam Saikia defended his doctoral thesis titled "Contradictions in(side) the tradition: Lived religion, ritual and change with reference to Majuli sattras" to obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Folkloristics) at the University of Tartu.

This PhD dissertation is an excellent example of the combination of emic experiences and perspectives combined with a critical etic analysis of a social scientist and a folklore scholar. It is an excellent performance, engaging closely and systematically with contradictions within the tradition of Majuli sattras, which are religious monastic and educational centres on the island of Majuli in the Brahmaputra River in Assam, north-eastern India.

This work proves to be a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, ably supported by evidence and relevant citation. It shows an excellent ability to organise, analyse, and express arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis displaying a highly-developed capacity for original, creative, and logical thinking.

The great value of this PhD is its method of ethnographic fieldwork combined with a rare emic perspective. Through the lens of a very personal experience and through the methodological fieldwork enquiry, the author shows the reader a religious, educational, and monastic tradition torn within paradoxes and contradictions.

Having been ritually given to a Majuli sattra by his parents, the author became a ritual child sattriya dancer in his years of childhood and adolescence. The sattriya dance is a ritual dance officially recognised as one of the eight principal classical Indian dance traditions. The sacred and ritual dance is exclusively performed in the monastic context of sattra culture by its male sattra devotees. It is one of the main cultural vehicles to spread the neo-Vaishnavite culture of the social and religious reformer and mystic Sankaradeva (1449–1568), who founded the monastic, mystic, and devotional bhakti religious and educational institutions of sattras in Assam as a revolt against casteism and authoritarianism, some of the oldest ones at Majuli.

The author's international higher educational and academic work as an adult has enabled him to respectfully distance himself from his monastic life and to transform his experience and knowledge to a sociological and cultural reflection and analysis. The deep personal experience of a reflective transformation from an internal insider view to an external outsider perspective makes this work a model for a successful combination of emic and etic perspectives.

The work is analytically very balanced, culturally sensitive and respectful, but it also does not lack highly critical reflections on contemporary politization of the famous anti-cast and anti-authoritarian social and religious reformer and mystic Sankaradeva. Here the author discusses the rising contradictions of Sankaradeva's neo-Vaishnavism

with once radically egalitarian and anti-establishment ideas transforming today to the revitalisation of Brahmin supremacy and its caste ideology.

Sankaradeva (1449–1568), who spread the worship of Vishnu, has become an iconic figure of neo-Vaishnavism and its regional identity in Assam. As the creator of Assamese literature and sattriya dance tradition, he also became synonymous with the united Assamese ethnic identity, which itself is very heterogenous and diversified.

Monastic sattras offered, besides the cultural centrality of Assamese aesthetics and artistic expressions, a sustained social service to difficult human social conditions and situations. They served as social orphanages or offered children to be adopted by the monastic centres. In return, the adopted boy children obtained spiritual, artistic, and aesthetic learning, mainly expressed through the classical sattriya dance tradition.

The author describes in an interesting manner how the ascetic order needs to create new generations to continue the traditional ascetic heritage. As a means for this, a particular tradition of a boy child donation/gift emerged within the sattra tradition, thus ensuring the continuation of the ascetic practice and tradition through spiritual adoption and the creation of a monastic family.

Baburam Saikia with his supervisor Professor Ülo Valk (University of Tartu) and opponent Dr Lidia Guzy (University College Cork). Photograph by Piret Voolaid.

In addition to a robust discussion of the diverse features of the coexisting local religious traditions within the ethnic tapestry of Assam, the author also analyses the everyday life of the celibate sattra devotees and observes remarkable changes and challenges within the ideal of celibacy in the contemporary situation of the religious and educational centres. Here ritual purity and chastity are hard to maintain for young male sattriya dancers and devotees who find themselves navigating between the glamourous national and international stage lights of sattriya dance performances and the temptations of the sensual virtual world of social media, making the admiring outside world physically so much more easily approachable and available as in pre-digital times.

The thesis is a precious example of an excellent emic description and an etic academic discussion of a vernacular monastic tradition in Assam. With the author's insider experiences and views and with his measured and just academic analysis, the complexity of the religious and spiritual landscape of Assam becomes manifest.

The author places a strong emphasis on the analysis of rituals and the orthopractice of the sattra centres and the ascetic devotees (monks). "Rituals (*prasanga*) are very important tools for ascetic neo-Vaishnava devotees to maintain the tradition that is controlled by religion. They believe that without the continuation of ritual, tradition will die," writes Baburam Saikia (p. 21). Here the author distinguishes very well between religion and tradition, and he is very conscious with the use of academic categories which are clearly defined and discussed as meta-categories, such as religion and ritual.

The thesis provides a very good introduction into the multi-ethnic and politically dynamic region of Assam in north-eastern India. Assam with its multi-ethnic tribal identity is constantly on the verge of disintegrating (p. 22). Animistic, shamanic, spirit and goddess worship is continuously prevalent in the tribal region of Assam. "When dealing with the world of spirits, religious boundaries do not matter even for orthodox neo-Vaishnava adherents" (p. 23). Goddess worship in this cultural context is combined with many elements of indigenous magic practice, sacrifice, and mystical traditions. Assam, which was earlier divided into several independent kingdoms of tribal communities, accumulated a diversity of religious traits and traditions vivid until today.

The author concurs that the diverse ways of worshiping and communicating with spirits, deities, gods, and goddesses suggest that pluralistic belief systems have always been characteristic of Assam and that the blending of those religious traditions can hardly be overtaken by any fundamentalist, non-secular, majoritarian nationalistic ideology.

The more paradoxical, it appears that the democratic and anti-authoritarian and anti-cast ideology of the bhakti movement promoted by Sankaradeva has today become a vehicle of Hindutva nationalistic rhetoric spread through the sattra religious centres.

The particular exclusion and control of Assamese traditions of the feminine sacred and the exclusion of women from the ascetic traditions presents a great criticism by the author: "As with other major world religions, the neo-Vaishnava order is also patriarchal when it comes to socio-religious structure and authority. The ascetic sattras

particularly do not allow the presence of women in their lives: there is no order of nuns in neo-Vaishnava tradition" (p. 35).

The author's critique of Sankaradeva's neo-Vaishnava patriarchal tradition indicates misogynic practices and concepts within this tradition. He writes: "In the neo-Vaishnava order women are sometimes considered a polluting agent, because of which they are not permitted to enter the prayer halls. This contradicts the liberal notions ingrained in Assam Vaishnavism, although it is typical of general Hindu patterns of ritual purity and women as agents of pollution" (p. 35). Here we see, I would say, a neo-Vaishnavite attempt to control, exclude, demonise and also to appropriate the power of the so powerful goddess worship of Assam through the rival male and ascetic ideology of Sankaradeva's neo-Vaishnavism.

The relationship between the neo-Vaishnavism of Sankaradeva and the tantric goddess worship and its resilience could be of further interest for an alternative analysis of social and religious change and resilience in relation to asceticism and tantric goddess worship. The author writes: "Ascetic devotees, especially of the Kamalabari school of sattras, keep their hair long in the belief that all humans are female, only lord Krishna is imagined as being male. … In the secret gopikhela ritual, sex between a human Radha-Krishna couple is an auspicious ritual act. During this ritual devotees offer worship to the genital organs of both the male and the female." (p. 38) We see here the complexities of an ascetic tradition which absorbs, appropriates, and also modifies the local goddess worship patterns.

The work offers an excellent account on the roles of tradition, culture, and the individual development. The author's own emic experiences of more than two decades of sattra life prove the functioning of tradition as "lack of individual choices". It shows that, to become an individual, there is a need for a constant individual contest tradition, a fight against tradition. The individual personality development is the individual choice in the face of or against tradition. The quest for freedom as the core human quest can be seen as a great lack in ascetic traditions where individual freedom is sacrificed for a greater good.

The author's discussion on the role of tradition and human need for individual freedom is highly thought-provoking and important. In the context of sattras, people are bound by tradition. Freedom is not a part of devotees' lives until and unless they decide to continue a different life outside. The young celibate devotees who are involved in teaching sattriya dance and music try to enjoy some freedom (for example, eating food outside) as their lives are full of social restrictions inside the sattra campus. Sometimes, this beginning of enjoying freedom leads them to married life (p. 51). It may be concluded that the great challenges for the future of ascetic culture are its worldview and life model which lacks joy, pleasure, and individual freedom as values. Apart from the lack of individual freedom, strong institutionalisation processes of sattra culture constantly lead to the re-introduction of the caste system despite the egalitarian and democratic principles of Sankaradeva's neo-Vaishnavism.

Another interesting detail is the author's documentation of the centrality of food rituals and their purity and impurity concepts in the context of food intake and food preparation within the sattra tradition. Here I would question whether the author is right about the concepts of food purity and pollution being exclusively Hindu concepts. I would rather say that they may also indicate indigenous ascetic practices and tribal concepts of food purity and pollution prevalent in all indigenous and local cultures.

The phenomenon of Hindutvaisation or politization of sattra culture in recent years is of particular importance: some sattras introduce a newly emerging Hindutva sattra model. A few sattras in Majuli, however, have a different outlook and have maintained political neutrality and never indulged in communal politics. The author generally deplores the compromise of sattra ideas and values by the introduction of communal politics and political corruption.

In summary, Baburam Saikia's PhD thesis represents an innovative, very valuable and honest research, with rare and rich data, unique insights, scholarly analytics and reflections on the sattras' tradition – a topic which until today has been insufficiently studied.

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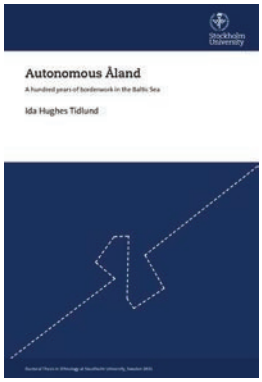
BORDERLINE ISSUES CONCERNING THE AUTONOMOUS ISLAND OF ÅLAND IN THE BALTIC SEA

Ida Hughes Tidlund. *Autonomous Åland: A Hundred Years of Borderwork in the Baltic Sea*. Doctoral Thesis. Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Stockholm University, 2021. 219 pp.



Ida Hughes Tidlund presented her doctoral thesis in ethnology at Stockholm University and the Centre for Maritime Studies in Stockholm (CEMAS). The thesis reviews issues regarding the definition of borders surrounding the autonomous archipelago of Åland with more than 30,000 inhabitants as of 2021 and located in the Baltic Sea between Finland and Sweden. Altogether, there are 6,700 islands, 60 of which are inhabited. A law adopted by the League of Nations prevised that the inhabitants' language, culture, and traditions should be protected. The land of Åland was to be used and owned by the inhabitants of Åland. The right of domicile grants regional citizenship. This is required to permit political activities, business ownership, and ownership of fixed property. The right of domicile as well as the demilitarization are protected by an international treaty. Åland's autonomy includes decisions regarding education, industry, commerce, communications, postal services, health care, radio, TV, police, culture, and museums. The local government has the executive power within the framework of local legislation.

Åland is not required to offer education in languages other than Swedish, which is the only official language. Therefore, Åland is even more Swedish-speaking than Sweden, where several languages can occur as part of education. In 2018, 87% of Ålanders spoke Swedish as their mother tongue. Åland's autonomy is symbolized, among other things, by the Åland flag and its own stamps. The Finnish authority extends to foreign policy, border controls, monetary policy, and civil and criminal law.

This thesis gives an overview of the methods used to establish borders by legal means, which might change over time, and of how they shape everyday life for the individuals affected by them. Micro- as well as macro-perspectives are investigated, bearing in mind that borders and actions are linked to each other.

The theory behind the thesis is inspired by the phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre as well as that of the philosopher and phenomenologist Edward Casey and the social anthropologist Sarah Green, and their view that borders are legal and cultural constructions to convey understanding to the individuals concerned. A border is a point where something begins – and something else ends. A border thus is immaterial. "Here"

is separated from "there". Åland can be deemed by its inhabitants to be "here", while Finland is seen to be "there".

The author's material consists of fifteen interviews conducted by her in 2017, and participant observations during 2016–2019. The author lives in Stockholm but has been able to build on having relatives living in Åland during her field studies. Her own experience from field studies is that it is not easy to establish relationships with the inhabitants of Åland. Older archival source material has also been used for the thesis, for example interviews with senior inhabitants between 1952 and 2015, statute books, newspaper articles, maps, and schoolbooks.

Participant observations have been recorded, among others, on the rocky islet Märket and on ferries to and from Åland, on which duty-free commerce takes place. This commerce is an important part of Åland's economy. Tobacco and alcohol as well as Swedish snuff, which is prohibited in Finland, constitute large sales. Contraband sales of (among other products) Swedish snuff are also made.

After the first, introductory chapter, the second one reviews the legal framework of autonomy. The first law regarding autonomy was enacted in 1921 and the second one in 1952, both strengthening the protection of minorities. The third law was enacted in 1993, further strengthening the protection of the Swedish language.

The third and fourth chapters of the thesis focus on maritime borderlines which are less precise and harder to identify than land borders. There is only one land border on Åland – on the rocky islet Märket. One part of the island belongs to Finland, the other being Swedish. The Skiftet region separates Åland from Finland and the Åland Sea separates Åland from Sweden. The borders need to be reviewed every five or ten years not least due to the strong isostasy in the Baltic Sea. New islets appear. A map in the thesis (p. 78) shows how the rocky islet Märket has grown between 1810 and 1980.

Chapters five and six investigate how the Åland inhabitants deal with the border in their day-to-day life, in connection with hunting seals, fishing, and trade with Finland as well as Sweden. The author uses the concept 'hodological navigation' inspired by Sartre's phenomenology to show how the inhabitants relate to their borders in everyday life. This means that people act to achieve certain objectives. There is a strong awareness of the borders because the inhabitants need to deal with them frequently. The author writes that the border is a recurring issue. Moving over water makes it necessary to consider the weather, waves, and ice conditions. A prolonged personal experience of navigating these border waters adds to this awareness.

Chapter seven summarizes one hundred years of Åland's autonomy and the expression of this autonomy in handling the borders.

The thesis offers an extensive summary in Swedish (pp. 184–199). This is unusual in Swedish theses written in English, and strengthens the impression that Åland is more Swedish than Finnish.

The thesis is thorough with regard to material, use of theory, and analysis. It constitutes an important contribution to maritime ethnological research. There is plenty of material regarding legal developments and international treatises, as well as the inhabitants' handling of the maritime borders in day-to-day life.

I failed to find, however, comparisons with research concerning other border areas. In the 1990s, I participated in a research project entitled "Cultural Meetings along Borders". The scientists analyzed border relations from the late nineteenth through to the twentieth century in the Swedish regions of Bohuslän and Dalsland along with Østfold fylke on the Norwegian side. The key findings were published in the book titled *Gränsmöten* (Border Meetings, 1999). This is not mentioned or commented on in Tidlund's thesis. Comparisons with other territorial autonomies would also have been useful, not least the Faroe Islands and Greenland. These are islands under Danish authority but are mentioned only in passing in the thesis. For example, ethnologist Jóan Pauli Joensen has conducted several studies of the Faroe Islands from a historical perspective. Another ethnologist who is missing in the references is Nils Storå, former professor at the Åbo Academy, who has strong links with Åland. In 2003, he published a book titled *Fishing and Fishing Culture in Åland*. The Archipelago Research Institute at Åbo Academy University, which was established in 1978, is also missing. Since 1978 the Institute publishes the journal *Skärgård* (Archipelago), in which Nils Storå has had an important role.

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