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# THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN (RE)CREATING THE TATAR DIASPORA IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THE ESTONIAN TATARS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper\* focuses on the meanings assigned to the Tatar language among the Tatar diaspora in Estonia. According to interviews with Estonian Tatars, language is an important aspect of Tatar ethnic identity. This paper will track common discourses about the Tatar language and the way it is connected to Tatar ethnic identity. Issues concerning the Tatar language are used to demonstrate various ways of enacting Tatariness in Estonia. The paper shows that Estonian Tatars worry about the vitality and purity of Tatar, but for some, marginalisation of dialects is also an issue. People categorised with the same identity labels by themselves and others can experience and enact their Tatariness in a variety of different ways.

KEYWORDS: Tatars • identity • diaspora • language • Islam

## INTRODUCTION

The question of the legitimate use and destiny of the Tatar language is emotionally loaded for many Tatars, along with the question of the unity of the Tatars as a nation. This can be seen in a quote by Tatar writer Tufan Mingnullin:

Today as well, Tatars are not united. This is why their opinion is not taken into account. I do not blame the Russians at all for what we are. Only we are to blame. Those who lack self-respect are not respected. A docile slave is beaten more often. (Mingnullin 1996: 55, via Rorlich 1999: 392)

The Tatar political authorities have emphasised the importance of improving the status of the Tatar language as well as of embracing the diaspora to help the maintenance and recreation of Tatar identity and connections with Tatarstan.

I will explore the attitudes of Estonian Tatars towards the Tatar language and the role assigned to language choice and linguistic performance in the maintenance and recreation of ethnic identity. The interviews I conducted gave me personal insights into (among other things) the ways my informants conceptualise Tatar and the meaning of

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language in Tatar identity discourse. Rather than finding out, for example, the extent to which Tatar is used daily among Estonian Tatars, my goal was to understand the “interviewees’ interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world” (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 36) through stories that my informants told about their lives. The process of generating meanings is undoubtedly subjective. I will approach the topic by pointing out certain common lines of thought about using Tatar that came up in the interviews, specifically consideration of the viability and purity of Tatar, status struggles between dialects and the possibility of language shift. These discourses will then be connected to anthropological and sociolinguistic writings about the role of Tatar in nation building and identity construction in Tatarstan, and especially about the ways that Tatarstan approaches the diaspora in relation to language issues. I am interested in meanings Estonian Tatars assign to the contexts and ways of speaking Tatar as well as their own linguistic performance. I am also interested in how Tatarstan’s attempts to reach out to the Tatar diaspora have influenced the attitudes of Estonian Tatars to language. Thirdly, I want to investigate the relationship between language and other ethnic identity markers for Estonian Tatars.

The interviews were conducted with members of the Estonian Tatar community in 2009 (12 interviews conducted with 18 interviewees). My study also relies on field notes from some events carried out by the Estonian Islamic Congregation in the same year and two Tatar Sabantuy<sup>1</sup> festivals, in 2008 and 2009, in the small town of Maardu, where an active Tatar community lives and the largest Sabantuys in Estonia are organised. Some of the interviewees had organised or were organising community events at the time of the interview, others participated in events while not being active in their organisation. The ages of interviewees ranged from 19 to 81 and there were 9 men and 9 women. The length of the interviews varied from one to four hours. Most of the interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ homes in Tallinn or Maardu, while some preferred to meet me in cafés, and one in a park in front of his house. In order to protect their anonymity (of which I assured them at the time of the interviews), I use pseudonyms when referring to interviewees. The languages of interview were Estonian and Russian. Four interviews are conducted primarily in Russian and the rest in Estonian.<sup>2</sup> I also rely on background information provided by a three-week field trip to Kazan in 2007.

#### TATARS AS A DIASPORA NATION AND THE TATAR DIASPORA IN ESTONIA

For a long time in Russia all Turkic people were called Tatars. By the early 20th century several Turkish-speaking groups situated in the Volga–Urals region, Crimea and Siberia used the term ‘Tatar’ as self-designation. In the 2010 census in the Russian Federation, over 5.3 million people declared themselves Tatar, about 2 million of whom live in Tatarstan (a little more than half of Tatarstan’s population). Distinctions are made between Crimean Tatars as a more distant group and the Volga Tatars, including Siberian, Astrakhan, Kazan Tatars and Mishars. The Kazan Tatars mainly live in Central Russia, in the areas of Tatarstan and in regions around it (like Udmurtia and Bashkortostan), while the Mishars traditionally live in the Nizniy Novgorod region about 300 kilometres north-west of Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan. While the tra-

ditional religion for most Tatar groups has been Sunni Islam, there is also a group of Orthodox Tatars called Kryashens. These distinctions are based on self-identity as well as categorisations by others and are related to both political discourses and linguistic and cultural differences.

The idea of Tatarstan as the spiritual homeland of all Tatars does meet some resistance. For example, the Astrakhan and Siberian Tatars have presented themselves as ethnic groups distinct from the Volga Tatars. These groups both claim that historical and linguistic peculiarities differentiate them from Volga Tatars to such an extent that they should be considered separate groups (Graney 1998: 155–156). For the 2010 census, the Russian federal statistics service Rosstat provided a list of nationalities to guide residents in completing the census form, which gave almost 30 categories of Tatar. The Tatar elite in Tatarstan saw this as a central government political strategy that tried to downplay the numbers and influence of Tatars in the Russian Federation. They claim that these Tatar subdivisions do not have any ground in the people's self-perception (Sindelar 2010; Goble 2013). Tatarstan's elite makes a conscious effort to keep their relationships with the central government in Moscow harmonious, while simultaneously retaining as much sovereignty as possible. In the 1990s, Tatarstan used the diaspora as legitimation for increasing its influence and decision-making power in the Russia Federation. Relations between the central government and Tatarstan are fraught with power struggles, which are nevertheless carefully hidden. According to Yves-Marie Davenel (2009: 77), in the 2002 census, when only the Tatars of Siberia, Astrakhan and Kryashen were counted separately, there were about 34,000 people out of 5.5 million Tatars in the Russian Federation who chose to identify themselves primarily as members of these groups. Although the number is small, this fact reveals the existence of some divisions among the Tatars. Some members of other minority groups also seek recognition of their distinct ethno-linguistic and religious traits and resist the homogenising attempts of Tatar political authorities in Tatarstan (Graney 1998: 155–156). There is also a widespread diaspora of Tatars with long traditions in the former Soviet Union, especially Central Asia, and in the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The largest communities of Volga Tatars outside of the former Soviet Union live in China, Turkey, Poland and Finland (see *ibid.*: 157 for a detailed table of Volga Tatar diaspora communities).

The first Tatar community in Estonia formed after Estonia and Livonia were annexed to Russia in 1721, when some Tatar navy officers in the Russian army stayed in Tallinn after the Great Northern War (Abiline 2008: 58). The names of Tatari and Uus-Tatari Streets in Tallinn date from this period (*ibid.*: 60). When Russia abolished serfdom in 1861, many former serfs took up trade, and in the 1870s and 1880s Tatar peddlers started to come to Estonia. The number of Tatars living in Tallinn, according to the 1897 census, was 109. However, the military were not accounted for, and it is thought that the actual number of Tatars could have been much higher (*ibid.*: 66). During World War I and the subsequent Estonian War of Independence, 1914–1918 and 1918–1920 respectively, many Tatars left Estonia for Finland, Germany and Tatarstan. Simultaneously, new Tatar immigrants came to Estonia and the immigration process continued during the first Estonian independence period (*ibid.*: 68). In Tallinn and Narva, where the largest communities of Tatars lived, Sunday schools for children were organised. Narva Muslim Congregation (Narva Muhamedi Kogudus) was registered in 1928 and later reregistered as Narva Muslim Religious Society (Narva Muhamedi Usuühing). In

1940, Tallinn Muslim Religious Society was registered. According to the 1934 census there were 170 Muslims living in Estonia, and 166 of them were Tatars. Thus, Muslim organisations in Estonia at the time were mainly Tatar ventures as well. During the Soviet period, religious societies were banned. In 1988 the Tatar Culture Society was registered and the reregistration of the Estonian Muslim Congregation came in 1989. After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was also a considerable amount of emigration (Abiline 2008: 58–74). According to the 2011 census in Estonia, 1945 people listed themselves as Tatars (Rahva ja eluruumide loendus 2011).

Tatars who came to Estonia before the Second World War mainly originated in what is today the Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast, from villages around a larger central village Sergatch. They were mostly Mishar Tatars. Between 1950 and 1980 Estonia experienced extensive immigration from different parts of the Soviet Union. Many Tatar immigrants came and now from different areas of the Soviet Union. They came as workforce to build the Narva Electric Power Station and the Maardu Chemical Combine starting from 1948, and the Olympic Complex in the 1970s (Abiline 2008: 74). Those Tatars who came to build the Maardu Chemical Combine were mainly Mishar Tatars from the village of Andreyevka in the Sergatch area. However, other immigration waves included Tatars from Tatarstan, Bashkiria and other locations as well.

#### NATIONAL IDENTITY, LANGUAGE, DIASPORA

Identity is a notorious term. Siniša Malešević (2006: 3) argues that identity has become an ideological device used by academics and various political actors alike. Because the concept of identity is often employed as a device of elite power struggles, he cautions social scientists to be prudent in their analysis (*ibid.*: 5). Denis-Constant Martin (1995) asserts that although identity is often used as an explanation in the context of various conflicts, it does not cause human behaviour in itself. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) are critical of the use of identity as a term in social analysis because of its ambiguity. They point out that identity is used in conflicting ways, taking on strong, essentialist meanings mostly in its non-scientific use, while simultaneously being “routinely characterized as multiple, fragmented and fluid” in social analysis (*ibid.*: 6). The constructivist stance does not seem convincing, they say, because it ends up conceptualising a myriad of affiliations, experiences of community and commonality and self-understandings with one term, which is confusing (*ibid.*: 2). Brubaker and Cooper also find it problematic that the term is often used analytically in a reifying manner, implying that identity is a thing people can have, hiding the essentialism of one’s argumentation behind what Brubaker and Cooper describe as “constructivist gestures” (*ibid.*: 6). Brubaker and Cooper suggest the use of “identification” (*ibid.*: 15), “self-understanding” (*ibid.*: 17) and “groupness” (*ibid.*: 19) in academic writing instead of identity. Of these, “identification” is used frequently, in order to emphasise the process of constantly recreating an individual sense of self and personal agency in associating with different categories or groups of people. Brubaker and Cooper see the benefits of “identification” in that it draws attention to processes, while “identity”, “designating a condition rather than a process, implies too easy a fit between the individual and the social” (*ibid.*: 17). As identity in a non-academic setting is regularly used with the assumption that identi-



ties are essential, unitary and rather stable features of people and groups, the term can easily be misinterpreted to denote the same in academic texts as well. Some academic texts also follow the trend to explain away certain acts simply with the ethnicity, nation or religion of the people involved. There is a small step from seeing group identities as sole reasons for a person's actions, to discriminating against a person for his or her identification with some group or category of people. Some of my informants, who identify with a Muslim, Russian-speaking and/or Tatar-speaking minority, have recounted being subjected to suspicion or hurtful experiences from other parties in Estonia. It is therefore important for me not to perpetuate this kind of essentialism in my argumentation. Nevertheless, this problem can be solved by a more conscious and precise way of handling the term identity.

One often-heard criticism of the use of identity is that instead of explaining why people act in certain ways, it merely veils selfish interests of one form or another, which actually motivate them. Roger D. Abrahams, for example, emphasises that market forces govern cultural identities. Abrahams (2003: 217) points out that ethnic identities are commoditised for the use of tourism and heritage industries. Richard Jenkins, on the other hand, points out that interests and identifications are, in fact, intermeshed. Jenkins underscores that "classifications of self and others [...] can never be utterly disinterested; they are potentially too consequential for that". People's identifications influence what they consider to be in their interest and pursuing certain interests may encourage them to prefer some identities over others. Both interests and identities depend on other factors outside of a person as well, including the identities and interests of other people. (Jenkins 2011: 9) Jenkins suggests that instead of theoretically opposing interests to identities, both should be looked at empirically in local contexts with their local histories. The question Jenkins urges us to ask, is how much ethnicity matters, if it does at all, and in what ways? (Ibid.: 11) Jenkins agrees that in some contexts, ethnic identities do not matter at all, while in others they may be consequential in one way or another.

While national identity is certainly not important for everyone (see, for example, Fenton 2007 about indifference to being English and British), its use value in signifying the differences and categorisations of especially the post-Soviet realities cannot be denied (for a short introduction to how the Soviet system strengthened ethnic identity and its impact on post-Soviet diaspora politics see King 1998: 17–20). Identity is processual and situational, meaning that it happens in daily interaction with others and changes depending on the social context. Stuart Hall (1996: 3) describes identification as a process that "operates across difference". Therefore, identity is always exclusive. It includes defining oneself or others against something, which they are not. The identities are always constructed within a discourse of power and exclusion. Hall continues that identification "entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'" (ibid.). The boundaries constantly recreated in discourse are situational and flexible. They are not completely arbitrary, of course, but negotiable to a great degree. This paper will explore the use of language as a symbolic boundary for Estonian Tatars, and show that there are many ways in which language is used – in relation to purity of language and dialects, as well as being or not being able to speak Tatar at all. The various uses of Tatar in boundary maintenance are connected to the fact that identity is also hierarchically organised. Thus, the same person can talk about his or her national identity by referring to a we-group of Mishar Tatars in rela-

tion to, for example, dialect and descent, or Estonian Tatars in relation to location and networks. The discursive approach to identity emphasises that the meaning of identity changes over time and between different members of a community. For example, Rogers Brubaker et al. (2008: 207–238) show that individuals given the same identity labels both by others and by themselves, can practice and experience their identity in very different ways.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen finds that second and third generation immigrants tend to identify more strongly with the values of the majority than their parents did. However, in societies, where ethnicity is important, subsequent generations could instead experience revitalisation movements. (Eriksen 2010 [1993]: 167) In the context of today's Estonia (or the whole of the former Soviet Union, for that matter), it would then be expected that the overall importance of ethnicity in society would make Tatar revitalisation movements more likely to come to life here. Furthermore, the importance of language is emphasised in Estonian laws and national identity discourse, which carry the idea of the Estonian language needing protection in order to survive. The same is true for Tatarstan. In a study of ethnic identification in Tatar schools, Aurora Alvarez Veinguer and Howard Davis (2007) show that language is of central importance in Tatar schools and is treated as essential to being a Tatar. Helen Faller (2011) argues that language is allotted a special place in Tatar national identity discourse. Azode-Ayse Rorlich (1999) uses perceptions of Tatar collective memory in speeches, literature and other texts by Tatar intellectuals to show the interconnectedness of the discourses of language, statehood and religion (Islam) in the Tatar national identity today and considers these three to be the "defining markers of Tatar identity". Thus, the discursive contexts of Estonia and Tatarstan both place great importance on mother tongue in the context of national identity.

#### MEANINGS ASSIGNED TO TATAR LANGUAGE AMONG ESTONIAN TATARS

In what follows I will outline some common discourses related to Tatar that my interviewees expressed. The topic of the vitality and purity of the Tatar language came up repeatedly in interviews as they matter to Estonian Tatars and are part of sometimes clashing ways of enacting Tatariness in Estonia. I have connected opinions expressed by informants, with sources of Tatar national identity discourse and Tatarstan's endeavours to help recreate Tatar identity and connections with Tatarstan as the spiritual homeland of the diaspora. I will demonstrate various meanings assigned to Tatar by Estonian Tatars and look at how they relate to writings about Tatar national identity discourse in Tatarstan as well as Tatarstan's work on the direction of the diaspora.

##### *Effects of Tatar Diaspora Politics on Meanings Assigned to Tatar*

Since the end of the Soviet Union the Tatar political authorities in the Republic of Tatarstan have worked to improve the status of the Tatar language and culture. Tatarstan has significantly increased the legislative importance of Tatar in the republic. For example,

the constitution of 1992 defines Tatarstan as a bilingual republic with Russian and Tatar as the two official languages. Several positions (such as the president of Tatarstan) are only attainable to those who know both state languages. The number of Tatar-medium schools has significantly increased and Tatar is part of Russian-medium school curricula as well. Nevertheless, in daily life the two state languages are far from equal. Cities are mainly Russian speaking. Tatar speakers of the republic are bilingual, while Russians and many Tatars do not speak Tatar.

One of the ways Tatarstan tries to improve the status of Tatar language and culture within the republic, as well as its political status in the Russian Federation, is by reaching out to the Tatar diaspora. Tatarstan advocates an image of itself as the spiritual and historical homeland of all Tatars, the prime source of Tatarness and the protector of diasporic Tatars. Although the idea of Tatarstan as a homeland for all Tatars is older, it was not until after the Tatar ASSR was turned into the Republic of Tatarstan in 1990 that Tatarstani officials decided to pay more attention to diaspora issues (Graney 1998: 161). Thus, for example, Tatarstan was depicted as the “cradle of the Tatar people and its culture and language” in the priorities of nationalities policy outlined in November 1996 by the Tatarstan’s Department of Inter-Ethnic Affairs (Graney 2009: 93). In the negotiations with Federal government in the 1990s, Tatarstan used the republic’s perceived obligations to the Tatar diaspora as a justification for its demand for political and economic independence and influence within the Federation, as well as internationally. Tatarstan initiated bilateral contacts and signed agreements of economic, political and cultural co-operation with states where large Tatar communities resided, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey (Graney 1998: 161–162).

However, Katherine Graney notes that in the 1990s, Tatarstan emphasised its moral and spiritual commitment to the diaspora, while not actually funding activities that would promote the recreation of Tatar identity in the diaspora (ibid.: 170). In the 2000s, Tatarstan adjusted its legislature to be more active towards the diaspora. In 2002, an amendment to the constitution was adopted, formulating obligations of Tatarstan towards ethnic Tatars living abroad. Article 14 stipulates that Tatarstan provides support for the development of national culture and language and to safeguard characteristics of Tatars living outside the borders of the Republic of Tatarstan (Davenel 2009: 79). In January 2004 an amendment was made to Tatarstan’s law on languages, including increased commitment by Tatarstan to promote the teaching of Tatar in the diaspora (Graney 2009: 93). Estonian Tatars felt mainly spiritual support from Tatarstan. However, the Maardu Sabantuy is often visited by delegations from Tatarstan. A delegation includes folk musicians and representatives of the Ministry of Culture. Tatarstan pays the salary and travel fees of the performers. In 2009, an organiser of Maardu Sabantuy explained that he sees this as a sign of respect and proof of the good work of the organisers in Estonia. In addition, many of my informants emphasised the importance of attending events directed towards the diaspora, to their work in cultural organisations and networking with other Tatars. The measures taken by Tatarstan to teach Tatar abroad have not reached the Estonian diaspora yet.

An important aspect of Tatarstani diaspora politics is the organisation of the World Congress of Tatars and the establishment of the Executive Committee of the World Congress of Tatars. The first World Congress of Tatars was organised in 1992 as an event that specifically tried to consolidate the Tatar diaspora both in the Russian Federation

and abroad. Some of my informants recounted memories of visits to the Congress. Dinara (54)<sup>3</sup> emphasised the aspect of interaction and acquiring contacts with other Tatars around the world through the Congress events in Kazan. For Ilkhan (65), a Tatar community activist, participating in the Congress provided good examples of how to organize Tatar cultural life. The Congress worked for both of them as a source of inspiration and of Tatar networks. The Congress also compiles and sends out newsletters via e-mail to interested Tatars. Several of my informants told me about receiving these e-mails. Thus, the Congress works as a consolidating agent that to some degree brings Tatars abroad into the Tatarstani mediascape.

Another influential event organised by the World Congress of Tatars is the All-World Tatar Youth Forum. This is an annual youth conference held in Kazan at which participants from the diaspora are invited and matters concerning Tatar language, cultural and social issues are discussed in lectures and workshops, in addition to which there are a lot of socialising, trips to heritage sites and cultural events. One of the important goals of the forum is community building, or, to put it bluntly, introducing “young Tatars to each other so that they might marry and produce Tatar children” (Faller 2011: 301). The organisers of the Forum invite a certain number of participants from each host state and the final decision of which people go to the Forum is made in the local Tatar cultural associations. Two of my interviewees had participated in the Forum. They mentioned the Forum as a community-building occasion, where they had gained many contacts with Tatars in, for example, Latvia, Lithuania or Moscow. Attending the Forum had created new social networks for them, which involved both digital (e-mails) and real-life contacts, such as inviting and visiting Tatar friends and attending Sabantuy festivals organised by friends in neighbouring countries.

Events organised by the World Congress of Tatars help disseminate Tatarstani ideas of the correct way of enacting one’s Tatarness, including the importance assigned to speaking Tatar. Networks developed through these events further help to maintain Tatar identities in the diaspora.

### *The Vitality of Tatar*

The idea of Tatar being threatened and needing revitalisation is commonplace in Estonia as well as in Tatarstan. In 1989, 95 per cent of urban ethnic Tatar residents in Tatarstan<sup>4</sup> claimed that Tatar was their native language. 36 per cent of them used Tatar daily with their spouses, 25 per cent used it daily with friends, 21 per cent with colleagues. Most urban Tatars used a mix of Tatar and Russian or only Russian in these situations (Graney 2009: 93–94). Thus, although a large part of urban Tatars claimed Tatar to be their native tongue, a minority of them actually used it as a domestic language. Is the situation similar in Estonia? According to the census of 2011, 1993 people in Estonia claimed that their nationality was Tatar. There were 806 people who said that Tatar was their mother tongue. Thus, it seems that about 40 per cent of Estonian Tatars consider Tatar to be their mother tongue. Most of my interviewees expressed concern about Estonian Tatars as well as Tatars in general forgetting Tatar. Rakhima (38) found that Tatars struggle to maintain their ethnic identity in the diaspora:

We don't have an integration problem. The problem is the other way around, we assimilate too much. We forget our roots [...]. What happens is exactly that the mother tongue is forgotten.

Ali (38) thinks that attending Russian-medium schools promoted assimilation during the Soviet period:

During the Soviet period those who studied in Estonian schools, they know Tatar language well. But those who studied in Russian schools, they had a stronger influence. During the Soviet time, Russian language was, there was so much of it. But even though when we went to Tatarstan during the Soviet period, people were surprised that we spoke Tatar. There were people there who were ashamed to speak their mother tongue.

Thus, Ali sees the strong influence of Russian during the Soviet period to be a factor that promoted assimilation. Specifically, he claims that during the Soviet period Russian-language schools were institutions that furthered Tatar assimilation.

A study conducted by Mart and Ülle Rannut at the Integration Research Institute about the domestic languages of 8–12-year-old schoolchildren in Tallinn shows that Ali's remark about the Russianising effects of the Russian-medium schools holds true today as well (Rannut and Rannut 2010: 16). Roughly half (46.2 per cent) of the children, who identified as Tatars, claimed Tatar to be one of their home languages. However, there were surprisingly few children who chose to identify themselves as Tatars – only 13. The authors suggest that the Russian-language school environment discourages children from identifying as Tatars, because for various reasons the reputation of Tatars and Muslims is low among Russian-speakers (*ibid.*: 60, 62). On one hand, attending a Russian-language school can influence children's choice of national identity in general, while on the other hand, the fact that the study was conducted in the school environment can also have an effect. It is possible that had the environment of the study been the home instead of the school, more children would have chosen to identify as Tatars. It is also possible that Tatar families, where maintaining a Tatar identity is considered important, tend to choose Estonian-language schools for some reason. Rannut and Rannut find that according to census results there should actually be more Tatar children in this age group, but they chose not to identify as Tatars in the study (*ibid.*: 60). However, this does not change the remarkably low number of Tatar speakers among the children.

All of my interviewees claimed to use Tatar as one, or the only, home language. Nevertheless, even if Tatar is the only language used at home, a person's subjective evaluation of their Tatar language skills might not be very high. Several informants say that they use a mixture of Russian and Tatar or Estonian and Tatar as their domestic language because their vocabulary in Tatar is very limited. Razia (75) explains the mixing of Tatar and Estonian as follows:

I have to say with regret that our language is a home language. Well, a disappearing language. We don't have many things. If we want to talk about art or science or whatever, then we don't have those words.

Khaidar (31) says that although he speaks Tatar at home, interaction with friends, who are Tatars from Tatarstan, usually switches to Russian. One of the reasons is his pronunciation, which is different from that spoken in Tatarstan:

To some extent, I speak Tatar. They understand, but let's say, even if I speak Tatar, their pronunciation is a bit different. Our pronunciation already oscillates between the two languages [Russian and Tatar].

Lack of proficiency in written Tatar is the reason why his e-mail correspondence with Tatar friends from abroad is mainly in Russian:

Interaction usually switches to Russian. As much as I was taught here, I can't write in Tatar. I have asked them to write to me in Tatar, but I am not capable of answering in Tatar.

For some members of the Estonian Tatar community it is vitally important that when Tatars meet, especially on formal national occasions, only Tatar should be used. "They were talking to each other in Russian all the time! As if at a party meeting!", one interviewee explains with fervour, making an allusion to communist party meetings during the Soviet period, continuing:

If all Estonians came together and spoke in Turkish. It is almost the same. [...] It is a question of principles. Gatherings, all events must be purely in Tatar. Otherwise the language will not survive.

During the greeting speeches at the beginning of the Maardu Sabantuy festival in 2008, one speaker started his speech in Russian. He was immediately reprimanded by voices from the audience, who demanded that Tatar should be spoken on this occasion. The speaker excused himself by saying that he was speaking Russian for the non-Tatar residents of Maardu, who were present as well. Tolerance and consideration of cultural others are valued to a great extent among Tatars and these values are generally considered a great asset that helps Tatars to live in peace with their neighbours everywhere. Nevertheless, the general opinion seems to be that it is essential for the viability of Tatar language that the family circle and Tatar community events are Tatar-medium only.

### *Purity of Language*

Another issue that frequently came up in interviews is that of the purity of Tatar. Suzanne Wertheim (2002) gives a thorough overview of the quest for the purification of Tatar in Kazan. Wertheim explains two common aspects of what Tatars in Kazan mean by the 'impure' Tatar language. First is the misspelling or mispronunciation of Tatar words. Wertheim gives a longish list of occasions on which grammatically incorrect or poorly translated Tatar is seen in Kazan. It is common for street signs, shops, museums, etc., to be spelled incorrectly in Tatar, for elementary level Tatar teachers to make grammatical errors, for university lecturers and professors to not master the formal language or education vocabulary in Tatar (Wertheim 2002: 13). Another aspect of Tatar considered an impurity is code-switching and code-mixing with Russian, meaning the insertion of Russian phrases or sentences and isolated words or idiomatic expressions in Tatar-language conversations (ibid.: 20–21). This linguistic phenomenon is common and normal in bilingual speech communities, but viewed negatively both by Tatars and local Russians, who tend to have little respect for Tatar language. Wertheim reports

code-switching and code-mixing to be very frequent and partly unconscious among ethnic Tatar Kazanites. Especially on formal occasions in the public sphere, but sometimes in private conversations as well, people switch to what Wertheim calls Tatar on-stage style, and do their best to de-Russify their speech (ibid.: 21).

The issue of the purity of spoken Tatar was important for Tatars in Estonia as well. Mixing Tatar and Russian or Estonian in speech is common and is generally regarded as an impurity of language. During casual Tatar conversations (such as when telephone calls interrupted interviews or when Tatar family member spoke to each other in my presence) I often spotted Russian words or phrases. The issue of the impurity of one's own, or someone else's, Tatar was sometimes discussed or mentioned in interviews. I have already mentioned people's complaints about limited vocabulary or pronunciation being influenced by Russian.

Conversely, being able to speak pure Tatar is a source of pride for many. Dinara recounts a story of her visit to Kazan:

When I went [to Kazan] with my daughter, everyone was wondering how a girl coming from Estonia can speak so well. During the millennium jubilee I gave an interview on the street and they were surprised. We in Kazan don't even speak as pure Tatar as your children do. I received numerous compliments about this.

For Dinara, maintenance of Tatar language skills is very important and she is genuinely proud of having brought up her children so that they speak Tatar well. She says that her children correct her speech, when she uses 'impure' Tatar:

Sometimes I come from work and Russian words slip into my speech. They always correct me: "Mum, you are not speaking correctly." I speak Russian for the whole day. Of course I sometimes mix things up when I speak quickly. They both always correct me.

Speaking Tatar on public occasions becomes a test of one's Tatariness, which can demand a considerable amount of concentration and self-control. Speakers are also assessed by people in the audience and poor performance on the purity scale is frowned upon.

### *Marginalisation of the Mishar Dialect*

One aspect of the perceived impurity of language that seemed significant in Estonia, while not so in Tatarstan, was speaking the Mishar dialect. For example, Khaidar (31) states that

living here, I don't know Tatar so well, so thoroughly. There [in Kazan] they speak the pure Tatar language. Literary Tatar. I understand their speech generally, but, let's say, most words, I just, I sense what they could mean, but I don't comprehend fully.

Wertheim (2002: 16) mentions that "ordinarily the Mishar dialect is considered extremely low-prestige and somehow lacking the richness of the Middle Volga/Kazan Tatar dialect". For many Estonian Tatars, there really does not seem to be any discord of this sort at all. As a Kazan Tatar woman explains: "Of course there are differences. We are

all Tatars. Nobody says that some are Tatars, some are Mishars. They themselves don't want to emphasise that they are Mishars." This seems to be the view of many Tatars in Estonia.

However, some Mishar Tatars in Estonia like to make it clear that they are Mishars. Said (61), one of my first informants, stated at the very beginning of our interview: "Actually, let's say, me, my wife and practically all Tatars in Finland, we originate from one or two villages in Gorki (today Nizhniy Novgorod) oblast [...]." And specifies: "We are not the ones from Kazan. We are called Mishars. But, well, there are those from Kazan as well in Estonia." As this was almost the first thing he said after the voice recorder was switched on, and he continued to make remarks on this topic later on as well, I assume that the distinction between Mishars and Kazan Tatars was significant for him. Several Mishar Tatars whom I interviewed were certain to emphasise their Mishar origin. References to differences between Mishar language and Tatar literary language are usually made in a matter-of-fact way and do not necessarily involve strong antagonism: "For example, those Kazan Tatars, their, maybe their pronunciation or of course the language is different as well. When they start to talk then I don't even understand them right away," said Razia.

From the Kazan Tatars' point of view, there is a clear reason why the Kazan version of Tatar should be studied by other Tatars as well. As I was explained: "The literary language is in Kazan. There is not one book in the Mishar language." Dinara is an active proponent of the Tatar language and national movement and quite a confident Tatar speaker. She praises the local Mishar Tatars for maintaining their Tatar language skills, yet she is positive about the importance of knowing normative literary Tatar.

Another reason that Dinara gives for the central importance of Kazan Tatar heritage to all Tatars is that Kazan Tatars are thought to be the descendants of a "compact Tatar culture since the ancient Bulgars". Volga Bulgaria was a state surrounding the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers between the 7th and 13th centuries which is an important part of modern Tatar collective memory as proof of their long cultural and political history as a nation with a state. Conquest of the Bulgar Khanate by the Mongols in 1236 signifies the first loss of Tatar statehood in Tatar collective memory (see Rorlich 1999).

If Kazan Tatars perceive themselves as originating from the hub of Tatariness, then Mishar Tatars like to stress their several generations of history in Estonia. Coming here first is perceived as a justification that legitimates their way of enacting Tatariness. Said is definitely not content with the marginalisation of Mishar ways: "That cultural society [...], it consists of purely Kazan Tatars. They don't accept our culture and our things here [...]. It is not possible to co-operate with them." However, by looking at the family history of our language used by members of different cultural societies, no clear divide between Kazan and Mishar Tatars can be detected. Some of my informants, who have been active in the cultural society that Said talks about, originate from the Mishar Tatars of the Sergatch area villages and speak Mishar dialect. This is another example of the fact that identification depends on the drawing of boundaries and not so much on the "cultural stuff" (Barth 1998 [1969]).

Mishars in Estonia often emphasise their connections to Finnish Tatars. Finnish Tatars are a small minority of about 1000 people. They have maintained their identity and language since the 1870–1920 period, when their ancestors moved to Finland, while



simultaneously being well integrated into Finnish society and doing well socioeconomically. When explaining his relationship to some Finnish Tatars, Said states: "I can say that we are boys from one village (*ühe külla poisid*)."

This comment is about perceived common origin, not the actual experience of growing up together that it invokes. The identification with Finnish Tatars tells about the high prestige that they enjoy among Tatars in Estonia. So while Kazan Tatars have the discursive power of the literary language and Bulghar ancestors on their side, Mishars boast to have deep roots in Estonia and wealthy kinsmen in Finland.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND OTHER IDENTITY MARKERS FOR ESTONIAN TATARS

I have now covered several meanings and attitudes that my interviewees assigned to Tatar language and linguistic performance. Although most Tatars I interviewed made statements about the importance of the mother tongue to their ethnic identity, other aspects of Tatar identity mentioned as important included religion (Islam), Tatar food, self-perception, interaction with other Tatars or a patriarchal upbringing. Although all of my interviewees spoke Tatar to some degree, this does not hold true for all Tatar activists in Estonia.

Emphasising the importance of Islam in the maintenance of Tatar identity is quite common. Many Estonian Tatars see Islam as a central feature of their identity. The 2011 census results show that 30.3 per cent of Tatars in Estonia identify themselves as Muslim. It thus seems that Islam is currently less prevalent among Tatars in Estonia than is the Tatar language as mother tongue.

The attitudes of my interviewees concerning the relationship of Islam to Tatar national identity are various. Some people consider Islam to be essential for the Tatar national identity. Today Islam is often the unifying factor that connects Tatars with different backgrounds, coming from various locations and speaking different dialects or not speaking Tatar at all. For Ali and Rakhima, Islam is an essential part of Tatar identity because it differentiates Tatars very clearly from Russians and therefore prevents Russification. They also attribute a special role to Islam as the holder of traditional Tatar values, such as chastity and abstinence from alcohol. Excessive alcohol drinking is considered a particular vice that is very un-Tatar, and in Estonia it is associated with the Estonian or Russian influence.

Yet some Estonian Tatars do not see Islam as an aspect of their national identity. Khaidar (31) states that "the fact that I am a Tatar and the religion I profess have no connection. Most Tatars are Muslims, but there are Christians as well. It cannot be connected." Thus, for him both Islam and nationality are important parts of his identity, although he does not want to see one as an expression of the other. Ilkhan (65), on the other hand, finds that "Islam is a religion that came here quite recently. I have never been interested in this question."

The Turath Islamic Cultural Centre and Mosque in Tallinn is Tatar dominated. The mufti and his wife are both Tatars. The focus of the centre is on religion and because of the multinational *umma*, who attends prayers, classes and festivities there, Russian is the main working language of the centre. However, the activities of the Islamic Cultural

Centre give members the occasion to express their Tatar identity as well. At services during religious festivals the mufti delivered his speeches in Arabic, Tatar, Russian and Estonian. The centre has, for example, organised Tatar classes for children in addition to classes that are more essentially Muslim, such as Arabic or religious guidance. The centre is also a space that allows Tatars to interact with each other and speak Tatar, to practice their religion or eat Tatar national food together on religious festivals. To conclude, the activity of the Islamic Cultural Centre supports Tatar identity and the use of Tatar for Tatar participants as well.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I analysed different, sometimes conflicting, ways of enacting Tatariness through language use in Estonia. The paper showed that Tatar identity in Estonia is not uniform. Although Tatar political authorities in Tatarstan have worked to connect the Tatar diaspora to its historical and spiritual homeland, low status given to minority groups in this process is not unanimously accepted. Nevertheless, Tatarstan's attempts to reach out to the Tatar diaspora are felt by Estonian Tatars. The interviewees found inspiration in events organised for the diaspora, such as World Forum of Tatar Youth or the World Congress of Tatars in Kazan. These events have also given them networks of Tatar acquaintances in Russia and Europe and new possibilities to use Tatar. The language is given a central position in Tatarstani national identity discourse and issues pertaining to the improvement of Tatar language skills in the diaspora are discussed at these events. For those of my informants who are actively engaged in events organised by the Congress, their connection to Tatarstan is now more formal – instead of or aside from visiting relatives, they also go to official conferences. Signs of recognition from Tatarstan, such as sending delegations to local Tatar events, are also important for many Tatars in Estonia, as they show that their work here is appreciated. However, the number of Tatar speakers in Estonia is low and especially low among children. Thus, it can be concluded that measures taken by Tatarstan in relation to the diaspora have supported and inspired those activists who are involved in community events. The language skills exhibited at the Tatar events have improved over the course of the post-Soviet years. However, this has not changed the fact that majority of Tatars in Estonia do not speak Tatar as their mother tongue.

The viability of Tatar is a concern for Tatars in Estonia. Those who speak Tatar emphasise the importance of speaking Tatar in the family circle, to their children and at Tatar community events. Several informants were in some ways insecure about their Tatar language skills, claiming that their vocabulary was small and pronunciation somehow 'Russianised'; or they regretted the lack of Tatar written skills. For some activists, the knowledge and use of Tatar is crucial to being a Tatar. They expect all community events to be held in Tatar for fear that the language will disappear if Russian is the norm at community events. However, there are other Tatar enthusiasts in Estonia who do not necessarily speak Tatar and claim some other identity markers to be more important for their Tatar identity. Considering the results of the study conducted by Mart and Ülle Rannut at the Integration Research Institute, there is reason to question the viability of Tatar language in the Estonian Tatar community. The remarkably low number of Tatar

speaking school children in Tallinn is evidence of an extensive language shift in the younger generation of Estonian Tatars. The accompanying low rate of identification as Tatar among children could be an indicator of the importance of mother tongue for Tatar ethnic identity in Estonia.

Purity of language is something discussed by many informants. Purity is connected to the Russianisation of Tatar language and to some extent dialect. Again, some community members were keen to track the purity of public performances of Tatar. Here the status of Mishar is lower than that of Kazan Tatar, while being able to de-Russify one's speech (whatever the dialect) is valued most. For many people, speaking Tatar is the key element to being Tatar.

Islam is another important identity marker for Estonian Tatars. For Tatar members the Tallinn Islamic Cultural Centre supports, rather than contradicts, their ethno-linguistic identity. Further research might explore attitudes towards Islam and the Tatar language in the context of the transnational Tatar diaspora networks in which many Estonian Tatars are engaged. Tatars in the diaspora come from various backgrounds and knowledge of Tatar language is limited for many. It would be interesting to see in what ways Islam unites Tatars transnationally as an aspect of ethnic identity.

## NOTES

1 Sabantuy is a popular Tatar festival usually held in May or June. While originally being a village feast in the agricultural calendar, it is today celebrated as a Tatar national festival in Tatarstan as well as in the diaspora.

2 Because I mainly found interviewees either with the snowball method or by introducing myself to someone at a Tatar event, I had an idea of whether this person would be more comfortable in Russian or Estonian. I tried to use Russian if I felt that this would be easier for my interviewee. However, all interviewees inserted some phrases or words in Estonian, and some interviews quickly switched to Estonian when the interviewee sensed that my knowledge of Russian was below their knowledge of Estonian.

3 I refer to my interview partners with a pseudonym followed by their age in parentheses. Unless stated otherwise, the interviews took place in 2009.

4 There is a sharp difference in Tatar language use between urban and rural Tatars in Tatarstan; this is affirmed by attitudes as well. I have heard numerous times both in Tatarstan and in Estonia that real Tatar culture is in the villages. Estonian Tatars are here compared to urban Tatars in Tatarstan because both experience multilingual living environments and pressure to Russify, as well as because Estonian Tatars are also mainly urban dwellers.

## SOURCES

The author's interviews conducted with members of the Estonian Tatar community in 2009.

The author's field notes taken when attending community events in the Estonian Islamic Congregation in 2009 and two Tatar Sabantuy festivals in 2008 and 2009, in Maardu, Estonia.

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# KARAKATS: THE *BRICOLAGE* OF HYBRID VEHICLES THAT SKATE AND SWIM

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## ABSTRACT

This paper\* explores the material culture of 'karakat' (Russian *karakatitsa*) hybrid vehicles in the town of Kallaste, east Estonia. It focuses on the social factors that allow karakat culture to change. The region of study was part of the Soviet Union so the phenomenon of self-assembled vehicles implies socialist and communist considerations. Local people are still surrounded by the material legacy of that time. Technological assemblages from the past therefore continue to live in the present. It was popular in the USSR to maintain off-road vehicles, which were put together with the owner's own hands. Such a *bricolage* technique has been preserved since the middle of the 20th century and is something that is used as a marker of local identity. The distribution of spare parts was problematic in former Soviet times and this has influenced the way men now make karakats. Current owners spend a lot of time servicing their vehicles. The issue of masculinity is highly relevant here because dealing with technology is seen as a masculine activity. Moreover, because it is increasingly open to tourists, karakat culture is becoming a tradable commodity.

KEYWORDS: hybrid technology • car culture • east Estonia • masculinity

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## INTRODUCTION

[...] technology ceases to be a visible tool or technique, but becomes a world in which the boundaries and interfaces between humans and technological systems become blurred, refigured and difficult to disentangle (Featherstone 2004: 11).

When walking through the streets of Kallaste, in summer or winter, it is difficult not to notice a number of big strange vehicles parked-up near the cottages and houses.



Photo 1. Karakat in the garden. Photo by Patrick Lavolette, 2014.

These are karakats (Russian *karakatitsa*). Such self-assembled machines have huge smooth wheels, equipped with big bolts. Tyres of this type, without any gripping pattern on the outside surface, were certainly not made for asphalt roads. Sometimes such vehicles are left standing near the house under the open sky. At other times, only the tyres are covered with black plastic bags. The body is often cut into two halves, whereby the authentic rear is removed and replaced with a prolonged back-end (imagine a jacked-up, limousine-styled SUV), which is made from all sorts of materials. The list of items used for constructing a karakat is limited only by the imagination (see Photo 1).

Kallaste is a little Estonian town on the western edge of Lake Peipus, which forms a main part of the border with Russia. It first appeared in documents at the end of the 18th century as a fishermen's village.

The residents – mainly Old Believers – are widely known for their innovativeness. Their domain is spread along the shore of the Lake (known as *Chudskoye ozero* in Russian). Estonians, Russian Old Believers and the ethnic religious minority of Orthodox Setus have been the traditional residents of this part of the Republic of Estonia (Annist 2011). Recent statistical records vary but there are approximately 1,000 residents in Kallaste, with a majority of Russian speakers.<sup>1</sup>

Since effectively Kallaste is a fishermen's town, an obvious question emerges: why create such strange hybrid vehicles? What is the purpose of these machines? Who makes them? Many studies have been undertaken previously in Kallaste. The shores of Lake Peipus are being constantly monitored by researchers from various fields. For example, in a Master's research project, Yuka Kaneda (2005) has described the town as a whole and stressed an ethnic-economic-environmental approach. Ethnologists Gustav Ränk (1934), Aliise Moora (1964) and Elizaveta Richter (1976), as well as political scientist Leonid Mihhailov (2008) and historian Frederic Miller (Miller et al. 2010), have added some historical data to the common understanding of the past. The cultural organisation Pritchudye and the Russian Museum have also referred to some historical events that are



important for interpreting fieldwork data. The Centre for Transboundary Cooperation often carries out research in this territory. These writings have concentrated on different topics (for example, Old Believers, history, economy, fishing, the environment and so on). As these studies were primarily environmental and economics related, little has been said about how local people interact or the ways in which they lead their everyday lives (Kuusk, Käräinen 2013). The current situation in Estonia reveals important ethnographic gaps, especially when it comes to the divisions between urban dwellers and the country's rural citizens. This derives largely from a lack of understanding of the people who reside in poorer, non-agricultural settings (Roll et al. 2006).

It is the town's fishermen who use karakats to go fishing on the frozen lake. The tradition for making them appeared half a century ago but the car culture has since changed due to the political and economic modifications brought on by the end of the Cold War. It is important to remember that the assembling of karakats became popular during Soviet times. It was a form of politically and aesthetically charged material culture. Because Soviet cars were relatively easy to fix, a lot of people became skilled in repairing them with their own hands, so that many young men are now experienced in carrying out quite sophisticated repairs (Möser 2011).

Though they acknowledge karakats as important objects, local people have not kept in mind how the word *karakatitsa* first appeared. Most of the fishermen explained that the word *karakatitsa* is something inexplicit and funny. One smiled and tried to gesticulate with his hands. It was an attempt to show something in motion. Another explained that karakats are made from different parts of various technologies, so that from a distance you do not understand clearly what is in front of you. This is what the name of the vehicle shows – an odd and scruffy machine holding meaning within itself. It is not a piece of art but rather meant to be of advantage to fishermen. There was a need for a type of *vezdekhod* (cross-country vehicle) in Kallaste, but when a car itself was a rare thing, it was not easy to start creating a new technological form. The dictionary (Ozhegov 1964: 261) defines *karakatitsa* as:

1. Sea mollusc that excretes a colourant – sepia.
2. [transferred meaning] About short-legged, awkward human (colloquial, funny).

The men who assemble karakats from heterogeneous parts generally swerve from traditional courses of employment. They can be referred to as archetypal jacks-of-all-trades, *bricoleurs* in other words, a term coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss. From his (1966 [1962]: 16–17) definition, such a person is “someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman”. A *bricoleur* can be seen as a do-it-yourself, handyman, a person who uses haphazard techniques but who is not necessarily a ‘deviant’. This type of *bricolage* was quite a normal phenomenon in the Soviet Union and creating such vehicles was generally approved, or at least tolerated. We are thus dealing with what Bruno Latour (1993) would call a hybrid form of technological construction, for he argues that hybrids are conceived as contaminated mixtures of two pure forms put together.

## FIELDWORK

Kallaste hosts a yearly Karakat Festival on the last weekend of February. This calendric event attracts people from different parts of the Baltic states (Addo 2009: 218). On the eve of the festival in 2009, the winter was exceptionally snowy. Even from the window of the bus, one could see grey clouds that were ready to pour down. A key informant for this project was a janitress, Lyudmila, who cleaned the bus station. Upon meeting her there, she mentioned immediately that her husband Gennady has a karakat. Lyudmila's brother Aleksander also has one. What's more, he is amongst the pioneers in assembling karakats. He has made a brief introduction to the history of karakats and recounts stories of the yearly festival, when dozens of participants compete and where Gennady has been presented with several championship cups. Another key informant, a friend of Lyudmila, is Nina – a local historian who has outlined some of the town's significant historical events and the people who live there. She has a son, Gunnar, who bought a three-wheeled karakat (an old type based on the model of a motorcycle) after graduating from school.

Other than them, the first random informants were an old couple, residents in town for around 70 years. The woman replied that she was not interested in karakats but her husband had one: "the car has the wheels from a plane and it can swim". Surprised to hear this rather unusual description for a truck – it made us want to look for more information on karakats. Data was thus gleaned from participant observation as well as interviews that were mainly held in private garages while men were mending their trucks. Hansmann, an enthusiast and pioneer in karakat assembling, was the first to show his garage with schemes for making a small hovercraft-type boat (see Photo 2). It was the research participants themselves who suggested seeing their karakats, of which they are exceptionally proud.

The Karakat Festival has taken place every year since 2003. This day dedicated to karakat constructions has been supported by the local government. The concentration of the home made hybrids made the cultural director of Kallaste think that celebrating the vehicles could bring outside income to the town. Even though this man does not govern any more, the day of the karakat has survived. One remarkable thing is that the celebration of the vehicle during the festival gathers residents from neighbouring towns as well as tourists. Some karakats have been successfully sold to such visitors. This means that the towns and villages on the same coast also have karakats in private garages. Several years ago, the number of entries at the festival was about 20. During the 2010 Festival, there were 35 registered nominees in the contest. In addition to the karakats, local 'Henry Fords' assemble various other vehicles needed in the household. The total number of self-assemblages also includes other home-made machine-like tractors. Gennady therefore jokes that the entire population of Kallaste can get into these karakats and drive away.



Photo 2. Hansmann with his small home-made air-pad boat. Photo by Alla Siroтина, July 2010.

## EXCHANGING FISH AND FUNCTION

During the last decades of the 20th century it was popular to make greenhouses in Kallaste. A lot of men were involved in building greenhouses, which were later sold in Russia. All three main informants were involved in this and Gennady described the past with passion – he explained that making greenhouses was the way people earned their living. After the Soviet Union collapsed, people did not know what to do. The trade was interrupted by the border and there was no longer any income so new business was needed. It was in 1996, when there was a *putina* (a period when there was plenty of fish and a good catch on the lake), that a karakat boom took place. These circumstances motivated people to start assembling the vehicles in larger numbers, thus enabling them to enter into several systems of reciprocity.

In his research, Arjun Appadurai (1986) writes about economic exchange and the creation of value. For him, reciprocity is determined by the fulfilment of one's desire to obtain the other object. This can be observed among the Kallaste residents, but with a small shift in the theory of exchange. Value in this case can be easily defined. With the present shift in economic regimes it is possible to evaluate the good (the type or size of the fish and its market cost). Fish is of the greatest interest and value because it is something local, 'authentic', if you will.

Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (2002) has reflected on barter and similar domestic modes of production: the organisation of economic production and consumption primarily in the household. She cites an earlier work with a colleague (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992) when they give a rather strict definition of barter that draws on Appadurai:

(a) The focus is on demand for particular things which are different in kind; in other cases it may be for services exchanged for goods or other services. (b) The protagonists are essentially free and equal and either can pull out of the deal and at the end of it they are quits. (c) There is no criterion by which, from the outside, it can be judged that the oxen are equal in value to the carving. Some kind of bargaining is taking place, but not with reference to some abstract, nominal measure of value; each simply wants the object held by the other. (d) In the case above, the two parts of the transaction occur simultaneously; sometimes the two may be separated in time. (e) Finally the act is transformative; it moves objects between the 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986) sustained by the two actors. (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992: 1)

On the eve of the Karakat Festival, fish is brought by some residents and often by a relative of a karakat owner. Is this somehow relevant to the relations that people have? At first glance it would seem that the exchange was the same: there are small presents like chocolate for a favour; people are often invited to the sauna or neighbours may come to ask to heat up the sauna. The existence of barter approximates the ordinary theoretical definitions. There is an addition to these basic definitions that is worth mentioning, however. This is connected to Caroline Humphrey and Stephen Hugh-Jones's (1992) third criteria for barter (c) when it is hard to comparatively evaluate the goods being exchanged. It is not easy to understand why people now give fish, nor how much fish can be given. This demonstrates that there are no universal rules for barter and thus the exchange system may and does vary cross-culturally.

Locals, especially fishermen, may pay a lower price for servicing or part of the payment may consist of fish. This exchange system can be explained by the socialist regime that influenced the region for many decades – money now has a different meaning in the post-Soviet bloc. But Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992) warn about assuming that the barter system can exist in its pure form as a single means of running an economy. It should be seen as a mode of exchange amongst others. Oleg and Gennady often do not demand money immediately. The karakat builders order fish when they want fishermen to return the debt. Everyone knows how much a kilogram of a certain fish costs in the market, so the 'payment' can be easily calculated. In Oleg's words:

You know, it is only if you make a deal. Of course the fish is worth money. If I need fish then there is no difference, but when a person pays with fish – with the same price or even lower and I need money, then why do I have to take fish? In the past times yes it was... but nowadays it costs money. Two kilos of perch is approximately 80 kroons [approximately 5 Euros]. You gave one, two, three fish to your friends. You are loosing money.

Until recently it was possible to give a bottle of alcohol instead of any favour. But now "to hell with that bottle – why do the fishermen need it when one bottle is worth 150

kroons (9.5 Euros). A single fish is more expensive than that”, continues Oleg. It is hard to get fish – one must spend time, money and effort to get the catch but simultaneously fish is desirable and valuable. Nina has said that fish has the value of gold because there are no longer so many of them. Gennady follows the same pattern as Oleg – he asks different people so that it is not too much work for just one person. He has six or seven friends to whom he can turn during the winter and ask to bring fish. This economy sustains the relationships local people have and supports their social network.

## A FESTIVAL FOR DIY VEHICLES

Karakats are part of Kallaste’s lifeworld, a hybrid form of material culture that expresses a rapidly changing, hybrid identity. Karakats are being anthropomorphised in several ways. A vehicle that has its own festival and anthem indicates that such vehicles matter. The karakats in the festival are often decorated with fish and town flags, pointing to the ethnicity and authenticity of the vehicle’s origins. Gulnara Roll, Aija Kosk, Natalia Alexeeva and Peeter Unt (2006) have described Kallaste as a cultural centre of the Pridchudye dwellers,<sup>2</sup> with choirs, a *izba chital’nya* (library) and different hobby centres for handicraft. Today, with new political circumstances and the influence of contemporary trends, faraway places are becoming more reachable and open for visitors. Karakats were devised to be a helping hand in the fisherman’s job, but now they are becoming more of a vehicle for taking tourists and fishing fans to the lake, or as heritage tourism objects that show cultural value.

Today the Karakat Festival is growing bigger with a market running throughout the festival. Visitors from other towns come to see the performance. Karakats registered for the festival start a parade at 11 o’clock and drive to the town hall square. At the opening of the festival a song is sung – the karakat anthem – authored by Andrei. People competed to create an anthem for the karakat and Andrei, a local bard, won. When talking about the song he mentioned that the inspiration came when he saw karakats reaching the shore in twilight. The words of the song talk about the lifeworld of the fisherman. The fact that karakats have an anthem already places them in a sphere of special social significance.

A jury decides which karakat construction deserves prizes in ‘light’ (two, three or four-wheeled vehicles that can drive over ice 3 cm thick) and ‘heavy’ (with 6 wheels, mainly built to please tourists) machinery categories. In addition, they present a signboard saying Kallaste instead of the registration number plate. During the festival in 2009, there was also a lottery in addition to the first place prize. The winner of the lottery received a motor auger to make holes in the ice. This auger is now stored in Aleksander’s blacksmith shop. As Oleg mentioned, without the Karakat Festival he would not put that much effort into making his karakat look attractive or in keeping it in such good mechanical order.

The karakat is something quirky and unique that can be traded. In her writing, environmental anthropologist Amanda Stronza (2008) focuses on the conservation of traditions. For tourists, this means that cultural development stops, is preserved at a certain moment and thus becomes an exponent of stability. The invention of the festival and the current political situation have both effected the representation of pneumatic vehicles:

karakats are becoming increasingly promoted – visitors are attracted by the parade. The trucks are becoming neater, participants polish rusty coatings, attach some signs such as town or European Union flags. It is also becoming widely practiced to put a frozen fish on the front of the bonnet. Commenting on the festival, Gennady undermines its significance, saying “it is not important for the participants, it’s only for tourists”. The men are improving karakat cars because they want them to be faster, more comfortable. The result, however, is that individually or collectively they achieve the same purpose – developing the tourism infrastructure to improve the economy. The expansion of the do-it-yourself technology culture in Kallaste seems to be a unique phenomenon that remains important to the region. The surrounding towns situated on the shore of Lake Peipus (such as Mustvee) tend to use manufactured, modern technology such as motor sledges to drive on the frozen lake. On more rare occasions, however, a karakat may be found in some of the neighbouring towns.

Krisztina Fehérváry (2013) argues that producing citizens with high expectations for the modern material world was integral to the project of creating Soviet society. This should not be seen as equal to the capitalist project although socialist states often positioned Western modernity as the norm. The goal was not to create individual style, but to lift people up out of poverty. Scarcity of private property made a difference in the sphere of commodities and this has influenced and even shaped the region’s car culture. In the Soviet period cars were rare things and owning one, especially privately (not provided by work) meant a lot. Despite having to wait for years to get one, cars quickly became an ambivalent yet integrated part of the socialist environment (Siegelbaum 2009).

#### HYBRID MATERIALITY

Social activist Wolfgang Zuckermann (1991: 54) remarks: “Every concession a city makes to the automobile encourages movement at the expense of access and contact, and roads at the expense of residences and amenities”. Consequently, ‘roadscape’ and their associated paraphernalia are good cultural indicators (Lavolette 2015). They can show us many things: histories of travel and mobility as well as contemporary interpretations of them; what the local people consider important, what they put on display or what they try to conceal. So the architectural layout and arrangement of the town has certain sociological implications.

Kallaste is quite a remote place and it is not big – stretching only a few kilometres along the Lake Peipus coastline. The town can be crossed with a bicycle. It has a long history, however, thus harbouring a distinct older part alongside the newer. They differ in appearance: the older area consists of private houses mainly of wood and making up the larger part of the town. The block-houses are concentrated in the newer part of town and have lines of garages immediately in front of them. Two key informants, Oleg and Aleksander, live in a private house. The third, Gennady, lives in a Soviet-style block-house apartment. Gennady has a garage right in front of his door but he also rents a second garage to store his karakat. Aleksander and Oleg have recently built private garages next to their houses for their own karakats. This architectural layout influences social life because these garages serve as places where car culture has developed.

Cultural geographer Tauri Tuvikene (2010) has chronicled the Soviet legacy in Estonia through such functional buildings. Garages in Estonia inevitably point to the social change and the Soviet Union. In the beginning, garage areas were part of a resistance to the government that expressed the needs of residents rather than state ideology. As private enterprises were not allowed and the State provided insufficient car services, there was almost no place where one could repair a car. This resulted in the need for places to do it yourself – “a garage box” (Tuvikene 2010: 516). Hence the function of the garage has a long history of being both a place for vehicle storage and a place for mingling. As well as storing household goods such as old furniture, jam jars and musical instruments for band rehearsals, garages in Kallaste are places where vehicles and social relations are not just kept but are also maintained.

One intriguing thing in the Kallaste townscape is that, despite the high level of car related technology, there is no petrol station. Apart from a blacksmith who mends vehicles on one side of the town and a second blacksmith who accepts broken cars (in order to use the spare parts further) on the other, there are several places for technical servicing (where it is possible to change oil, fix parts and so forth). To get petrol, then, residents either go to the nearby town of Alatskivi, or store it in reservoir tanks.

Many visitors to the town therefore get the impression of emptiness. There are almost no people on the streets, not many young people loitering around and few communal activities. Even if most residents live there the whole year round, they seem invisible. One reason is that the majority are older people. They also constitute the biggest group of fishermen working at the Kallaste Kalur factory. It is next to impossible to find a permanent job in the town so some people look for work in Finland, mainly by working on farms or finding short-term employment in the fishing industry. People usually go to Finland in the summer when catching fish on the lake is restricted (Kaneda 2005: 5). They earn money on the farms or fish processing factories and come to Estonia to see their relatives. For several centuries local people’s lives have been largely related to fish production, so this has influenced the lifestyle and caused the evolution of various sub-cultures (Stoop 2007). Many of these subcultures change and disappear, like the influx of new religion or the boom in building greenhouses. But through karakats, a unique subcultural element related to fishing survives. Although the phenomenon of assembling hybrid car technologies has evolved relatively recently, it seems to be spreading around the coast of Lake Peipus. It offers a fascinating insight into the local society and its post-Soviet reality. At the same time, it reveals the sociocultural character of automobile technologies.

The first karakats were largely based on motorbikes (see Photo 3). One of the first people in Kallaste to assemble two-wheeled karakats (made from motorcycles) was Konstantin. He bought 4 *taz* (a kind of bowl) in a local shop and glued them together. In this way he constructed wheels for his karakat. People call these first karakats *kostotryas* – bone shakers. The major flaw that the old type of karakat has is that there is no suspension if they are based on motorbikes, so the seat is not comfortable and one can feel the vibration of every movement or bump on the frozen lake. In order to minimise the discomfort, people stand up when riding such karakats. The new variant of karakat, when it is based on a car or a larger vehicle, is quite comfortable (although vibration is still present) and there is enough room for tools and fish. One can add a two-wheeled trailer at the rear, so it is possible to carry more fish or tools, if needed.

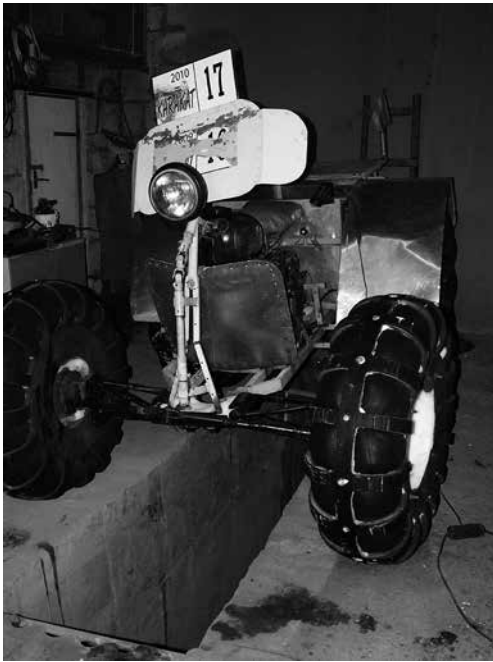


Photo 3. Oleg's motorbike karakat. Photo by Alla Siroтина, 2010.

Gennady mentioned that during the early days of karakat building at the beginning of the 1980s, there was considerable mockery regarding technical innovation. After a while, however, the designs of pneumatic assemblages proved themselves to be beneficial. Different magazines for car owners were published in the USSR in which amateur engineers shared their know-how. One enthusiast, Hansmann, has seen the pictures of these vehicles in one such magazine. Later Hansmann's brother thought of using the tyres that were stocked at Tartu airport.<sup>3</sup> The wheels were taken from fighter planes that were left by the Red Army Air Force. According to Gennady: "It was about 1981 then, [...] he was the first one who thought of getting tyres from the plane. His brother served in Tartu [airport], he knew where to get them. They were just dumped."

The ready-made tyre needs two layers: the original is left as is and a second is cut into strips and fixed by big bolts to create a pattern that can be durable on the ice. One tyre is wrapped in another, as Lyudmila explained, "like a sausage" and it is ready for use. Nadezda has cut these strips and screwed the bolts to help Gennady in the work. At present, however, there is no longer access to the spares of the Soviet period which used to form the basis for the karakats. This is not a problem though since the markets are full of analogous bits and pieces and spare parts. This reveals one significant aspect of *bricolage*: unlike an engineer, the *bricoleur* does not find it hard to cobble together what's necessary and "seeks the materials that are at hand" (Lévi-Strauss 1966 [1962]: 17). The biggest regret the men have is the shortage of the Soviet tyres. Gennady chastises himself for leaving the aeroplane tyres in the woods when he noticed them some 20 years ago. There were a lot of them and some were even packed. Now, these *bricoleurs* need to buy tyres. The new ones are made of real rubber and the brake discs of light metal, making the construction exceptionally durable and providing them with the ability to 'float' on the icy water.

The next task, related to karakat assembling, is to define the people who are involved in this business – are they fishermen or mechanics? Is it their job or hobby? This is not an especially easy thing to determine because most people say that any man can assemble the vehicle in his private garage. Indeed, most men in town have an *avtogen*, a gas cutter used for cutting through metal. There are some interesting relationships between technical expertise and the personalities involved in karakat making. Gennady is good at electronics for instance and is therefore needed for brainstorming if an assemblage is being considered. He used to work in different spheres and now he is a member of the local government with a high position in society. Gennady can repair many vari-



ants and collecting rarities has become a hobby for him. He has a model that was made during the Soviet period for disabled people. It was built in such a way that a person without legs could pilot it using his or her hands. He has rebuilt it now so it can be piloted using the legs as well.

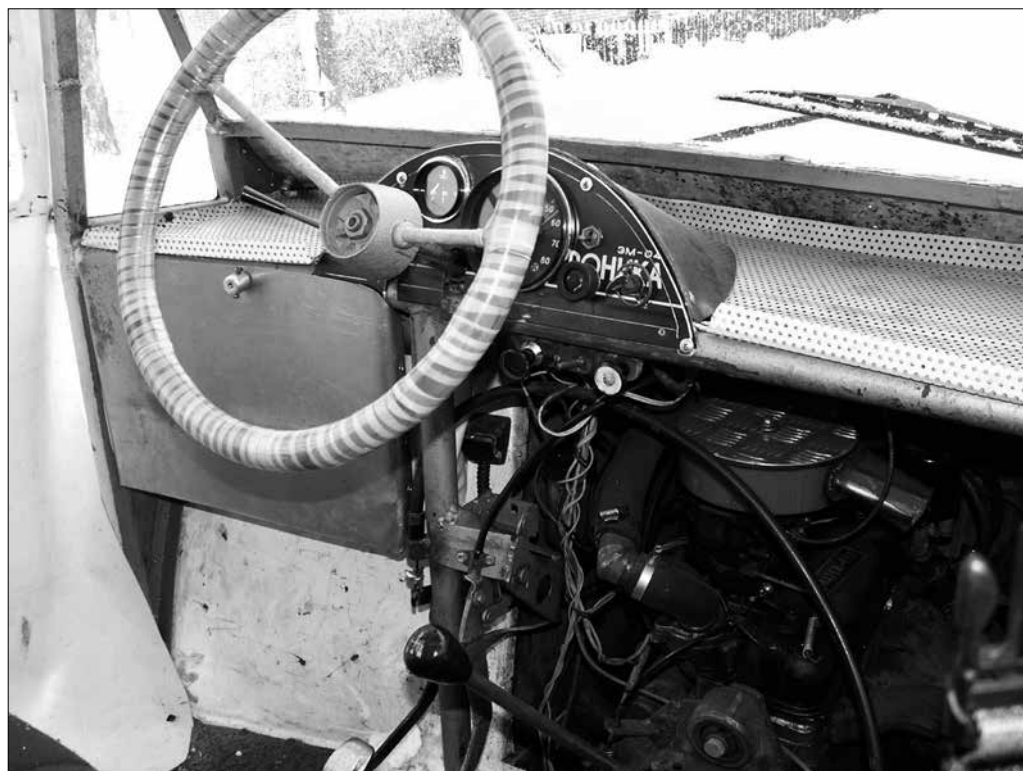


Photo 4. The inside of Gennady's karakat. Photo by Alla Sirotina, 2010.

Men spend a lot of time assembling karakats either by making them on request or simply to publicly demonstrate that they are working. The answer to the question of why do this kind of work cannot be given in just one sentence because there are important social and occasionally political factors that make the assemblage profitable. Take the following interview passage:

It all started when people saw pneumatic cars in a magazine called *Modelist-Konstruktor*. So the tradition comes from Russia. Because of the lack of cruisers or squad cars (*vezdekhody*) people started to assemble these *vezdekhody* for fishing. In earlier times fishermen used to go on foot or, when the ice was thick enough, rode horses. Later when the ice was smoother, they rode bicycles; some rode motorbikes or drove cars. With time, people saw what a relatively light technology karakats are. What is more, they do not sink. The pioneer [as Gennady remembers] was Andrei Hansmann. [...] It was a lot of trouble with spare parts. They were very expensive. Everyone tried to save money, so they assembled cars from “whatever one can get”.

In the Soviet Union, spare parts were certainly in deficit, deficit here being used in the economic sense in which demand exceeds supply. By the 1980s, it was clear that the socialist government had failed to lift people out of poverty or to provide them with high standard goods. Vehicle parts were hard to get as the government did not place their availability as a top priority for all strata of society. At that time the second-hand economy was flourishing. This is why plane tyres were adopted by the entire town as a substitute for car tyres; karakat parts have often been collected from rubbish material or reused things. To understand the way they are assembled and why they are being assembled in a *bricolage* way we need to go back to when karakats began to appear.

In order to give a more thorough explanation, let's turn to Victor Buchli (2000) and his description of Soviet design. This relates to the beginning of the second half of the 20th century when the Soviet Union was experiencing the period of reassessment – the 'thaw' –, a reinvigoration of Marxist understandings of the material world. Buchli (2000: 23) defines this era through the term *byt*: "Loosely translated, *byt* encompasses all the following English terms: 'daily life', 'domesticity', 'lifestyle', 'way of life'", in which design and multiple-use (i.e., 'transformable function') are problematised. This was not limited to the interior, such as sofas or bookshelves that could convert into a bed or cupboards with multiple drawers. Instead, new design was applied to the entire milieu. (Ibid.: 140) In the case of karakats, new designs were spread through the visual examples and instructions found in such magazine as *Modelist-Konstruktor*.

There are usually no refinements like colourful upholstery or sophisticated adornments in karakat design. Most consist of heterogeneous parts that are close at hand (like plastic, cupboard doors, an engine from another car). Parts should not cost much, or anything at all. As Gennady explained: "If people want contrivance: some want a mighty engine, so they put one. Some want to order wheels from Russia."

The karakat blacksmiths are around 40 to 50 years old. They consist of different groups – mainly friends who are skilled enough to discuss the parts that are going to work. Some are skilled at electronics, some know more about engines. Others generate new ideas so that the completed vehicle is the product of the diverse talents of a whole team. Assembling these vehicles is a great way to create and preserve social relations as well as express oneself. Sociologist Tim Dant (2009: 4) even goes so far as to claim that the work of repair involves emotions unlike those generated whilst manufacturing.

Another motivation to maintain objects through the labour of one's own hands was that vehicles during the Soviet period were relatively interchangeable. Aleksander has been an untrained mechanic since he was at school. He has constantly made repairs and even got his nickname Shponka (a thin layer of wood trim from the interior of the car) because of his interest. The karakats are accepted by the residents, so the craft is not something that differs from the norm. A *bricoleur* is someone adept at performing his/her skills, as Gennady, Stanislav, Hansmann, Aleksander and many more are. Yet in contrast to scientific knowledge, they do not apply theory to their skills. They have learned on the job from their own experience. In Gennady's words: "If one is dealing with mechanics and has some experience, one already imagines whether this knot is going to work or not".

Gennady described the discussion during the assembly process and how other men brainstorm if a leaf spring or suspension is going to break or not:

I say: "Blin, it won't resist, it will bend. Yura, come on, where will it go?" – That is how we consult. I can say that this one will break. Then, true, it breaks. There is intuition. Sometimes a part that looks good and you even don't expect it might break, does break.

In describing repair work, Dant (2009) suggests that cars are likely to be fixed even though modern techniques of mass production often attempt to prevent enthusiasts from doing so. The ethos of do-it-yourself repairs exists in many societies but varies due to the economic situation, gender-based norms, the desire to master manual labour and so on. There were several reasons to repair Soviet cars: first, it was relatively easy to undertake this on your own as there were no smart electronics or other devices under the bonnets that could prevent motorists from meddling. The second reason was that the state failed to provide owners with the necessary spares, such as windshields, tyres and other technical devices. In Kallaste, the motivation to create private vehicles was even higher. One thing was the ownership of the motor vehicle, which helped create a desire for people to construct such vehicles. Another reason was a *putina* – a good catch. Gunnar bought a karakat whilst still a schoolboy because there were plenty of fish in the lake. A lack of cross-country vehicles meant those who went fishing needed a karakat, otherwise they would have to wait until the ice on the lake was stable enough to go there on foot.

Soviet society has been characterised as a shortage economy (Tuvikene 2010: 516). This phenomenon was widely known in the USSR and meant a lack of necessary things – not only food but also different products such as clothes and household commodities. People often queued to get certain basic things. The historian of Russia Lewis Siegelbaum has argued that owning a car was a dream for the masses but the shortage of spares (petrol, tyres) and the vehicles themselves, made it almost impossible to own one. Sometimes a person could barely afford a car; even when they contemplated the idea of making the effort, the levels of maintenance involved (especially due to the shortage of spares) would make them reconsider. In Siegelbaum's (2009: 2) words "while providing a greater number of cars, the state did not follow through with the myriad of accoutrements and services on which cars and their owners depended". By 1978, the number of technical service stations (STOs) reached 13 while the number of cars was 250,000 (a ratio per STO of 83,333:1). This insufficient proportion created an infrastructure that tied down car owners.

Such an interpretation has been disputed, however. According to the recent studies (Roth 2007) this is incorrect since the causes of the deficit economy were in the system of distribution controlled by higher authorities, not in the shortage of spares as such. Despite the discord, it is clear that people nonetheless got around the deficit by using various practices (an informal black market), creating unions (such as the All Union Voluntary Society of Auto Enthusiasts) and sharing knowledge of maintenance through magazines *Behind the Wheel*, *Modelist-Konstruktor* and so on. So for Gennady:

Right now there is no problem because there are so many abandoned cars. One can buy a car for 500 kroons [approximately 32 Euro]. If there were such advanced

sledges as Lux or Yamaha at that time, and they were affordable, maybe we wouldn't have started making these karakats, but it started as usual: The Russian people start to think because of poverty and despair *Gol' na vydumki hitra*.<sup>4</sup>

A further example of a man who started doing repairs during the deficit period is Aleksander. He was born in Kallaste and has good relations with the other repairers. He used to work with Gennady during the greenhouse boom, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today Aleksander works as a blacksmith, mainly fixing tyres although he also does some welding. The high value attributed to karakats is demonstrated by him storing his vehicle in a private garage dedicated solely for this purpose. His karakats are based on the latest models. One of them, polished and shiny, has six manufactured tyres and can go on the lake when the ice is thick enough to take the weight. Aleksander has a crane to pull a karakat out of ice cracks and a forklift to lift them up. His do not float if the ice breaks and are considered heavy technology. These days he is geared up to take tourists to the lake so his karakat has space for ten people. He no longer works as a fisherman and thus does not need as much space for fish. He works at a car repair shop. To have the karakat repaired at his place means paying extra to his boss, who comes from Mustvee.

It is possible to get a complete karakat for 50,000 kroons (approximately 3,200 Euros). The price varies because, as Gennady explained, the craftsman composes a price list in which he shows how much money he will need for parts and how much will be added for labour. He gave an example, when someone caught fish and got 20,000 kroons (1,280 Euro) for them, that man then turned to order a karakat from Gennady. He told such a customer that he could sell him the karakat for 15,000 kroons (950 Euro) but it was another person who gave the money and took the karakat with him. There was no serial number and no documents. Gennady emphasised that the vehicle is always unique. He has never bought a karakat himself. He has made six or seven, three of which were small ones that he keeps photos of in an album. It is possible to sell a karakat for 30,000 to 150,000 kroons (2,000 to 10,000 Euros). People make 'nice', good-looking karakats, without any cables holding parts together, or without many welding marks, so that the whole vehicle is relatively polished and shiny. The buyers are either locals or from Latvia. The latter come to the lake for the winter period.

Gennady, Oleg and Aleksander learned to fix such machines through practice. Oleg does not hesitate to ask friends and acquaintances or look for answers on forums (log files) if something breaks down. They not only build karakats. They can fix other vehicles: trucks, light cars, motorbikes and so on. It is possible that there might be two or three teams, or coalitions, if you will, working on the improvement of the vehicles. These three men are apparently the 'centres of know-how' because they are felt to be authorities, likely to provide help with technology that is often referred to as "reliable". This is one of the main things to define karakat culture – hands-on experience.

#### GENDERED AGENCY

The role of masculinity in Kallaste is demonstrated and sustained by two things: fishing and technological truck assemblages. From discussion with local people, and from seeing fishermen at work in the morning, one can conclude that today only men are

involved in fishing on the lake. Women are left out of this labour. The men work with great amounts of fish that can be caught with nets. Women work at the Peipus Fish Factory, which processes frozen fish. There is also another small enterprise in town called Kallaste Kalur. This enterprise has permission to catch a certain amount of fish within the factory's limit. Karakats have proven themselves to be beneficial and reliable – the fishermen at Kallaste Kalur factory work using their private vehicles.

By talking to men who maintain the karakats it becomes clear that this technological realm is not the sphere of women either, who hardly ever take part in assembling the vehicles. Karakats are spoken of by women as something their husbands have but which they were not interested in and could give no information on other than lists of owners. The Karakat Festival showed the same – local women either stayed at home or returned home shortly after the opening. When asking informants' female friends about who won the cup this time, they did not know and started pondering. Ulf Mellström (2004) argues that technology, as a rule, expresses masculinity. For him, the relationship between masculinity and technology is so pervasive that it formulates a durable equation. Suggesting that technology is related to masculine issues in most cultures, he states that “women's technical skills are rarely defined as technical because technology is pervasively a masculine cultural expression” (Mellström 2004: 369).

A similar logic can perhaps be applied to the expansion of karakat technology and understanding of its importance. Indeed in Kallaste, all those who use and maintain them are male. It is an appropriate thing for a man to be interested in owning and maintaining cars and men's interest in technology is obvious. Informants stress that one has to be an experienced mechanic to build a karakat that will not break down. Men interact and ask for advice from other men who are experienced in this sphere.

Siegelbaum (2009: 12) identifies male bonding within Soviet car culture as a significant thing in strengthening social exchange. This phenomenon parallels the flourishing of do-it-yourself repairs as a function of pervasive deficit in the last decades of the USSR. When the Soviet government failed to supply spares and services, car enthusiasts created their own system of car support. The tradition of do-it-yourself repairs influenced the performance of masculinity as men applied their skills to the household. In addition to assemblage consultations, men keep in touch once they witness an accident. Frozen lakes are dangerous places so drivers usually count on friends as backup. As Oleg mentioned, he is quite sure that once he helps someone, he won't be left helpless in a similar situation. Maintaining the vehicle and helping others – these factors keep the men united and sustain a system of reciprocity amongst them.

To take the humanity of the car seriously one must examine it as a vehicle for class oppression, racism or other forms of violence. A vehicle's humanity, if you will, exists not simply in what someone is able to achieve through it “but in the degree to which it has become an integral part of the cultural environment within which we see ourselves as human” (Miller 2001: 2). One aspect of humanity is that karakat expresses masculinity. Secondly, it is a vehicle that is helpful in sustaining domesticity. As Buchli (2000) shows, the ‘thaw’ year, 1960, brought in a new addition to the meaning of masculinity that included the presence of men in the domestic realm. The role of masculinity was reshaped by “social engineers of socialism” (Hann 2002: xii) and the previous aspects of rural manliness. Men were to apply “traditional masculine skills” (Buchli 2000: 152) to domesticity. Men in Kallaste predominantly do this by keeping a karakat in the house-

hold. In addition to the help it brings in fishing, it can also be used as a tractor to plough fields. Lyudmila said that a plough can be placed at the rear of the karakat if the tyres are replaced with the summer variant i.e., ordinary tyres. It is then ready to turn over the soil. Gennady, on the contrary, argued that it is better to use a tractor since these are conditioned by the power of the engine and special wheels.

Considering the construction of gender differences through the fabrication of karakat trucks, many argue you cannot give this kind of work to a woman or a child. It is hard for a woman to cut all the rubber strips that are needed for the tyres or do the welding, but there are also some masculine expectations that are being applied. Women and children, as both Gennady and Oleg mentioned, are neither that apt at assembly nor physically fit enough to drive karakats and therefore are not entrusted to this kind of work. Gennady asked his boys Vladik and Andrey for help in cutting rubber for the karakat, but then joked that they did it incorrectly, so it was better to cut the rubber himself.<sup>5</sup> Lyudmila also tried to cut the rubber but when Gennady did not mention that fact, Lyudmila did not interrupt. This situation points, once again, to the gendered construction of car culture in Kallaste as a masculine phenomenon. We can surmise by saying that rebuilding hybrid vehicles is a sign of certain historical events and anthropological manifestations. As materialised thoughts, cultivated self-assemblages of this type locate men in private garages or on frozen ice.

## CONCLUSION

Anthropologist Daniel Miller (2001) and gender specialist Ulf Melström (2004) describe the car phenomena in different cultures. Starting from Africa and ending with Japan, Miller's ideas concerning the car's humanity and agency resonate with the attitudes towards motorised vehicles in Kallaste. As Miller (2001) argues, cars become ever more personalised and ascribed with human characteristics. In his words:

The car today is associated with the aggregate of vast systems of transport and roadways that make the car's environment our environment, and yet at the same time there are the highly personal and intimate relationships which individuals have found through their possession and use of cars (Miller 2001: 2).

Indeed, different cultures treat the car in different ways. For example, usage of cars in Africa has different meanings to the United States or Japan, because people and circumstances are different. Cars can become a form of resistance to social alienation. Diana Young (2001: 35) equally provides a fascinating case study regarding the death of cars which aboriginal Australians treat as pseudo-living beings. They are abandoned by owners in Australia when the car is no longer usable. She describes several cases which she identifies as social 'death', pointing to an anthropomorphic humanism.

The analogy with abandoned bodies can be extended to Kallaste, for as Gennady recounts, it is worth giving the parts a second chance. This is what residents constantly do – they prolong the lives of these vehicles. In her accounts of post-Soviet societies, concentrating on how the Soviet structures have survived despite social changes, Caroline Humphrey (2002) reflects upon the current trend within the eastern European heritage industry of seeking to highlight certain elements that we could label 'Soviet chic'.

When going out on the lake, one does not only catch fish. There are lots of different forms of social interaction: cooperation, cooking, celebrating birthdays and so on. Even though pneumatic karakats have proven themselves to be a trustworthy form of technology that can bring income to the household, this does not mean that all the town's residents make them. Those enthusiasts involved in assembling such vehicles are blacksmiths. Fishermen just use them. Blacksmiths do not make karakats in advance – they understand that for the small town the present quantity is too great (there are currently more than 20 four-wheeled karakat cars in Kallaste, not to mention the three-wheeled ones and small hovercraft).

Karakat smiths pick up the parts for their assemblages from spares in their garages and from scrap metal yards. Some elements, such as engines or parts which need to be in working order, are bought from a shop. There are many ways to get spare parts starting with those found lying around in private garages and ending with local repair shops. Because such pieces are not of the best quality, karakats often break down. This frequently occurs outside in the uneasy circumstances of the frozen lake. When drivers need help they call anyone who can bring the appropriate tool or spare, giving GPS coordinates so that help can reach them without delay because conditions can be extreme.

Today karakat construction is not a private task and is becoming more centralised. There are several blacksmiths to whom people are likely to turn. People come to Aleksander because he is a known blacksmith. There is an unofficial queue when there are no registered clients during which time locals can come. Locals pay a little, or if they have no money they can give fish (although this is rare). Aleksander is an employee and his boss is the owner of the car repair shop so he cannot make too many rules himself. People turn to Oleg because he has a reputation for not being a profit-making person. Nor is he restricted by commercial activity. So it is easier to make a deal with him. He is neither an Old Believer, nor a fisherman. He used to work as a fisherman but later moved into the sphere of tourism. Now his main work is technical inspection of karakats.

Originally karakats were made for fishermen, so it was not possible to use them on the road. Like a yacht, one had to put it on a trailer and take it to the lake. Since then, Kallaste dwellers have obtained the town's permission to drive them within the town borders and on the frozen lake, but not on the main roads. Gennady mentioned that it is a tricky thing if you start promoting this product because at the moment it is free for use, no one pays taxes. The karakats owners might be ordered to acquire a license, other documents, or go through technical inspection and so on. Nevertheless, karakats are currently being promoted.

Hence, karakat culture has today become more tourist oriented (see Photo 5). They are still vehicles to help fishermen in their work. Yet this technical assemblage is far from functional – the factors that lead to the construction of these vehicles are also political and symbolic (Fehérváry 2013: 8). Karakat car culture is becoming more accepting of contemporary tourism and today it is an attraction for visitors. It creates local identity and masculinity, notions performed during the Karakat Festival. With the coming of new cultural values displaying the karakat car culture of Kallaste represents a setting in which the objects of the past are reused and transformed. Moreover, this hybrid vehicle is a trademark of the town, becoming an exhibit that can be traded as a local good.

The social life that surrounds this car culture is showing a situation in which karakats are assembled in a *bricolage* way indicative of the intertwining of penury (Hatton 1989). Hence, the proliferating use of spares is dictated by past circumstances of shortage regarding the parts needed for car maintenance in the former Soviet Union.

The things crucial for understanding karakat culture are: people, fish, vehicles, spare parts and the political circumstances. Choosing the materials for an assemblage from items at hand is the main goal for the karakat *bricoleur*, who does not look at the availability of the spares but instead at the picture of the final product and acts from that perspective. Relations between residents circulate through a system of exchange between blacksmiths and fishermen. The different spares used for the assemblage, stocked in garages, are generally the legacy of a past era. The phenomenon of the karakat involves a unity of men, relations which are created by Kallaste's particular car culture. The men of Kallaste thus construct their reality with their own hands. The cultural infrastructure involves a nexus of blacksmith shops, garages and odd hybrid vehicles that help with fishing because they can skate on ice.



Photo 5. Image of karakats in the local café. Photo by Patrick Laviolette, 2014.



## NOTES

1 See Kallaste arvudes 2015; for example, this site indicates 963 people living there in 2013.

2 This is a term to describe the inhabitants of the region near the three main 'chain' lakes that make up the border with Russia: Lake Peipus, Lake Lämmijärv (*Tëpłoye ozero*) and Lake Pihkva (*Pskovskoye ozero*).

3 As of May 2015, some tyres were still there but were being cleared due to the recent construction work for the Estonian National Museum's new building.

4 A common phrase that means that poor people are prone to invent things.

5 The tyre that is based on aeroplane wheels consists of two parts: i) a frame, ii) a second wheel that covers the frame so that it creates a pattern that prevents the tyre from slipping on icy surfaces. The two parts are fixed together using big bolts. The second part is called *pauk* – 'spider' (see Photo 5).

## SOURCES

The initial fieldwork for this project was undertaken by A. Sirotina in 2009 and lasted for three months. Subsequently it was followed up sporadically by both authors from 2010 to 2015. The main informants have given consent to use their genuine first names. Many dialogues and interviews were recorded and remain at Sirotina's disposal.

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# ARCTIC BOWYERY – THE USE OF COMPRESSION WOOD IN BOWS IN THE SUBARCTIC AND ARCTIC REGIONS OF EURASIA AND AMERICA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper\* is a study of the traditional use of a special kind of wood in bow construction in Eurasia and North America. This special kind of wood, called compression wood and coming from coniferous trees, has unique qualities that makes it suitable for bow construction. Bows made using this special wood have been referred to as Finno-Ugric bows, Sámi bows, Two-Wood bows and Eurasia laminated bows. These bows appear to have developed from archaic forms of compression wood self bows that were made from a single piece of wood. Recently features similar to the Eurasian compression wood bows have been discovered in bows originating from Alaska, and the use of compression wood for bow manufacture has been known to some Canadian Inuit groups. This paper addresses the origin and possible diffusion pattern of this innovation in bow technology in Eurasia and suggests a timeframe and a possible source for the transfer of this knowledge to North America. This paper also discusses the role of the Asiatic composite bow in the development of bows in Eurasia.

KEYWORDS: bowyery • self bow • compression wood • Finno-Ugric bow • Eskimo bow • primitive hunting

## INTRODUCTION

The ability to efficiently hunt large prey animals has been of key importance for human habitation of the Arctic and Subarctic regions of Eurasia and North America. Ancestral Eskimos developed intricate harpoons that enabled them to make use of the marine life in the icy water of the North. The bow and arrow appeared in Europe during the Upper Palaeolithic period, and this innovation eventually found its way to the Arctic. Typically early European bows are self bows made of hardwoods.

As hunters migrated to more arid and colder areas they also adapted their technology to suit the requirements of their new environment. The cold and harsh tundra and taiga of the North offered little if any suitable wood for bow construction. Wood will

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also become brash at very low temperatures. These disadvantages were overcome by technical adaptations such as the combination of materials with different mechanical qualities to produce serviceable bows. This is generally referred to as composite bow technology. The technical adaptations in bow construction in the Arctic can roughly be divided into two main geographical areas: (1) the Eskimo cable-backed composite bow tradition in the North American Arctic, southwest Alaska and the far eastern corner of Siberia and (2) the North Eurasian composite bow tradition stretching across the northern parts of Siberia to Finland and Scandinavia.

Many scholars adhere to the Asiatic origin of the Eskimo composite bow. Some go as far as to believe that the Eskimo free sinew backing or cable-backing is the ancestral form of the classic Asiatic composite bow used by several ancient nomadic peoples of the steppes (Balfour 1889; Hamilton 1970). Eskimo bows have also been subjected to intense typological study and local variations of bow types across the extensive Eskimo area have been mapped by early anthropologists (Murdoch 1890; Birket-Smith 1918).

There are, however, some practical problems that have to be taken in to consideration when studying Arctic bows. For one the area inhabited by the Eskimo is vast, stretching from the northeast corner of Siberia, across North America to Greenland with numerous localised variations. Furthermore, bows from this area are scattered in numerous museums and collections in America, Europe and Russia. This has obviously been of practical importance as most previous research has been limited to bows in the collections of a single museum. Non-resident researchers have had to settle with photos, sketches and second-hand information about bows scattered in ethnographic museums across North America and Europe. Furthermore, historical facts as well as issues of language have efficiently hindered access to collections in the former USSR. This veil has only recently been lifted and new ethnographic materials from both Alaska and Siberia have begun to feed in to the larger scientific community.

I have conducted studies of the constructional aspects of bows originating from 19th-century Alaska in several museums and collections in Finland, Estonia and Alaska. This research has resulted in a discovery of previously unknown structural similarities with Eurasian bows. In northern Eurasia, Finnish, Sámi, Khanty, Mansi and several other Finno-Ugric peoples used a special kind of strong wood from coniferous trees, known as compression wood, to make powerful bows. It was, however, not known that the same type of wood was also in use in parts of North America for the same purpose. This construction feature suggests that Eurasian and North American Eskimo bows may share a common origin. This common trait has remained unidentified in all previous studies that have attempted to trace the origins of composite bow technology in the Arctic. In this article I will discuss the significance of this find and how it relates to the origin and latter diffusion of bow technology in the Arctic.

#### PREVIOUS RESEARCH IN PREHISTORIC BOW CONSTRUCTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPOSITE BOWS IN NORTHERN EURASIA AND THE ARCTIC

A bow in its simplest state is a stringed projectile weapon designed to shoot arrows. It consists of a slender stave (the bow-stick) and a cord fastened to each end under

a certain amount of tension. The archer holds the bow in one hand and draws the string along with the arrow in the other, until the stave reaches a sufficient bend and the string is released. The impelling force of the bowstring shoots the arrow forward at a high speed. Archaeological evidence suggests that the bow first emerged in Europe; the oldest surviving bows have been located at the Holmegaard site on the Danish Island of Zealand. These bows date to ca. 6000 BC (Bergman 1993).

There is also a considerably older bow that was discovered at Stellmoor, in northern Germany. This site yielded fragments of bows made from heart wood of Scots Pine. These bow fragments were, however, later destroyed in the violent bombing of Hamburg during the Second World War. As carbon dating was unavailable then, the age of the bow-fragments was attributed by archaeological

association. The bows were associated with the Upper Palaeolithic Ahrensburgian culture that existed in northern Europe in the 11th–10th millennia BC. Ahrensburgian finds have been made in southern and western Scandinavia, in the North German plain and in western Poland. The Ahrensburgian area also included vast stretches of land now at the bottom of the North and Baltic seas. The cold spell of the late Weichsel glaciation resulted in deforestation and the formation of a tundra with bushy arctic white birch and rowan. The most important prey animal for the Ahrensburgians was wild reindeer. The Ahrensburg culture is considered to the earliest hunter-gatherers that used bow and arrow. (Rust 1937)

As a bow bends it is subjected to two different forces; the back of the bow (outside curve) is stretching when the belly (inner curve) is being compressed. This mechanical fact affects both the design and the material requirements of the bow as the wood has to be resilient enough to withstand the forces of bending. Many hardwoods as well as yew and juniper are well suited for this purpose, but these do not grow in the far north. Functional, although less efficient bows can be made of birch and willow, which is the case with some Athapascan tribes of Alaska (Mason 2007 [1972]: 47–49). The forests of the North thus offer little, if any, of the hardwoods preferred by southern bowyers. However, pine and spruce forests are abundant in coniferous trees growing slant due to the proximity of wetlands or rocky terrain, which gives little footing for roots to

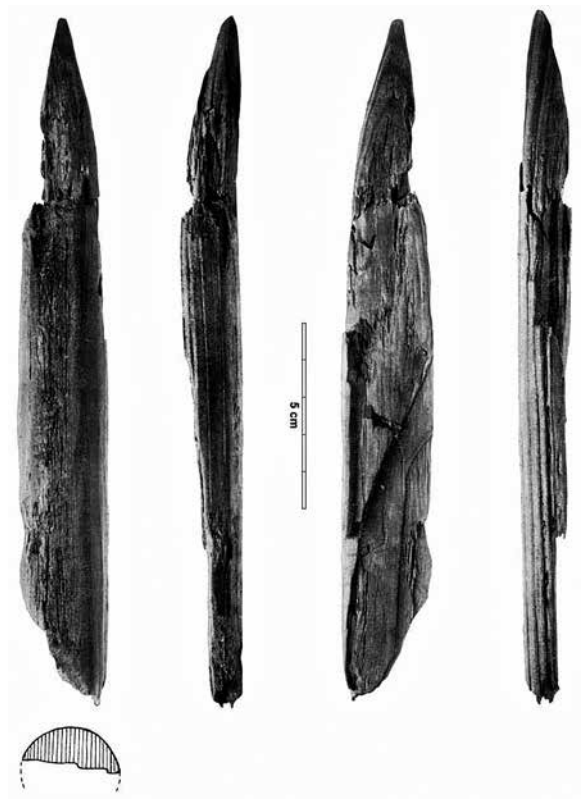


Figure 1. Ancient bow fragments of pine heart wood from Stellmoor (Rust 1943).

grasp as heavy snow or wind push the tree down towards the ground. Compression wood is found on the underside curve of the coniferous trees (spruce, pine) growing in a slant position. This wood has completely different characteristics to those of ordinary coniferous wood. Compression wood is produced as the tree reacts to the gravitational pull on the tilted trunk and tries to align its top back to a vertical position. This reaction produces compression wood. Due to its high lignin content, thick cell walls and a special orientation of the microfibrils in the cell walls, compression wood has unique mechanical abilities compared to ordinary pine or spruce (Insulander 1998). Ragnar Insulander (1999; 2000) argues that the benefits of compression wood as a raw material for bows has been known for quite some time as he maintains that the bow fragments found at Stellmoor were in fact compressed pine.

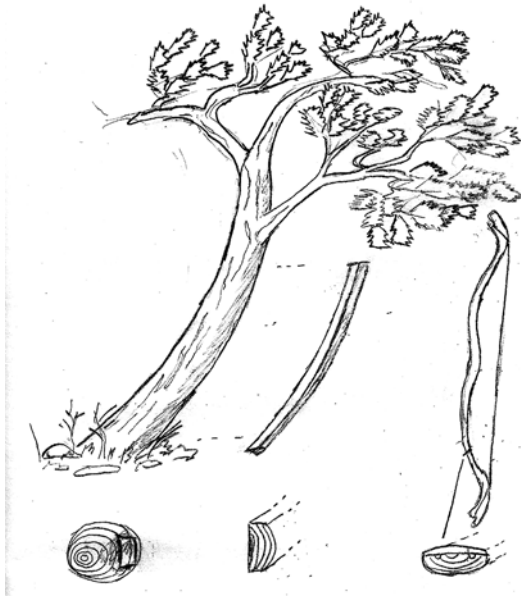


Figure 2. Compression wood and how it is used in the making of Finno-Ugric type bows.

In Finland and Scandinavia the Sámi and the Finns traditionally used this unusual wood to make special gliding skis (*lyly* in Finnish) as well as to make bows. These bows belonged to the Finno-Ugric type and were a lamination of between two and four different pieces of wood. In Finland and among the Sámi the back of the bow was made of birch and the belly of compressed Scots pine. This type of reaction<sup>1</sup> wood endures a lot of compression but fails in tension. The thin slat of birch that is glued on the back endures a lot of stretching and keeps the bow intact. Rigid *siyahs*<sup>2</sup> are either added to the bow as separate parts or cut out at the ends of a single birch back slate. Perch skin glue was used to hold the parts together, but as it is sensitive to water the finished bow was wrapped in birch bark for water-

proofing. The wrapping also helped keep the bow intact even in cold dry weather when the wood became more brittle. The range of this model extends from Scandinavia eastward to the middle ground between the Ob and the Yenisey rivers. (Sirelius 1989 [1919]: 45–48)<sup>3</sup>

Compression wood bows do not form a separate class within established bow-typologies and this is in part also not necessary as a rigid classification would make it more difficult to discern the diffusion and later development of this single technical innovation. Previous classification systems for different composite bows in Eurasia and North America have been inconsistent. Bows made from compression wood have not been singled out in these systems. Henry Balfour (1890: 240) has classed the Sámi bow as a variant of the simple or self bow, though strongly influenced by the horn bow. Felix von Luschan (1899: 226), on the other hand, assigned two-wood bows to the composite type. Bruno Adler (1902: 21) and Gad Rausing (1967: 19, 65) followed Luschan's classification

of the Sámi or Finno-Ugric bow as composite, while Josef Alm (1930: 63) refers to the same bow as reinforced. Spencer L. Rogers (1940) attempted to summarise earlier classification efforts in to a table. He also presented a classification of his own, which was intended to apply to both East Asian and North American bows. In this system, the two wood bows are assigned to the composite bow group, and are not considered a type of their own. Insulander (2002) recognised the overlap and ambiguity of the various classificatory schemes and presented a new classification for these attested historical bow types because none of the previous systems regarded the two-wood bow as a distinct type. The relationship between the Finno-Ugric bow and the Asiatic composite bow is also unclear. Some see that the latter is influenced by the Asiatic bow (Balfour 1890: 240; Alm 1952: 205), whereas Insulander (2002) proposes that the Finno-Ugric bow is ancestral version of the Asiatic composite.

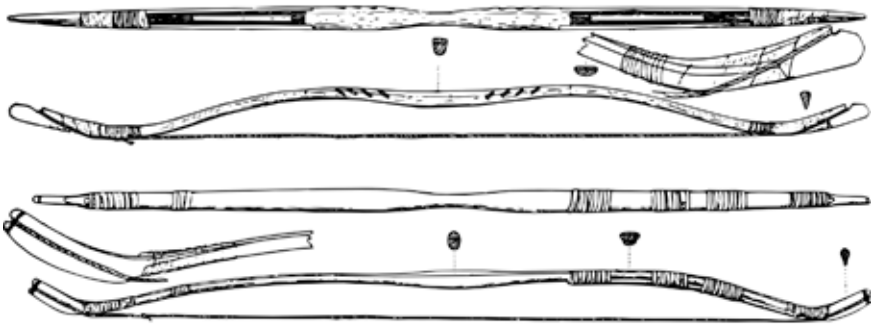


Figure 3. A Khanty and a Mansi bow by U. T. Sirelius in 1919 (Sirelius 1989 [1919]: 46).

The two-wood bow is according to Insulander (2002) analogous with the Finno-Ugric bow. However, in his system the compression wood component of the bow is of secondary nature as these bows can virtually be made up by any two types of wood fused together. A bow made of two different strips of wood from the Jomon culture in Japan dated to 2600 BC as well as an Indonesian variant of laminated bow are included in the classification presented by Insulander. As these bows derive from areas well outside the Arctic context, I believe it is unwarranted to include them in this study. Creating a typology of compression wood bows is further hampered by the fact that such bows can appear in all shapes and sizes which is evident when comparing Alaskan Sugpiaq bows with Eurasian Finno-Ugric bows. A compression wood bow does have some recognisable characteristics that set it apart from other bows:

1. The bow is constructed 'backwards'. As the compression wood grows on the underside of a slant tree it will curve inward. In order to benefit from the qualities of the compression wood stave the back of the bow (outer bending surface) has to be made of the inner part of the tree. It is more common to make the bow back of the external/surface side of a stave. This feature will be easy to discern if one is able to study a broken limb on a bow in a museum collection.
2. The compression wood bow is recurved when unstrung or has a very slight set even if it has been strung for long periods of time. Most other bows take a set

(the bow limbs follow the string) if kept strung for a long time. However, this is not a given identification as there might also be other reasons for a strong reflex in a stave.

3. Compression wood is dark and hard and does not resemble normal growth wood from spruce or pine. It is easily mistaken for yew heart wood due to its dark colour.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF NORTH EURASIAN BOWS

Bows need a certain degree of elasticity to enable performance. Some areas of the world, such as the Arctic, the Steppes and Deserts in the Old World and Asia, are for the most part devoid of suitable bow woods. Different types of composite bows or backed bows emerged as an adaptation to these circumstances. Composite bows appear to have developed separately, but simultaneously, by both the state-level societies in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, as well as the tribal nomadic cultures in the steppe regions of central and northern Asia. Asiatic composite bows appear during the second millennium BC. Typically an Asiatic composite is constructed using a wooden core with added strips of horn on the belly to gain compression strength and a back reinforced with sinew to gain more tension strength. Separate *siyahs* are also added to the bow. (Bergman and McEwen 1997: 152)

These varied types of North Eurasian composite bow can be divided into two subcategories, the Finno-Ugric composite bow (Sirelius 1989 [1919]: 45–48) and the Siberian composite bow (Akbalyan 2005: 119). Both subcategories are very similar in appearance and size but are constructed in profoundly different ways. The Finno-Ugric composite is a wood lamination with the belly always made of compression wood. Insulander (2002) has proposed that the Finno-Ugric bow (or in this case the two-wood bow) would be regarded as a forerunner of the Asiatic composite. Ethnographic evidence, however, suggests the contrary and the archaeological record seems to support the idea that composite bow technology was introduced to the area from the East. In East Siberia the oldest discovery of a composite bow is a fragment from an Evenk burial ground dating to the beginning of the 1st millennium AD (Akbalyan 2005: 119).

The Finno-Ugric bow makes its appearance in Scandinavia during the Iron Age as the climate gets gradually colder. Compression pine belly slats have been discovered in bogs and lakes around Scandinavia with the oldest find in Finland dating back to 200–300 years BC (Vilkuna 1994: 208–223).<sup>4</sup> It would appear that the composite bow design, which included the use of compression wood, would have spread across northern Eurasia around the dawn of the first millennium. It is also likely that a primitive type of compression wood bow preceded the laminated Finno-Ugric bow in the taiga regions of Eurasia. Insulander (1999; 2000) raised the possibility that Upper Palaeolithic reindeer hunters in Europe were the first to use compression wood bows. The Stellmoor bow could in this respect be an old and archaic prototype for a simple self bow for areas devoid of other suitable bow woods. As the climate in Europe was warmed by the dawn of the Mesolithic, the reindeer migrated to the North and were presumably followed by hunters. Hunters in pursuit of migrating animals would spread bow technology to northern Russia and western Siberia. The area where this primitive compression wood bow could have been in use is vast and most of it is wilderness even today. It is there-



fore exceedingly difficult to find archaeological evidence to support this claim. Secondary evidence for the antiquity of possible compression wood bows in northern Europe is found in numerous rock carvings in Sweden and Norway in which archers and bows are depicted, some being as old as 6200 years<sup>5</sup> (Insulander 2002: 57). This evidence for the use of compression wood bows in Scandinavia in the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods is not conclusive as there is no sure way to determine if the depicted bows are made of several joined pieces or just a single stave. There is, however, ethnographic evidence that supports Insulander's theory. There are two self bows made of compression wood in the collections of the National Museum of Finland. These bows were collected by the ethnographer Uuno Taavi Sirelius in the late 1900s among the Khanty and Mansi of western Siberia. The Mansi self bow<sup>6</sup> was collected at the Sygva River. It is 185 cm tall and 4.7 cm wide. The bow appears straight and it is made of spruce compression wood with a string of plied hemp bast. According to Sirelius' notes the man who offered Sirelius the bow told him that the self bow of compression wood was the archaic bow used by the Mansi before they learned how to make laminated Finno-Ugric bows. (Sirelius' fieldnotes 1898–1900; Sirelius 1983). The tradition of using compression wood has apparently also survived up to the present among some of the minor tribes in Russia and in Slovenia (Tomse 1996).

Old Norse sagas often refer to the excellent power of the "Finnbogi" bows that the Norse Vikings bartered from the Sámi (Kiil 1954: 102–108). In Finland and Scandinavia the Sámi were the last to use Finno-Ugric bows, which they did well in to the 18th century<sup>7</sup> (Sirelius 1989 [1919]: 47). The Finnish ethnographer Sirelius (*ibid.*: 45–48) established the range of the Finno-Ugric bow as being from Scandinavia and Finland in the west to the middle ground between the Ob and the Yenisey rivers in the east. In reality the bow type extended much further east due to native trade networks, which will be discussed later in the text.

Finno-Ugric bows were used by the Khanty and the bow-making process of the Khanty is well documented.



Figure 4. Large Khanty bow. (Finsch 1879)

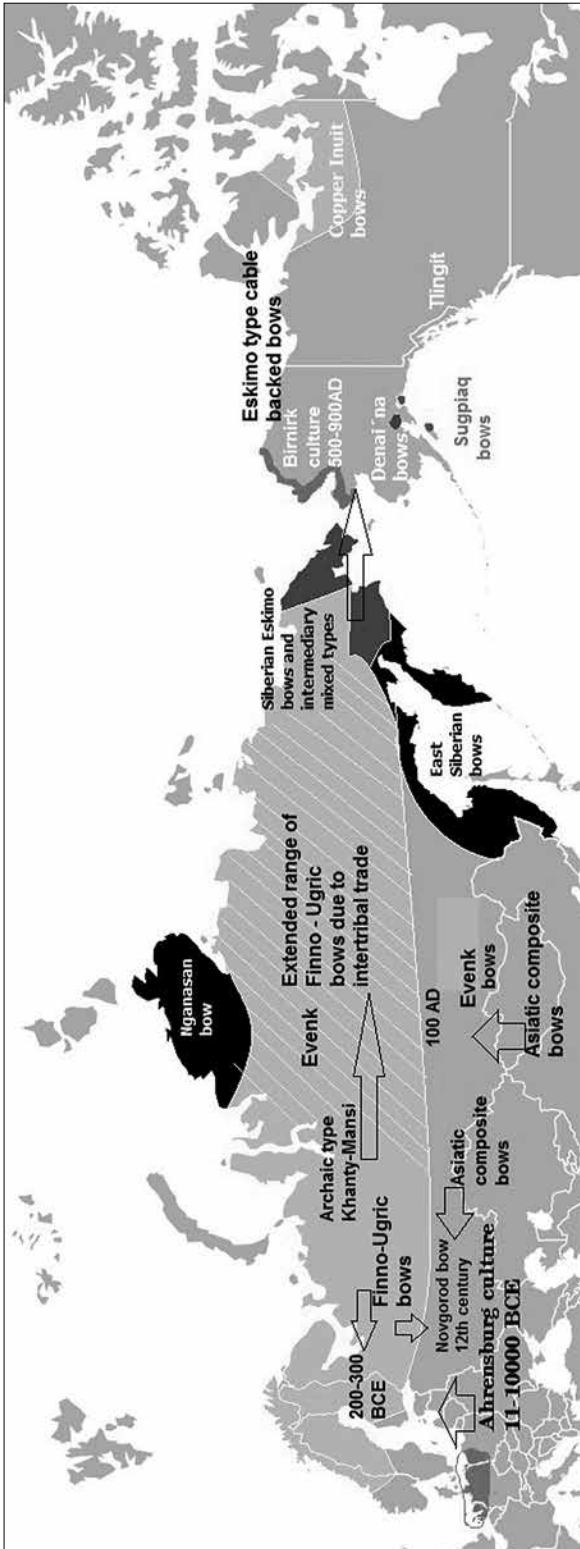
The Khanty heat tempered the compression wood bow-stave and rubbed it with pitch to add to its durability (Dmitriyev-Sadovnikov 2011).<sup>8</sup> The Finno-Ugric bows made by the Khanty and Mansi are tall, up to 193 cm<sup>9</sup> and exceedingly efficient. In this respect size alone separated these bows from the shorter Asiatic composites. The Siberian composite bow type becomes more predominant in the eastern parts of Siberia in close proximity to the Pacific Ocean with some interesting intermediary forms along the borders.

The Siberian composite bow occurs in some unique local variations. Siberian composite bows appear very similar to the Finno-Ugric type, there are, however, some key differences in construction. The Siberian bows are usually made of a single piece of wood with steam bent re-curved ends. Furthermore, compression wood is not used as exclusively as in western Siberia and North Eurasia. The bow is fitted with a moulded sinew back covering. The sinew backing or the whole bow is sometimes covered with rawhide or thin strips of birch bark. Some of the bows that belong to this type also have separate string bridges fitted on the *siyahs*, a feature that is not found on Finno-Ugric bows. The Siberian composites were made from many different types of wood. The Nanais and Orochs used beech for bows; the Nivkhs used ash, poplar, and willow; the Chukchee gathered driftwood to make their bows (Akbalyan 2005: 119). Koryak bows are apparently made of birch.<sup>10</sup> There is also a single odd bow type that was used by the central Siberian Nganasans. Their composite bow was made of a several pieces of resinous strips of larch root that were glued together with codfish glue and wrapped with birch bark. A string bridge was also added to the bow. A bowstring of thong was fastened to the outer curve of the bow, a feature which also distinguished the Nganasan bow from bows used by neighbouring peoples. (Popov 1966: 22–24)

Because of the many localised variations in both bow design and materials used for construction, the term “Siberian composite” has to be considered a working term that includes all composites that cannot be considered Asiatic horn bows, Eskimo cable-backed bows or Finno-Ugric bows. Other localised variations include large bows used for war by the Even and the Evenki that were made of three glued pieces of wood of different kinds, larch and birch (Nefédkin 2013: 122). The construction details of this bow are uncertain. There is also another type of bow that appears to be an intermediary version of the Finno-Ugric bow. This type of powerful bow could be more than two meters long, was made from two strips larch and cedar or fir and birch, dried for two years, and glued with fish glue (*ibid.*).<sup>11</sup> These incomplete descriptions might well refer to a single type of bow. It is unclear if compression wood was used in these bows or not and further examination to clarify the matter is needed.

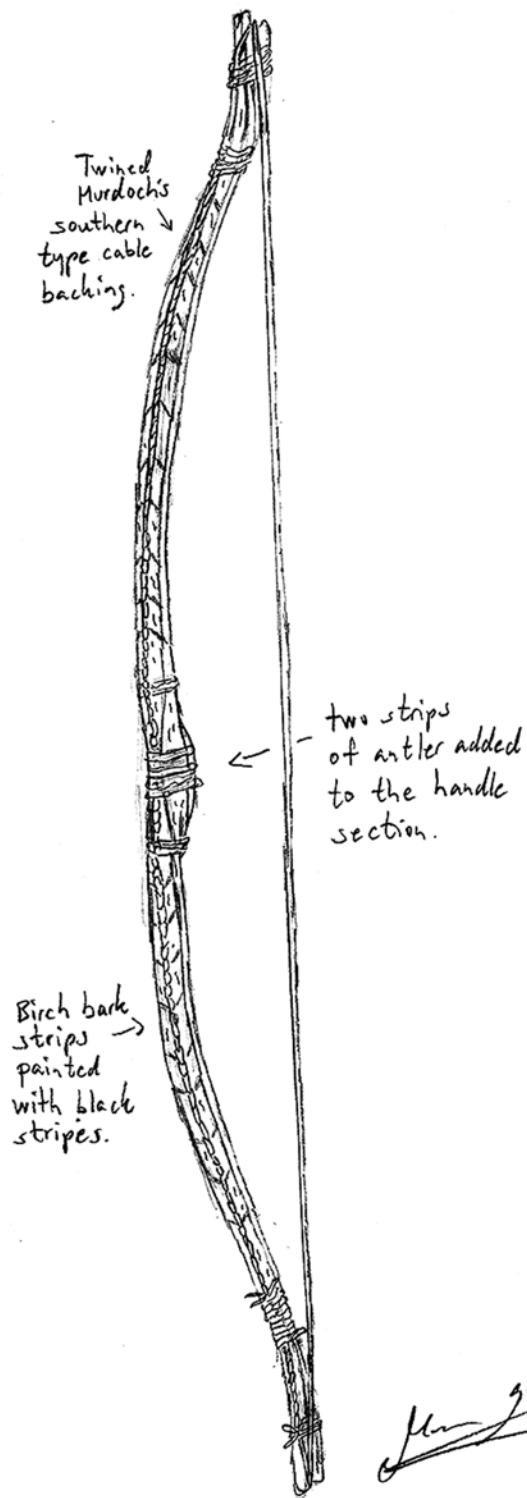
Intertribal trading and warfare were key factors in spreading new types of bows across Siberia. The Nganasan bartered more efficient bows from the Yakut and bows were also traded from the Ket; these latter bows were known as ‘Ostyak’ (Khanty) bows of the Finno-Ugric type (Popov 1966: 24–25). The Nganasans also had access to ‘Tatar’ bows (Asiatic horn bows) although these were not as popular as they were considered too weak (*ibid.*). Bows traded from neighbouring peoples replaced the old Nganasan bow long before firearms were introduced. Large bows were generally perceived as war bows in Siberia, smaller bows were made explicitly for the purpose of hunting as they were more practical to carry (Nefédkin 2013: 122).

The Nganasans inhabited a virtually treeless tundra and wood was a scarce commodity. This explains why they had to use such inferior materials as roots for their bows. The Nganasan bow might well represent the last line of an archaic Arctic bow-



yer tradition, technically very closely related to multi-piece Eskimo free-cable composite bows. An interesting intermediary form that combines traits from the Finno-Ugric bow and the Asiatic horn bow is demonstrated by the Evenk (Tungus) bow. The traditional Evenk home territory in the Lake Baikal area can be characterised as a border area wedged in between the open steppe in the south and the forested taiga in the north. Although the Evenk bow has the same outer appearance as the Finno-Ugric type, the bow is very differently constructed. The Evenk bow is essentially a two-wood bow that has been reinforced with sinew on the back and horn strips on the belly (Balfour 1890: 228). The heterogeneity of bows in East Siberia is in part the result of intertribal trading and subsequent addition of secondary features on the bows by the new owners. The Yakut (Sakha) were key distributors of bows, and their bows were traded from the Ket, who in turn received them from the Khanty. Bows such as these were in wide circulation and were even traded to the Chukchee. The Chukchee further improved these bows by adding a sinew cable and sometimes even antler reinforcements. A good example of a bow with mixed features is the Chukchee bow in the American Museum of National History (catalogue no. 70 / 6981). This circulation of traded bows in Siberia has caused some confusion among scholars, being unaware of the intricacies of intertribal trading. Alm (1930: 75) describes the Chukchee bow as a bow made from coniferous wood, birch wood and

Figure 5. Map showing where compression wood bows are found in Eurasia and North America.



two pleated strands of sinew on the back. Insulander (2002) briefly mentions the same Chukchee bow type but is unaware that the bow is in fact a Finno-Ugric bow with added Eskimoan features. According to Vilhelm Kiil (1954: 132) similar reinforced two-wood bows were also used by the Yukaghirs and the Lamuts. Several functional compression wood bows with broken or intentionally removed *siyahs* were also collected from the Chukchee by Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld during his voyage with Vega in 1878–1879. These bows are included in the collections of the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between the Asiatic horn bow and the Finno-Ugric bow is discussed by Insulander (1997, 2002) who presents the two-wood bow as the missing link in line of bow development that eventually lead to the creation of the Asiatic composite bow. Insulander (2002: 59) maintains that “the two-wood bow and related types are representative of an earlier stage of the evolution of the bow than the composite horn bow”. He elaborates on Rausing’s (1967: 148) hypothesis, that bows of the Holmegaard type may have been ancestors of the horn bow and presents intermediary types of bow to complete an evolutionary series from the simple wooden bow to the composite horn bow. Insulander (2002: 62) also suggests that the area west and north-west of Lake Baikal would be the site where this evolution would

Figure 6. Chukchee bow with added free sinew cable backing. American Museum of National History, catalogue no. 70/6981.

reach its pinnacle. Insulander's theory is lacking in evidence as it is not supported by the apparent age difference in the archaeological record, in which the Asian composite bow by far predates the Finno-Ugric bow. Insulander does not take into account the fact that oral tradition among the Mansi identifies simple compression wood self bows as a type used before the introduction of the Finno-Ugric bow. It would seem reasonable to suppose that the idea of improving the design of the simple compression wood self bow by adding a birch backing and separate *siyahs*, could have been the result of interaction with the steppes, possibly through extended trade networks. The Evenk bow is not necessarily an indication of a gradual development from a two-wood bow to an Asiatic composite, it is likely that it displays features of both Asiatic and Finno-Ugric bows due to its intermediary position between the two areas. It can be considered as a southern variation of the mixed-feature Chukchee trade bow.

Bow development in Eurasia and Siberia seems to be the result of reciprocal cultural contact between the North and the South that extends over a long period of time. This long-term interaction also explains the construction differences between the Finno-Ugric bows and the Siberian composites, of which the latter seems to represent a simplified version of the Asiatic composite. Siberian bows lack the typical slats of horn found on the belly of Asiatic composite bows but do have a moulded sinew backing. Another example of continuous interaction between the regions is a Medieval bow found in Novgorod, Russia. Horn bows were common in the ancient Russian kingdom during the 10th century and at least two different types of Asiatic horn composite bow were used by the Russians (Mikhailov and Kainov 2011: 242). A later 12th century bow found in Novgorod (Thompson 1967: 78) displays mixed Finno-Ugric and Asiatic features. The bow is, contrary to other Asiatic composites, made of two slats of wood which have been glued together and wrapped with birch bark. A layer of moulded sinew back was added to the bow but has rotted away. An empty cavity between the bow back and the bark wrapping indicate where the backing used to be. The belly slat of the bow is juniper and the back is made of birch. Insulander (2002: 62) refers to this as a reinforced two-wood bow.

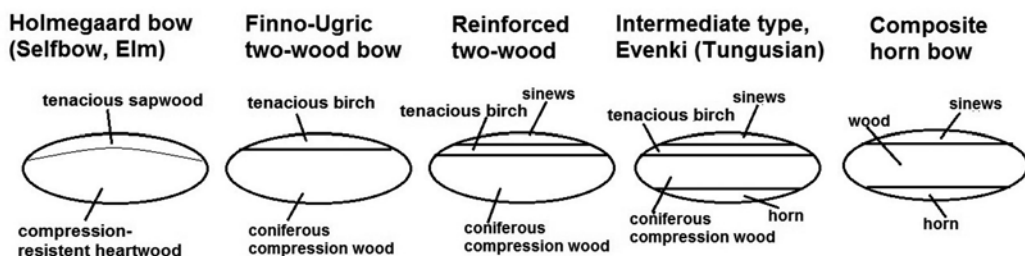


Figure 7. Proposed line of development of the Asiatic composite. Cross-sections of five bow types. (Insulander 2002). However, this chronology is not supported by the archaeological records.

I believe it is possible that the wood on the belly of the Novgorod bow has been misidentified as juniper. Compression wood spruce can resemble juniper due to its similar colouration. Nevertheless, this bow as well as the Evenki bow in Figure 7 has intermediary features typical of what might be expected of bows in areas where different types of bow overlap. North Eurasian bows could also influence the later develop-

ment of Asiatic composite bows (Grayson 2007: 11). The Chinese Manchu introduced a larger composite bow in the 17th century. The Manchu bow was made with a bamboo core, horn belly, sinew backing and wooden tips and handle. These bows were capable of propelling heavy arrows with great force but due to their size not suited for use on horseback. Previous bows had been considerably smaller. The Manchu bow was durable both in battle and hunting, and became the standard bow in China as well as Mongolia and Tibet (*ibid.*).

It seems plausible that the Finno-Ugric bow could have been developed in the taiga area of eastern Siberia or as a result of intertribal contact between the west and east. The apparent diversity of different composite bows in the eastern part of Siberia suggests a longer history of composite bow construction. The Finno-Ugric area in the west is more homogenous in terms of variations in bow construction and materials. This goes against Insulander's (2002) proposition that the Finno-Ugric bow could be regarded as a forerunner of the Asiatic composite.

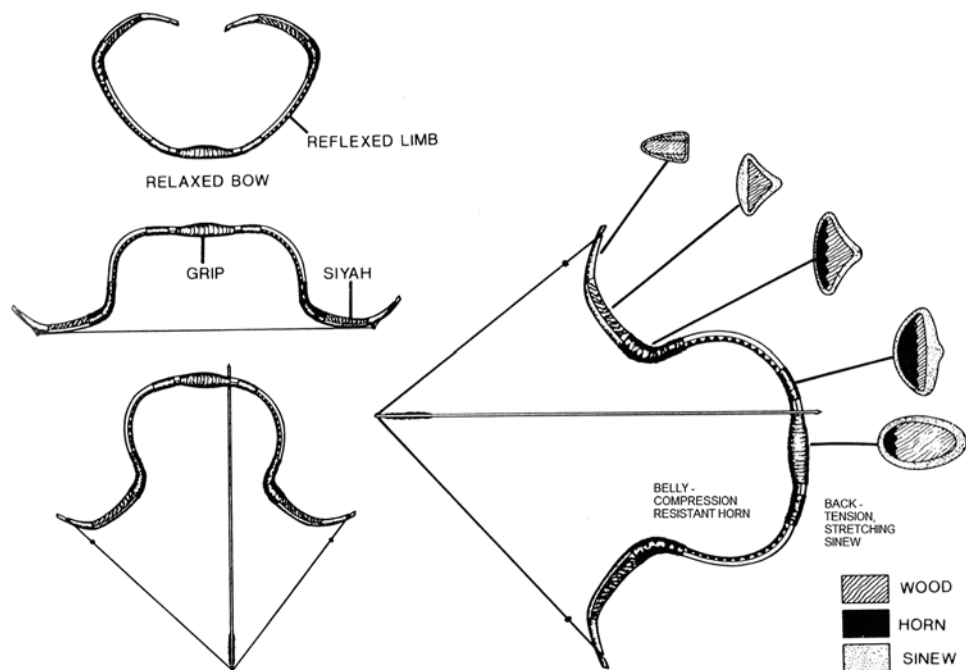


Figure 8. Asiatic composite bow construction and materials.

#### COMPRESSION WOOD IN NORTH AMERICAN BOWS

The true relationship with the Asiatic composite and the Eskimo bow as well as other North American bows has remained inconclusive, although vestigial features such as non-functional *siyahs* on some Eskimo bows are interpreted as evidence of Asian origin (Hamilton 1970). When comparing the North Eurasian composite bow with the Eskimo bows of East Siberia, North America and Greenland, the Eurasian bows seem surprisingly homogenous in their appearance in contrast with the rich variation in materials

and designs demonstrated by the multitude of Eskimo cable backed composite bows. The North American Eskimo area is more diverse and varied, ranging from lush coastal forest in southwest Alaska to freezing tundra in the East Arctic. The taiga environment of Eurasia in Siberia provides similar raw materials for bow construction throughout the region, but the Eskimos have had to adapt their bow designs to accommodate a great deal of local variation in available raw materials for bows.

The bow and arrow seem to have been introduced to the North America Arctic in a much earlier stage than in the more temperate regions of North America. The earliest bow find originates from the eastern woodlands around 600 AD (Nassaney and Pyle 1999). In the American and Greenland Arctic a possible bow fragment of whale bone along with arrowheads has been found at the Saqqaq culture site of Nipisat in West Greenland. This find was in association with the Phase 1 inhabitation of the site ranging from 2020 to 1740 BC (Gotfredsen and Møbjerg 2004). Archaeological records from 2500–2000 BC indicate that people in the central Canadian Arctic hunted land mammals with bows and arrows (Maxwell 1984: 360–368). The Saqqaq culture is part of a broad terrestrial cultural entity that developed along the Alaska Peninsula around Bristol Bay and on the Eastern shores of the Bering Strait around 2500 BC (Fagan 2005: 179–181). The cultural groups belonging to the Arctic Small Tool Tradition were the first human occupants of Arctic Canada and Greenland. They had a highly distinctive toolkit based on microblade technology and many researchers believe that this culture was the first to reintroduce the bow and arrow to the American Arctic (ibid.).



Figure 9. Copper Inuit archers drawing compression wood bows reinforced with cable backing. Photo by George H. Wilkins, 1916. Canadian Museum of Civilization, catalogue no. 51166 LS.

# ALUTIIQ (CHUGACH) BOW (13.B)

The Tavastehus Gymnasium Collection

L: 132 cm

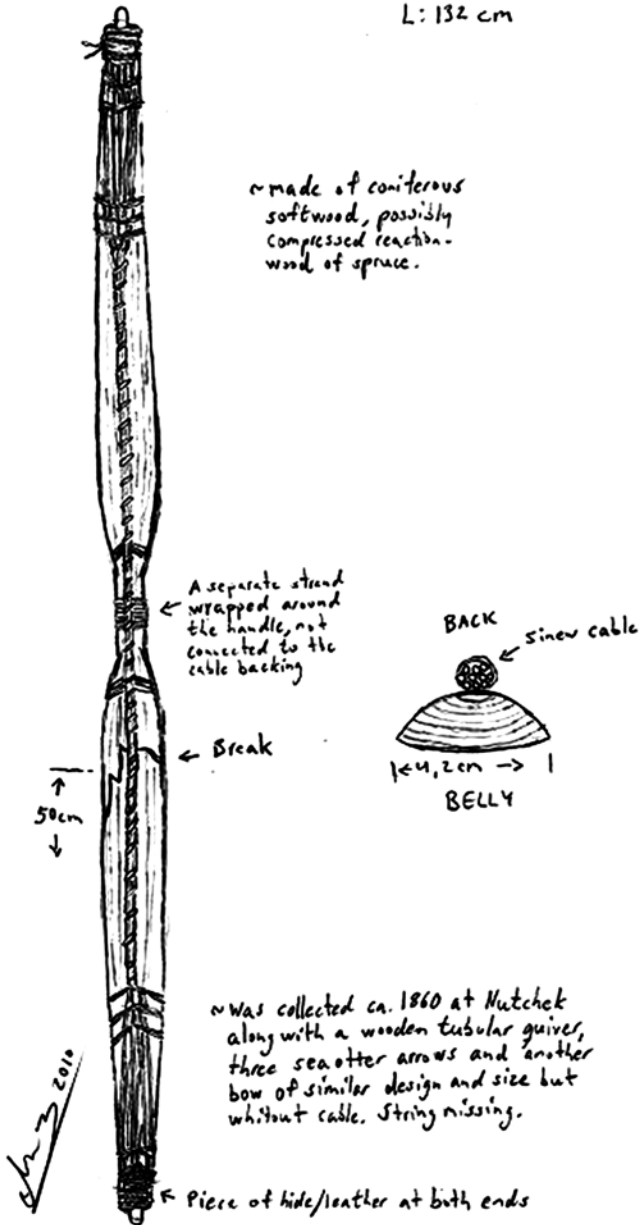


Figure 10. Sugpiaq – Alutiq cable backed compression wood spruce bow from Prince William Sound, Alaska.

The development of the Eskimo bow was not a straightforward process. The archaeological record indicates that the bow and arrow disappeared from use across the North American Arctic during Dorset habitation (500 BC–1500 AD) (Maxwell 1984: 366). In Greenland bow and arrow technology was abandoned around 1310–810 BC (Gotfredsen and Møbjerg 2004). The bow and arrow reappeared in the North American Arctic with the arrival of the Thule culture which gradually replaced the Dorset people (McGhee 1984: 369–376). The American Arctic is an extreme environment for human habitation and populations were often afflicted by starvation caused by severe weather conditions. In some cases the death toll would be so great among the adult population that technological advances would be lost in the wake of the famine. An exceedingly large number of Polar Inuit in northern Greenland did die of starvation and as result the bow and arrow disappeared from use for generations. This was confirmed by the first Europeans who visited the Thule district in the 19th century and observed that the bow was unknown to the Polar Inuit (Birket-Smith 1918: 8). Bows and arrows were later reintroduced to the Thule district when Inuit from Baffin Island migrated to the area (ibid.).



Scholars recognise two main types of composite bow; the moulded sinew backed composite and the free sinew cable backing used by the Eskimo (Balfour 1890: 224). The free cable backing is more versatile and practical in terms of bow manufacture as it allows the Eskimo bowyer to make serviceable bows of almost any available materials such as antler, bone, wood and even baleen. The sinew cable can also be re-used to make another bow if the first bow breaks. Both of these two composite types are found among East Siberian Eskimo although the free cable backed bow is the only type of composite bow that made its way across to the North American Arctic. In Eskimo territory local differences in the availability of materials seems to have been the largest contributing factor for variations in design and construction. As many Eskimo people lived in areas that were devoid of trees they were for most part dependent on driftwood and in such conditions compression wood could not have been used. Further up in the high Arctic, antler and whalebone were frequently used to make bows. Bows of the Sugipaq in the more temperate southwest corner of Alaska show strong influences from the northwest coastal area. Many bows along the Bering Sea coast are influenced by Eurasian composite designs.

Eskimos in areas with access to living trees were aware of the positive traits of compression wood. Sugipaq bows display features that are typically associated with the *lyly* in Finno-Ugric bows, such as the bow back is made of the inner part of the wood. The Sugipaq did, however, not exclusively use compression wood in their bows as other bow woods were also available to them. A damaged free cable backed bow collected at Nutchek in Prince William Sound in the 1850s is constructed “backwards” using compression wood (Lepola 2013).<sup>13</sup> Another Sugipaq bow in the Anchorage museum at the Rasmussen Center collections exhibits a very strong re-curved bend typical of other compression wood bows.<sup>14</sup> The Dena’ina Indians of Cook Inlet recognised the structural benefits of spruce heart wood and used it for bows (Osgood 1966 [1937]: 16). This dark wood was called *Ggek* (Russell 1995 [1987]: 28–29). It is not entirely clear if *Ggek* was in fact harvested from a tree that grew in a tilted position. The Tlingit Indians living further south down the Alaskan coast also knew the benefits of compression wood, although they preferred to use yew which is available in their territory. Some Tlingit bows were made of spruce selected from a tree growing on high land, and from a branch or young tree that curved in its growth (Emmons 1991: 127). The outside wood was used (*ibid.*).

The Copper Inuit/Innuinait successfully used compression wood for their cable-backed bows. Innuinait people would intentionally travel for the purpose of harvesting compression wood. If driftwood was used for bows it would have been the exception rather than the rule. In most of the Innuinait territory living trees large enough to construct bows and other tools are not available. It was, however, possible to travel inland and find pockets of trees growing in river valleys with their own micro climates. Trees growing on the slopes of riverbanks in such areas are often curved. Black spruce was the wood of choice and compression wood used in bows was called *Itkiq*.<sup>15</sup>

Although possible, it is not likely that compression wood use in bows could have developed independently in the North American Arctic in such a short time frame. It is more likely that this technology was known to early ancestors of Eskimo as they migrated to the American Arctic. It is curious that compression wood was known to Athapascan groups such as the Dena’ina and the Tlingit. Further research is needed to

determine if this is due to later diffusion from Eskimo cultures such as the Sugpiaq or if this knowledge has been passed down through a more ancient ancestry. We do know that there has been frequent contact between the two continents as Siberian Chukchee traders and even war parties often visited Alaska (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988: 234–236). It would seem that these later contacts across the Bering Sea did not transfer the knowledge of using compression wood as raw material for bows. The Alaskan Yup'ik on the Bering Sea coast apparently did not use compression wood for their bows. Frequent encounters with the Siberian Chukchee seem to have influenced the design of the recurved bows used by the Yup'ik, which appear similar to the angular North Eurasian bows. For the purpose of establishing a rudimentary chronology for when compression wood technology might have transferred to North America the most likely candidate would be a pre-Thule culture in Alaska, called the Birnirk culture. Communities belonging to this culture are found from Cape Nome to Point Barrow between 500 AD and 1000 AD (Darwill 2008 [2002]). Birnirk assemblages contain many artefacts paralleled in the tool kits of modern Inuit such as bows and arrows (ibid.).

As of yet there is little if any archaeological evidence that would suggest that compression wood was used for bows in the American Arctic. However, researchers and archaeologists have not processed existing archaeological material with this feature in mind. Re-curved three-part bows excavated from the Birnirk site seem surprisingly modern (Ford 1959). They resemble bows used by later Copper Inuit and in this respect this would also suggest the possibility of compression wood usage. Researchers have determined that spruce was used in the construction of these bows. Further investigation is needed to establish if Birnirk bows are made from compression wood spruce. This would potentially establish a link between these early North American bows and the compression wood bows of Eurasia. The angular design on some Alaskan bows is an indication of Asian influences but Eskimo bows with Asian features are not necessarily made of compression wood. This to me is an indication that compression wood technology was well integrated in the cultural knowledge of the peoples migrating eastward across the Bering Sea and not the result of later cultural transfer from Siberia due to trade or warfare.

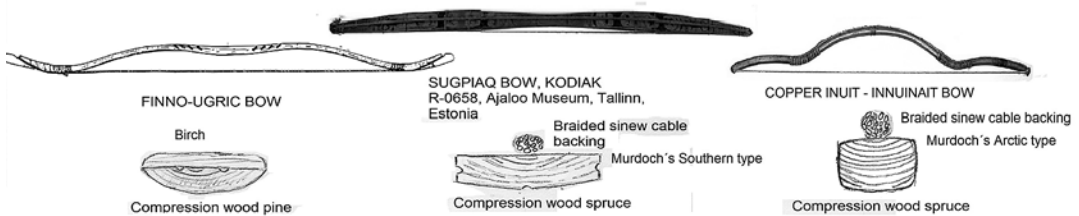


Figure 11. Three compression wood bow types from Eurasia, southwest Alaska and Arctic Canada.

## CONCLUSION

Ragnar Insulander proposed that the benefits of compression wood use in bows was known to the earliest Arctic bow hunters, the Upper Palaeolithic Ahrensburg culture in northern Europe. Ethnographic data suggests that that the simple compression wood bow was in use in prehistoric times in northern Eurasia and was gradually replaced

by a new composite design, probably introduced through contact with horse archers from the steppe around the dawn of the first millennium AD. The compression wood stave would become the core feature of the later Finno-Ugric composite bow. Trade networks would extend the range of the Finno-Ugric bow to the Far East. Composite bows in eastern Siberia are found in many localised variations and this heterogeneity of bow construction can indicate that composite bows have been in use for a longer period of time in the East than in the West. This is also confirmed by the archaeological record. The ethnographic record confirms the existence of compression wood bow technology among some Eskimo and Native American cultures in Alaska and the Canadian Arctic. It is possible that the knowledge of how to make these bows was brought to North America with the pre-Thule Birnirk culture. Further research on the archaeological material is required to determine a time frame for when the technology transferred to the North American Arctic.

## NOTES

1 Compression wood forms when part of a woody plant is subjected to mechanical stress, and helps to bring parts of the plant into an optimal position. This stress may be the result of gravity, wind exposure, snow buildup, soil movement, etc. This type of reaction wood is not externally visible, although asymmetric growth is a reliable indicator. The cork cambium in the affected part of the trunk is more active on one side, leading to thicker growth rings. Branches practically always have reaction wood, since they need support to maintain their horizontal or nearly horizontal position. There are two different types of reaction wood, which represent two different approaches to the same problem: (1) In angiosperms reaction wood is called tension wood. Tension wood forms on the side of the affected part of the plant, pulling it towards the affecting force. It is composed almost entirely of cellulose. (2) In conifers it is called compression wood. Compression wood forms in the bend on the opposite side of the applied force, thereby lengthening/straightening the bend. Compression wood is rich in lignin. (Wilson and Archer 1977: 23–43)

2 The stiffened end of the bow is a *siyah* (Arabic), *szarv* (Hungarian), *sarvi* (Finnish; both *sarvi* and *szarv* mean 'horn') or *kasan* (Turkish); the bending section is a *duster* (Arabic), *lapa* (Finnish) or *sal* (Turkish) (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 222).

3 The establishing of the eastern range of the Finno-Ugric Bow at the Ob River is based on the studies of the Finnish ethnographer Uuno Taavi Sirelius. He also recognises the Finno-Ugric bow as a distinct type. His studies only range as far as to the Khanty who live along the Ob and their bow is of the Finno-Ugric subcategory.

4 There are nine archaeological findings of Finno-Ugric bows from Sweden, Norway and Finland. For the most part the findings have been dated to Iron Age and Medieval times. The late Ragnar Insulander has studied these bows extensively in his article (1999). More information about these findings is available in Vilkuna 1994.

5 According to Insulander the rock carvings suggest that the two-wood bow as a type may be several thousand years older than the earliest archaeological finds.

6 The Finno-Ugric Collections of the National Museum of Finland, catalogue no. SU 3904: 345.

7 Ragnar Insulander commonly refers to all Scandinavian and Finnish bow finds as the Sámi bows. This is not incorrect as the Sámi have inhabited the Nordic countries for a long time. However he ignores the fact that some later archaeological finds such as the Viitasari bow from the 14th century could well have been of Finnish origin rather than Sámi (Insulander 1999).

8 The book contains 27 photos depicting the bow making process taken in 1914 among the Khanty in the Tobolsk district of Russia (Dmitriyev-Sadovnikov 2011).

- 9 The Finno-Ugric Collections of the National Museum of Finland, catalogue no. SM 3904: 352.
- 10 Koryak bows in the American Museum of Natural History collections, catalogue nos. 70 / 3922 AB, 70 / 3943, 70 / 3508.
- 11 According to this source the bow limbs were “pasted over with birch” and wrapped on the ends with sinew. It would appear that there might be some error in translation as it seems that the author is referring to birch bark, not birch wood.
- 12 A bow collected by Nordenskiöld is 102 cm long and 4.4 cm wide. It is possible that the bow was intended for use by children. Catalogue no. 1880.04.0128.
- 13 Bow in the Furuhjelm Collection, Hämeenlinna City Museum, Finland, catalogue no. TAV13a.
- 14 Anchorage Museum at the Rasmussen Center, catalogue no. 1980.030.010.
- 15 Unpublished source: Personal e-mail-correspondence with Darren Keith, senior researcher, Kitikmeot Heritage Society (October 24, 2010).

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# CONTEST IN NANAI SHAMANIC TALES

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## ABSTRACT

The tale motif of the shamanic tale competition is examined with due regard for the interpretation given by the Nanai storyteller-shamans from the standpoint of their personal spiritual experience. In shamanic practice it is not the personal ability (skill or physical power) that provides a challenger victory in conflict, but obtaining spirits-helpers more powerful than those of his or her rival. The predominant role of these fantastic personages/helpers in tales explains the losers' unconditional submission and readiness to sacrifice their freedom or life to the winner. It also clarifies the motivation of the initiators of these contests and games: by means of gathering a great number of competitors, such personages (shamans) solve their personal spiritual problems, such as the need to overcome their adversaries or find allies in the struggle against their opponents.

KEYWORDS: folklore • shamanism • Siberia • Nanai • contest • shamanic games  
• inter-shamanic conflict

## INTRODUCTION

The motif of contest is typical to the Nanai *dzorgil-ningmani* tale (a tale about shamanic roads in the spiritual world or, briefly, a shamanic tale). The hero of these tales learns that somewhere far away, someone has initiated a contest, and together with the numerous other people who are interested in participating, he sets off on a journey. The guests who participate in such contests never fight against each other; rather, the host and organiser of these games fights duels with each of the visitors – before the story's hero appears, nobody can beat him. Thus, he who becomes the only winner, will be the hero.

The purpose of such a tale contest seems enigmatic. The games are not only held to entertain and for someone to achieve personal superiority because penalty for the numerous losers is too brutal. In some tales, when the hero comes to the place of competition, he sees the heaped human bones of his predecessors, beaten in the games by the master of the competition. "Around the dwelling there were lots of bones: 'You see! Your wife has killed in competition a lot of people!'" (Sunik 1958: 137) In the other tales, the winner forces the losers to transplant all the residents of their villages to his place. "Lots of villages [and their villagers] have arrived; [the losers] have fetched them" (Avrorin 1986: 139).

On the beach, there appeared a big village. All the losers have removed there together with all the dwellers of their villages. She has already won almost forty

people. The village has become very big. She said, "as I won, all of you are going to move to my place. I am going to have all of you". (Alexei Kisovich)

Nobody forces people to participate in such unsafe competitions, so it seems incomprehensible, why people prefer not to ignore the rumours about these games and set out on a long journey in order to take part in such risky events. What is more, why do they submissively and without demur agree to lose their freedom and even life if they are defeated?

It is even more obscure that the hero, who finally wins the competition, sometimes refuses reward. For instance, he can choose not to move the host-loser and all the loser's villagers into his village and gain power over them. "Take us as your servants!" "No, we do not need servants; you have your own home, so go home!" (Avrorin 1986: 37) In some tales, they suggest the conqueror marries a woman (the host's daughter or sister) without a dowry as a reward for winning, but the winner also refuses. In the tale *The Horse's Son*, one of the guests says to the host, who lost the contest, "give your daughter to him [the winner]!" However, the winner replies, "brother, no, I do not want to, I do not need a wife. Marry her yourself!" (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 70) If the tale hero refuses all rewards, why then did he participate in a competition that risked his freedom and life?

It is hardly possible to answer these questions by limiting the research to folklore texts. However, it is quite another matter if we examine them within the wider context in which Nanai shamanic tales exists, i.e., within traditional Nanai shamanic praxis, which contains the practice of contests.<sup>1</sup> Until the mid-1990s, the hidden underlying meaning of the tales was still clear for the practicing Nanai shamans, because tales, according to shamanic conception, fix the information received from the spiritual world. Moreover, in certain situations, the very production of new shamanic tales, *dzorgil-ningmani*, results from certain shamanic ritual needs.<sup>2</sup> This gave me the opportunity to consult practicing Nanai shamans about their personal experience connected with inter-shamanic contests and ask them under what circumstances their real experience can become encoded into the corresponding tale motif.<sup>3</sup>

#### BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS. VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMPETITIONS

Before the 1930s, big public competitions were popular among the Nanai.<sup>4</sup> The games were held during the ice-drifting time on particular river beaches. Waiting for the ice on the river to go so that it would be possible to fish, people sacrificed pigs and cocks and held contests in jumping, in raising and throwing heavy things, and in running. Eaters were challenged in their speed of eating and in the quantity of food consumed.

The characters in the tales compete in similar events, which are hyperbolically exaggerated. They run with the speed of flying ball, jump from the sea beach onto the small island in the middle of the sea. "People contest; those who are strong move [a stone] over their shoulders; those who are strong, move that stone round their waists; and that stone is as big as a barn" (Sunik 1985: 122). Preparing for contest by cooking large quantity of food, a tale personage boils in one of the coppers "seventy bears' heads and thirty heads of other animals" and in another copper "he boils porridge of one sack of green



bristle grass". Then, in one of the heats, he competes with a guest, demonstrating that he is able to eat all of this (Ivan Torokovich). Meanwhile, in spite of improbability of the tale characters' physical abilities, the storytellers insist that there is nothing invented in such stories. According to their opinion, the abilities of the tale personages just seem to be fantastic, but actually, they are real, because tale events happen both in the physical world, *ilu*, and in the spiritual world, *dorkin*.<sup>5</sup> Another reason why such abilities seem to be real is that, according to the shamans' explanation, not all the tale personages are human. Some of them are spirits, which are only occasionally able to appear in physical aspect. In the same way, when the shamans' spirits enter the spiritual space, their shamanic abilities essentially become different from their normal physical ones.

For the Nanai, shamanic tales are typical shorn of so-called 'epic distance'. The shamans affirm that what they experience during their praxis is very similar to some tale events because they are shamans who 'compose' the first variant of a tale, and in some tale episodes, shamans allegorically open to the non-initiated people some of their secret information. The audience can perceive that the story as something invented for entertaining, and in this case the narration crosses the border of hidden shamanic discourse and starts being passed from one person to another, finely being turned into a tale.<sup>6</sup> Researchers describe this transformation in a similar way: "A narration from the first person that is a memorate can later start being formed into a fabulate because of retellings by neighbours and acquaintances [...]. Further on, it turns into a complete sample of folklore narration." (Kharitonova 2007: 173) However, for some initiated persons the tale is like today's newspaper in that it is concerned with the latest topical events. My informants categorically disagreed with me when I explained to them that the tale actions, as scholars interpret them, should represent an unreal world that is distant in space and time, and the narration should be "fictional, impossible in reality and opposite to what is evident" (Putilov 1999: 95).<sup>7</sup> This clash between the scholar's and the shamans' opinions can be explained by the fact that researchers try to find in the tale some correspondence between the epic plots and the events of the physical world (*ilu*), while shamans compare epic events with the real (for them) but invisible and unknown (for the others) spiritual world (*dorkin*), which they penetrate in their dreams and rituals.

The tale also narrates events only partly reflected physically, the decisive part of which occurs in the spiritual realm. Therefore, the tale personages who want to be victorious in tale games must rely not so much on their physical strength as on their spirit-helpers. Fighting against an old man, the hero of the tale *Coffin* grabbed him, tore him limb from limb, and

threw him so that he broke up into eight, and the parts of his body scattered around; he broke up into nine and the parts of his body scattered in the air. However, soon after, the parts of the old man's body joined together and the old man got up safe and sound. (Ivan Torokovich)

The hero finally managed to kill the old man only after his spirit-helper in bird shape brought him an egg, in which was the soul-life of the old man. Only after breaking that egg was he able to kill. (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 57) The strong hero of Ivan Torokovich's tale grabbed his rival, an old man, raised him up and turned him around his head (the hero was incredibly strong!) and threw him far away. However, the old

man returned to life, because the hero did not discharge the most important clause of the tale's duel: he relied on his physical strength instead of accepting aid from his spirit. Spirit-helpers are invisible, but are the most important and active participants in tale games. Not only do the spirits affect the scale of the games, but they also inform the hero of the forthcoming competition and force him to participate.

The *mergen*<sup>8</sup> hurried to pierce the window with his knife and looked. Oh! Oh! Oh! *Sazhen*<sup>9</sup> wide and *sazhen* height an old man! He is coming from the beach [to home], and his legs are stuck in the ground knee-deep. "What an old man he is!" When I walked, I did not step like him, but he is walking – *chamoliak* [with such a sound] – sticking in the ground [...]. "Where are you going that you have dropped to my place?" "Where am I going? Where am I travelling? Downstream from this place, there is a big village, and there will be a contest there. I am going to those games. Going there, I would like to pick you up. I need to get you as a companion." (Ivan Torokovich)

In his time, Vladimir Propp (2000 [1946]: 277) noticed that it was not the personal abilities of a tale personage, but the capabilities of his spirits-helpers that guarantee victory:

Attentive examination of the tale shows that in the competitions, neither the hero's dexterity, nor his strength is shown, but other qualities. It is the fairy helper who delivers a hero's victory. Without this helper the hero can do nothing; the matter is not about his personal strength.

The presence of such a spirit-helper indicates that the tale narrates not about contests among ordinary people but about shamanic competitions.

Invisible participants play the key role not only in the tale contests, but also in those tradition games that were held in reality. These games were performed as rituals, accompanied with sacrifices.<sup>10</sup> Scholars affirm that not only the Nanai, but also other indigenous Siberian peoples made sacrifices during the traditional games. V. S. Taskin (1973: 404) writes that during sacrifices the Uigur held horse riding events. Radzhana Dashinimayevna Dugarova (2004) reports about the coincidence of sporting games and sacrifices among the Buriat, and emphasises that the Buriat considered that the competition itself was thought of as "a bloodless sacrifice to the deities". The Nanai held the games-sacrifices during the ice drifting time because it is the time when the snow melts, and "the ground is changing its colour from white to black" and when "shamanic spirits together with their armed troops of the subservient spirits" become active (Gara Kisovna). It is significant that the name of one of the places where Nanai gathered to compete in "playing with a big stone" (i.e. in raising it), was called *Seven* (literally, 'spirit').

Even if the competitors were not shamans but ordinary people, the benevolence of the spirits towards them was a decisive requirement not only of winning, but also of divining the future. Divination rather than material reward for winning (the winners were not supposed to receive anything) represented the main interest of the competitors both among the Nanai and among the other indigenous peoples of Siberia. Thus, mentioning the eating competitions ("peculiar rituals") in the Yakut ritual *Ysyah*, Ekaterina Romanova (1997: 192) affirms that the competitors were convinced that their destiny "is encoded in the ritual food: more the eater drank and ate more happiness he or she earned for the next year". Interpretation of games as rituals, that can influence the

future of the participants also belong to Roberta Hamayon (2012: 5): “playing is experienced as testing one’s luck or capacity for luck in the future, and believing in this test is held to help one jump at opportunities”.

The dependence of games on the invisible participants-spirits is even more obvious in the case of competitor-shamans. Unfortunately, I could not find out if the Nanai ever held public shamanic games in front of an audience and supporters.<sup>11</sup> However, in literature, there are some references to such games among the other indigenous peoples of Siberia. Thus, Waldemar Jochelson (1926: 127) reports that Yukagir shamans publicly demonstrated their abilities during inter-clan competitions. As Galina Nikolayevna Gracheva (1983) elucidates, shamans fought physically, when they did not rely only for help of their spirits-servants. Writing about Nganasan shamans Gracheva (*ibid.*: 127) writes, “stripped naked, shamans fought on the tops of high hills at night”. Georg F. Heyne (1999: 387) reports about the comparable ritual battles between the Evenki shamans.

Apart from their physical strength, shamans also used the power of their spirits during these struggles. Thus, A. K. D’yachkov (2006: 183) writes that the Chuvan shaman has a

so called evil stone, which is used for shooting at rival shaman [...]. Sometimes, two shamans play using evil power, they shoot at each other with those stones, and when one of them succeeded in hitting his enemy, that enemy falls flat on his back and lies lifeless for several hours. Then he returns to life and for his turn also shoots at the opponent, who also falls the same way and then revives.

Such spiritual contests can sometimes be only partly available for detached onlookers. Some shamans confirmed to me that watching such contests they could see only one of two shamans because the other was hidden in the spiritual space. Chapaka Danilovna assured me that she saw such a fight with her own eyes: “He [a shaman] was alone in the field, but he could also [spiritually] see his rival there. He was fighting with that adversary, rolling on the ground. We did not see that rival, but he did.” Sometimes, as shamanists believe, competing shamans can be observed in the form of fighting animals, which are actually nothing other than the visible forms of the shamans’ spirits. During the fight between their spirits-helpers, shamans might stay far away from each other (for example, in different villages) and sleep or hoe their garden. Scholars have recorded some data on similar views of shamanic duels among other indigenous peoples of Siberia. Thus, Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff (1999: 371) mentions two Evenki shamans who turned into a tiger and a bear and fought in people’s presence while physically they were divided each from the other by a huge distance. According to Ivan Aleksandrovich Khudyakov (2002: 142), hostile Yakut shamans “walk around just like ordinary people, but at that very time their animals [spirits-helpers] are fighting somewhere. The ordinary people certainly do not see it, but the shamans do.”

In other cases, shamanic competition is entirely sunk in the spiritual world and does not become apparent outwardly. Nanai shamans told me that they prefer to fight imperceptibly for those around them. “Neither you, nor I can learn how shamans fight to each other, how they quarrel; they do their part quietly to hide it from everyone” (Niura Sergeevna), so, “in presence of other people, they were quiet; they did not say anything bad” (Olga Egorovna). That feature is not specifically Nanai. Sergei Mikhailovich Shi-

rokogoroff (1999: 371) mentioned similar secret competitions among Evenki shamans, which were entirely hidden in the spiritual realm. According to Shirokogoroff, the contesting shamans could accomplish battles and murders not only during their waking hours: they also compete in the fighting form of competition at night while they are asleep.

#### COMPETITION AS A MEANS OF FRIGHTENING RIVALS

Meanwhile, the public shamanic competition with numerous audience and supporters has its advantage over the secret ones. It solves the important task of bringing pressure on spectators and forming public opinion concerning the power of the contending parties; and, which is especially important, it frightens shamans' potential rivals. In tales, the organiser of the competition calls people to participate in the games because of fear of his personal opponent. Trusting to prevent his possible attack, he tries to frighten the opponent by demonstrating victories over the numerous guests. The initiator of the competition, the flying Yurgi *mergen*, praises himself saying that he is the best among all the people (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 149). Another motivator of the games "throws [her rivals] in such a way that their hips broke. She throws them in such a way that their arms broke." Before the decisive duel, "the fine fellow shouted in such a way that all the *mergen* [the guests who came to participate in the games] fell flat on their backs" (Ivan Torokovich). In the tale recorded by Orest Petrovich Sunik, the agreement of the competition was to raise the heavy stone. As soon as the hero came, the organiser of the competition started vigorously demonstrating his incredible abilities.

Oho, the man is approaching [...], he is holding seven people in one hand and nine people in the other. He has pierced those people all the way through and is approaching and carrying them that way. The audience looks at him, how extraordinary he is; he is wearing a silver skirt and a gold dress. Having approached, he scattered around those people, seven people from one hand and nine people from another one; then he quickly grabbed that huge stone and strongly rose it up. (Sunik 1985: 122)

Demonstrating such unique strength, the master does not leave to the hero any chance of success in demonstrating physical strength, and then the hero changes the conditions of the competition, using shamanic techniques, and wins.

Frightening rivals by demonstrating power is also typical of shamanic praxis. From time to time, shamans fight each other in order to show the power of their spirits (Jochelson 1926: 212) and enter into competition directly using the process of performing their rituals. Nikolai Petrovich told me that he attended the healing ceremony performed by three Nanai shamans. One of them, Pilkha, who was the eldest, sent Molo, the youngest, along the invisible spiritual road to search for a client's soul; secretly "he sent some sort of a dream in front of him". As Molo later explained, it had become very dark before him. Molo was frightened and stopped singing, and Pilkha laughed being satisfied by showing to everyone that he was more powerful shaman than Molo. (Bulgakova 2013) During another shamanic ceremony, when a Nanai shaman was going around the houses of his or her patients, it sometimes happens that in one of the houses he was as if stopped by some odd power. Vera Chubovna says:

Having come into a house, he is shamanising, shamanising, but is not able to leave the place. It means that someone in that house is also a shaman. As I remember, it happened quite often. My grandfather was a shaman. Once a shaman-woman came into his place, she was shamanising, shamanising, but could not leave. Then she said, "so and so", she said to my grandfather, "why do not you let me go out?"

Ivan Torokovich praised himself, saying that when another shaman-woman started shamanising, he was able to learn about it though physically he was far from her. He used this ability to block her shamanic road in the spiritual space, impeding her.

When she is shamanising, I can tease her and play jokes on her, I can block her shamanic road! If she feels it, she would say, "Why are you playing this way? Open my road!" Then I can do it as well [...]. I am such a joker! You must prove either you are a real shaman or not!

As my informants explained, in the spiritual world there is a peculiar podium similar to the one where they reward winners of the sporting competitions.

There is a shamanic tree which all shamans can see when they shamanise. Having assumed the aspect of birds, the shamans perch on the tree's branches to look around at their familiar companions, the other bird-shamans, who are also perched on the same tree. On that tree, the shamans can find out who of them are currently stronger or weaker. The weaker shamans alight in the lower branches of the tree, but the more powerful ones are able to reach the higher branches [...]. Some of the successful shamans, who perched on the higher branches, are not able to resist the temptation to express their scorn regarding the shamans who have perched lower. Ivan Torokovich condemned one shaman-woman: "She told us that she perched high and that from her high branch, she dropped her excrement onto those who were lower [...]. She considers herself to be better and higher than the other shamans, because she could alight higher, and not lower. She explained it to us that way. She perches there and drops her excrements onto the rest of the shamans!" (Bulgakova 2013)

One of the typical ways in which shamans use not only demonstrate their strength, but also create a special impression upon those around them, is, on the contrary, firstly to imitate pretended weakness and feebleness. Shaman Olga Egorovna said that shamans are "artful and you will never guess who exactly is the most powerful among them". When shaman meets his or her colleague (also in the spiritual world), he can pretend to be very weak, "he drags himself along like a decrepit dog", to provoke his rival into the wrong actions. Pretending to be weak gives shaman possibility to win over the opponent with much bigger effect.

Well, how cunning he was! I was a fool, I saw that he was weak and what I did? Had I trodden on him or what? Had I hit him? Only later, he has shown his real power [...]. However, I, a fool, thought: "I am a hero! Let me crush him!"

The tale hero acts in a similar way. Before a competition he pretends to be weak and worthy of contempt. The hero of Ivan Torokovich's tale having come to the games takes a place near the women, which for a man is considered very shameful. In the tale, recorded by O. P. Sunik (1985: 113), before the hero entered the competition, he "blew,

and turned into an unhappy one, he became bold, all over covered with pus, such very bad one; he became a very dirty one". The weaker those heroes seem before the games, the bigger is the effect of their subsequent victory.

#### PAYMENT FOR DEFEAT

Not only is disinformation concerning the capacities of the hero in tale typical, but the tale also hides the main reasons forcing the personages to participate in competition. There is a striking inconsistency between what the tale reports concerning the personages' motivations for going to the place of competition, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, what tale says about the results of the competition. The invitation to participate in the games looks like a harmless boast of superiority, a wish just to play and measure swords: "Well, let us try our prentice hand!" (Sunik 1958: 114) "It would be good to find a strong person to compete with!" (Avrorin 1986: 138) The forthcoming winner leaves for a journey to the game place without any serious motivation. He just joins other people: "there was a boat moving upstream", all people go; they say there will be a competition. One of them said to the master: "I would like to ask your son to be my friend" and to go to the competition as well. (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 63) However, the result of loss in games is so significant that it influences the freedom and even life of all the numerous losers. The organiser of the competition (the winner) takes all the losers as his servants and makes them to leave for their villages in order to bring to and to set in the winner's place all his fellow villagers (congeners). The Nanai elders affirm that gathering people under the winner's authority previously took place among the Nanai in reality.

That one who is stronger, can remain alive. That one, who is weaker, must die. If someone has won, he takes to his place all the people from the village of the loser. He has all of them in tow. It was so in reality [...]. If it was not so in reality, there would certainly not be such tales. (Ivan Torokovich)

The winner of tale games not only submits people, who for some reason agreed with no complaint. He also often kills the losers, who do not even try to resist.

In Alexey Kisovich's tale, a beauty (the elder sister) who has just come out on top over two men, plucked at those two mens' hair and dragged them towards her house because they could not outrun her while she was skiing. "Look, dear!" She said to her youngest sister. "I have caught them by their heads and was carrying them when their heads tore from their bodies! It is a bad job! What to do?" "Okay", the elder sister said. She tied the heads and put them on the threshold: one inside and the other outside. "Let everybody know what I have done!" (Bulgakova 2013)

The hero of one of the tales competes in magic with a girl-shaman. She threw at him in turn a knife and a needle. However, the hero, who had powerful spirits-helpers, managed to evade them and threw them back. The knife and the needle pierced right into the girl's face. Then the girl-shaman clapped her hands, and the hero's dress caught fire. Having managed with fire, the hero in his turn clapped his hands, and then thrust the girl's head into the hole in the pole in the middle of the room.

She had stuck there [...]. The girl was crying; the tears flowed down her cheeks. The fine young man forced her to look at him. She did. Fie-fie [he blew] and clapped his hands. The girl easily pulled out her head, but her legs themselves rose and stuck to the ceiling; her head was hanging down. Then he said: "Girl, you wanted to kill me, but now you will dry out like a dried pike, you will dry out like a dried carp," he said it and went out. (Sunik 1985: 123–124)

Nanai shamanists told me that not only in the tales, but also in reality did shamanic competitions result in death of a loser. If the rivals-shamans were physically far from each other, and they both just dreamt their duel, people could not watch the duel itself, but could physically observe the death of the loser. For instance, the shaman-loser unexpectedly fell down "as if someone had shot at him from a gun" for no any visible reasons, or his body suddenly became "all over covered with wounds as though someone invisible had beaten him, and then he died" (Chapaka Danilovna). Some information about similar shamanic encounters was also recorded among the other Siberian indigenous peoples. Thus, V. L. Seroshevskiy (2011: 267) wrote that being in competition, Yakut athlete-shamans, or to say more exactly, their spirits-helpers

can grapple with each other and lie this way for several months or even years, being unable to conquer one another. Then the people who are the owners of those spirits [...] become heavily sick, until one of them would die and free his rival.

The shamanic ability to kill people distantly was used in military practice. Thus, Dolgan shamans together with military men (*косуун*) participated in competitions of "bloody nature, they shot at each other using arrows with iron points" (Popov 1934: 119). The competitions, in which shamans participated and which led to the deaths of the losers, were part of common warfare; and, vice versa, warfare was often conducted in the form of competition. However, what distinguished competition from warfare was the certain regalement (announcement of place and time of meeting, fixing the tasks the participants should accomplish, etc.). This contrasts to factual absence of rules in the course of military conflict: attack without warning was typical, but at the same time this is also similar to shamanic spiritual competition: shamans also rushed to attack their rivals without notification.

#### WHY DOES THE LOSER NOT TRY TO AVOID CAPTIVITY AND DEATH?

There are some tales in which the killing of the losers is delayed, and in which the losers' strange submission and lack of any attempt to avoid death is especially obvious. In the Nanai tale *Yurgi mergen*, early in the morning the hero competes with Yurgi mergen skiing and hunting an elk (see Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 151–153): "Over there in the forest, there is an elk. Let us go and catching it. Let us compete to see who will be the first to catch it and kill it." Only after the competition is over and the participants have returned and finished their dinner "in the middle of the night" does Yurgi mergen speak to the hero, who has won the victory, begging: "My friend, do not kill me, have pity!" Nevertheless, the hero grasps Yurgi mergen's hair and takes him outside. He

tosses Yurgi mergen about, flinging him against a rock and tearing him into three parts.

The only attempt the loser makes to resist death is his lamentable and usually unsuccessful begging for mercy and suggestion that he be taken as a slave instead. "Eh, I only worry about my life. Will I not be able to fetch water, to chop firewood? Will I not be able to dust the floor?" (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 31–33) In another tale, the people, who have already taken part in the competition instruct the novices this way: "If you tell her [the organiser of the competition] not to kill you, she will not kill you" (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 67).

If you tell her "I am not able to win, I am going to become nothing", she will at once agree and will not kill you. However if you say: "I am not going to become your slave", she will swallow you right away. (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 69)

To exchange loss of life for loss of freedom is the best that the losers can hope for: not one of them even tries to avoid punishment as such, and as the winner can even leave them for a while with no control; their obedience seems to be strange. Only in one tale known to me does the winner, a little boy, order the loser, an old man, to bring him all his fellow villagers, and after that he cuts the old man's nose and ears: "Wherever you go, I will find and recognise you by those cuts!" (Sunik 1958: 114) In other similar episodes, the losers voluntarily and with no control leave for their villages and readily bring their fellow villagers to the winner.

The obedience of the losers shows that victory in competition results in something important, guaranteeing the fulfilment of the winner's wishes and making any further control over the loser pointless. Tale passes over this in silence, but examining it in the context of shamanic praxis we can notice that the result of shamanic games is resolved long before they start. It is resolved at the moment when the forthcoming winner provides himself with a proper spirit-helper, which gives him potential, or when that upcoming winner influences the spirit of his rival, depriving him from his spiritual support. For example, in the same tale, *Yurgi mergen*, the night before the competition the hero puts a glass of vodka on the sleeping chest of Yurgi mergen. This way he lured a small rat (Yurgi mergen's spirit-helper) out of his nose and killed it.

The rat approached the glass of vodka and [our] fine fellow grabbed it [...]. He had grabbed and crushed, killed it. In the morning, when the rivals started competing, Yurgi mergen said, "My friend, I don't feel well" [...]. He could not ski, his skis knocked *kutek-kutek* [with such a sound] [...]. It was over. He could not do anything. He became like that. (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 149–151)

Some of my informants confirmed that the shaman-enemies used their souls to manipulate the situation in a similar way, and they know how a person feels in such a case: "They took my soul away. I was at school and suddenly I got terribly sick. It happened in a flash. I was feeble; they took me to the hospital in an ambulance." (Zinaida Nikolaevna)<sup>12</sup>

Victory in competition gives the winner authority over losers' souls and the possibility to subjugate them on the spiritual level. Sergey Nikolayevich Stebnitskiy (2000) wrote that the Koryak shaman-winners "took away strength" from shaman-losers. Shamans gathered in one dugout, or *yaranga*, ate fly agaric mushrooms, and after becoming intoxicated, they "measured their swords". "The more powerful shamans took away power from the weaker shamans. This way they killed their rivals and became stronger;



they live as much longer and have as much strength and life *вюнатгырн'ын* ('life', 'existing', 'law') as had those who die." (Ibid.: 200) This probably relates to sacrificing the loser, who was offered to the spirit-helpers of the winner. If it is so, the physical death of the loser could be delayed, although it remains unavoidable. According to Matvey Nikolayevich Khangalov's (2004: 98) data, the Buryat winners of the games sacrificed beaten rivals to the spirits. The Siberian indigenous peoples performed not only bloody, but also bloodless, animal sacrifices. They dedicated animals to spirits who kept them alive.<sup>13</sup> It is possible to assume that earlier shaman-winners would also dedicate (submit) the losers' souls to their personal shamanic spirit-helpers. This could be done either by means of blood sacrifice of the losers (as in the case mentioned by M. N. Khangalov), or by means of dedicating the losers to spirits without killing them (bloodless sacrifice). This type is indeed the sacrifice that made the living loser dependent and submissive.

#### THE INTEREST OF THE MASTER OF COMPETITION: WAITING TO BE DEFEATED

It would be possible to suppose that the master (organiser) of the tale competition, who sits in the middle of the heaps of human bones, is just interested in enslaving and killing as many people as possible. Nevertheless, from some tales one can clearly see that killing people is merely a side effect of the event. The master of the competition him- or herself suffers from being invincible and paradoxically and strangely enough he or she is fixed upon the wish to be at last defeated. In one of the tales, after all the competitive guests were beaten, people began to look for others who would agree to fight against their shaman.

The shaman's daughter was in tears: "Instead of these men [who lost the game], will you, please, come up! If there is not such a man found, *my father will die because there is no one who can win the fight against him* [emphasis added]." (Sunik 1958: 115)

In the tale *The son of a horse*, a woman, who competes with the numerous guests, is in trouble: she is possessed by an evil spirit, and between the duels, they keep her

nine times nine tied in an iron cage. The hero, who finally managed to beat her, threw her that way that the iron floor burst. [From the crack] with sound *kingiar* there appeared an old woman. "Oh, that child has rescued me!" (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 69)

Beating the possessed woman in fact turns into healing her by freeing her from a malevolent spirit. Thus, holding games is a means to attract many people and to find among them the right person to exorcise the malevolent spirit and to solve the problem of the organiser of the games.

Another problem that the competition organiser would try to solve is his need for a shaman-ally who would help him against his enemy, whom he fights in his dreams.<sup>14</sup> Nanai shamans confess that they never voluntarily agree to help other shamans in the struggle against their enemies, because otherwise those enemies would take revenge on them and against their descendants for a number of generations.

Even the powerful shaman would never undertake it. Even the powerful one would not touch it, because otherwise he himself would get an enemy. He must not! If he interfered, the enemy would learn everything about it. A shaman fights against other shamans, and one of them dies, but no one from the outside would agree to help. Nobody would meddle in it. Nobody would touch it. Nobody would wish to get some additional adversaries. (Chapaka Danilovna)

Nevertheless, the shaman in danger has the means not only to find the proper person, but also to force that person to agree to fight against his or her enemy. This means is competition, which will gather many people (shamans), including the required powerful shaman. If, in a tale, a loser is inferior to a winner in power just a little, the winner can make him become his ally and name him "my younger brother". Such is the plot of Ivan Torokovich's tale *Kopiaru*.

In the other tales, the competition organiser searches for a shaman, a potential supporter, and bribes him by giving him his daughter with no dowry (see Bulgakova 2013). In this case, he would search for a person who is more powerful than he is and who would be able to beat him (and correspondently later to beat his enemy). In other words, he would aim not to win but to be defeated because this defeat would give him a chance to overcome his much more important troubles. However, it is risky and the more powerful hero-guest does not agree in all tales. In some of them, he kills the father (the organiser of the competition) and marries the daughter, or instead of getting married, prefers to kill both the father and his daughter.

#### COMPETITION AS A MEANS OF MEETING AND KILLING AN ENEMY MET IN DREAMS

Other than organising a competition, a person can search for a proper healer or for an ally; he can also look for an enemy, that is for a hostile shaman whom he or she wants to liquidate. My informants are convinced that all shamans have enemies with whom they fight in their dreams, although the shamans usually do not confess that they are fighting. It is only by observing them and by seeing the effects of their fighting can one arrive at this conclusion (Shirokogoroff 1935: 372). Fighting mainly takes place in the spirit world. Because, as in a night dream, "everything is seen indistinct, and it is possible to mix up an enemy with someone else", shamans can be interested in clearly identifying the person who threatens them in the spiritual world, and in meeting that person in the waking hours. A public competition that attracts many participants can help in reaching that goal, but the shaman does not achieve this in every tale. In some texts, on the contrary, he comes off second best, and the advantage falls to his rival. In his turn, the rival also sets analogical secret tasks to solve by means of games.

In the *Yurgi mergen* story the hero suggests to Yurgi mergen that they compete in skiing because he supposes that Yurgi mergen is the person who by a miracle has emptied all his barns and deprived him of property. After the hero killed an elk (the hypostasis of Yurgi mergen) in competition, he was able to regain his property. The plots of Nanai tales are deeply intertwined with shamanic memories of their personal spiritual experiences. The storyteller and shaman Olga Egorovna, who narrated *Yurgi mergen* to me affirmed that she was acquainted with a Nanai shaman-woman who was able to turn

into an elk just like Yurgi mergen. That woman died because an alien shaman started contesting with her in skiing and exactly as in the tale. During the games, he saw an elk (the shaman-woman's spirit-helper) and hit it hard with his ski stick. After returning to the village, he saw that "the shaman-woman was sitting at home and groaning. He actually hit [not the elk, but] her, and she died because of that [...]. It was in reality." To the question of why the shaman commenced a competition with that woman, Olga Egorovna answered that the woman was his enemy, and by means of competition he picked an occasion to beat her. She constantly "took away [the souls-shadows of] his children. A child falls sick and dies, another falls sick and dies." Therefore, he "rejoiced at her death."

#### IS IT POSSIBLE TO REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN COMPETITION?

The heaps of human bones around the tale competition organiser, or the number of previous unlucky participants who had to settle around his dwelling, clearly shows that the guest's chance of victory is extremely small. Why then does no one who has just heard about the competition try to escape participating in such a risky action? The storytellers explain their readiness to participate by the fact that the person who calls them to compete is always a shaman. In reality, in any life circumstances, people try not to contradict shamans in anything, because it could be unsafe. Everyone tries to please a shaman, to play up to and wait upon him or her "because of the mystical fear in front of shaman's scary strength and power" (Lopatin 2011: 253). The call to register at the place of competition is itself a shaman's attack, and as competitions are mainly held on the spiritual level, neglecting that call does not defend anybody from a spiritual duel with that shaman. The invitation itself is the beginning of the fight. The person challenged to compete with a shaman is under attack from the very moment of the challenge and has no chance to escape the duel. "If someone is attacking and does not answer, he will be killed, he will die" (Ivan Torokovich).

#### CONCLUSION: COMPETITION AS A PARTICULAR CASE OF THE INTER-SHAMANIC CONTEST

As with all other tales, the Nanai shamanic tale is based on the dynamic collision of personages, their conflicts, controversy and confrontation, as well as the inherent incompatibility between the personages. The tale competition is just one of the manifestations of such general competitiveness. In addition, the Nanai shamanic tale is a result of shamanic praxis, for which competition is extremely significant. The very relationship between shamans and their spirits-helpers is antagonistic. The first contact with the spirits comes at the stage of mastering them and becoming a shaman is in some way a manifestation of this possession (The Nanai call this condition *goria*, 'madness'). Spirits torment a shaman-to-be, and he or she fights against them trying either to escape from them (that is to recover) or to triumph over them (to subdue them temporarily and to become a shaman).<sup>15</sup> In some tales exactly such a struggle between a shaman (the hero) and his spirits is presented in the form of this competition. In the tale recorded

by Sunik (1958: 137), the golden hare (the potential hero's spirit-helper) challenges the hero: "Let us compete. I will run round that tree nine times; if you do not catch me, you will go mad." In addition, the inclination to conflict and tension is also typical to relationships between shamans. Conflict lays the very foundation of their relationship, both between themselves and with the spirit world. On the one hand, one spirit-helper can serve only one person,<sup>16</sup> and on the other hand, shamans constantly try to increase their opportunities and power by means of collecting new spirits. As a result, shamans are permanently tempted to increase their supremacy by struggling against other shamans and seizing spirits from each other. Another objective circumstance that creates tension between shamans is situated in the very principles of their healing praxis. Shamans are convinced that alien spirits-helpers can be unsafe and dangerous for them. However, as shamans have to heal alien people, they constantly have to intrude into the sphere that is engaged by alien spirits and controlled by foreign shamans. This course is fraught with forced inter-shaman tension and serious conflicts. One of my informants defined shamanic activity as "permanent competition".

All contests in Nanai shamanic tales are connected with the fact that tale contest is one of the manifestations of the savage confrontation between shamans that happens on the spiritual level and that are hidden from outside observers. On that same spiritual level the winner oppresses the loser not physically, but spiritually. Correspondingly, the Nanai tale shows that power in the physical world is obtained not as a result of the personal qualities of the participants, but as a consequence of having 'better and more powerful' spirits: the real competition is performed in the Nanai tale not between people, but between their spirits-helpers.

## NOTES

1 Traditional shamanic praxis was still active in the 1980s and up to the mid 1990s, during the initial stage of my field research; from the 2000s it was replaced by neo-shamanic praxis, which is no longer connected to the tradition of storytelling. The field material for my research was collected during almost-yearly field seasons between 1980 and 2014 in the Nanai villages, Khabarovsk Krai, Russia. It was audio-recorded from the different shamans and shamanists not only in Russian, but also in the Nanai language with follow-up transcription and translation.

2 For more detail concerning creating of tales in the context of shamanic praxis, see Bulgakova 2011 and 2013.

3 The information recorded during such interviews can be divided into two parts. It is personal shamans' memorates or, another way, their *primary utterances*, their revelations concerning past and present personal experience and shamanists' *secondary utterances*, i.e., the retelling of events happened to another person, in case if that informant was received from that person directly. Shamans' revelations about their spiritual experience often contain information that seems to be abnormal and improbable. In some details (though it happens rarely), it even surprisingly resembles some tale motifs. It makes it necessary to call to mind distinction between memorates (personal information) and fabulates (folkloric narratives). First, they differ by the form of their existing. Among the shamanists, discussing shamans' personal affairs is usually limited by the circle of very few initiated ones, if is ever discussed at all, whereas fabulates freely pass from one person to another like any other folklore texts. Secondly, difference concerns the content. Shamanic tales narrate about anonymous personages, who act in uncertain time in indeterminate place, but memorates give exact information about names, time and places. Improb-

ability of some shamans' utterances can be explained by the fact that during their praxis they deal with "an undercover layer, which is usually hidden from the eyes of a detached onlooker" (Funk and Kharitonova 2012: 122). However, for our purposes, it is enough to know that the shamans themselves consider it to be trustworthy and, whenever it is possible, to constrain from any correlations and ill-wresting interpretations. A researcher should not mix the notions of trustworthiness of the story and of its reality. What seem to be stories, which are invented and have nothing to do with real world, can be accepted as real stories for the bearers of shamanic tradition.

4 Starting from approximately 1930s, when the Soviet rule was establishing, similar practices, like all other populous rituals, were prohibited and replaced by so called Soviet feasts. Concerning the regular, non-shamanic competitions wrote Bel'dy (1989), Prokopenko (2003).

5 The idea of the spiritual territories, expressed by shamans, is close to the interpretation of shamanic space uttered by Vladimir Bogoraz (1923, cited by Znamenski 2007: 115): shamanic space is "an additional measure of the physical world". Tatiana Bulgakova (2014) also wrote about the Nanai shamans' conception of the spiritual territories.

6 For more details see Bulgakova 2013.

7 This fact makes us doubt that the Nanai shamanic tale belongs to fairytales. Taking into account its heroic nature, Yuriy Sem (1986) called it a heroic tale.

8 *Mergen* means in Nanai 'fine fellow, the hero of tales'.

9 *Sazhen* is an unit of measurement = 2.1336 meters (7 feet).

10 This important fact is mentioned in tales: "They brought a big pig, the pig that was laid up for the [sacrifice in] competition" (Sunik 1985: 111).

11 At that time, when I had the possibility to collect material among the Nanai, they preferred to compete secretly exclusively "in the spiritual territories". It was not possible for ordinary people to observe such competitions.

12 Manipulations with spirits and souls of the rivals on the eve of games is only one side of shamanic reality, rich by competitiveness.

"Shamans fight in dreams. When an alien shaman beats the *sewen* (spirit) of our shaman [...], when he strongly drives it into a stone [...], our shaman is not able to shamanize any more. For him, it only remains to die [...], but we cannot notice it [...]. In the morning they find him already dead." (Ivan Torokovich)

In other words, if a participant of shamanic competition manages to 'kill' the spirit of his rival, the loser becomes dependent on the winner's spirit, and since then, he would not be able to resist. The similar situation is typical for shamanic tale. In some of them, during the duel between the hero and his rival, the hero can win only because his spirits bring to him *ergen* the creature, in which the rival's soul-life is placed. In the tale *Khalatton mokhan* old man, *ergen* hero's rival, is placed in the half-baked nestling. The hero's spirits-birds bring that nestling to the hero, when he was fighting against that old man.

Then the hero pulls out the nestling's wings, and the old man's arms broke off. He tore nestling's legs, and old man's legs broke off. Eh, all his arms and legs were over there. "Eh, dear, now you will see your back made by your father." He turned his head face toward his back. Eh, after that the old man began to cry: "Look here, dear, though I killed your father, but I did not torment him that way, when I was killing him," he said [...]. Eh, fine fellow killed him after he tormented him that way. (Bel'dy and Bulgakova 2012: 63)

13 Leonid Vasil'yevich Kostikov (1930) wrote about bloodless sacrifice of reindeer among the Nenets.

14 Scholars repeatedly mentioned that shamans sometimes form coalitions to fight against alien shamans.

Master and novice enter into a spiritual and social alliance, which implies that both partners have to defend each other against hostile shamans and other adversaries (Mader and Gippelhauser 2000: 84). Not infrequently two or three shamans join their power to destroy a fourth (Tret'yakov 1869: 426).

15 If you start shamanising before you defeat the spirits in your dreams (your future helpers), you will just die and that is it! Those people who have not won in their dreams and simply shout in vain, do not recover after they become shamans. However many times they shamanise, they never get better. (Shaman Lingdze)

16 Collective possession of such a spirit manifests only between the generations, meaning that spirits can be inherited.

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# WHEN GHOSTS CAN TALK: INFORMANT REALITY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC POLICY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that researchers doing ethnography can fail in their commitment to take what their informants say seriously. This often occurs, despite ethnographers' best intentions, when informant statements depart radically from Western distinctions between what is real and what is imaginary. When informants talk about things like ghosts, witches and magic, there is a tendency to apply analytic strategies which translate these informant statements about the world so they conform to Western understandings about what is possible in the world and what is not. This article describes for example some commonly applied interpretive moves used in dealing with informant statements about other-than-human persons. The analytic models and categories we use in these cases are equivalent to often tacit and taken-for-granted Western strategies for dealing with 'non-existent things' and these make it impossible to take native statements at face value. We could turn the situation around in ethnographic analyses if we put under the microscope our own Western taken-for-granted assumptions and did so by taking definitions of reality, community, and the person radically different from our own seriously.

KEYWORDS: Ghosts • non-human persons • interpretation • ontology • epistemology

## INTRODUCTION

[...] as a pharmacist with a rigorous scientific training I can tell you that ghosts do not exist, except in the imagination of neurotic people probably in need of antidepressants (Roberts 2002: 175).

Magical practices and practitioners have a legitimate place in post socialist rural northern Romania.<sup>1</sup> Certain magical practitioners are even seen as pillars of the community. Religious practitioners are, in turn, sometimes perceived as a threat to moral order: some of these orthodox priests are even known in their own communities and beyond as witch priests. Their actions often prompt speculation and gossip about the extent and source of their powers. One such priest runs a private clinic for individuals who are epileptic or possessed by demons. In an interview, he told a story of a person who came to him with 375,000 demons inside. When asked how he knew these things about demons, he said, "you find out [...] by asking the [possessed] person and the demons will reply". As for what demons do inside a person, the priest said that they play games there in the person's belly. Assuming that the priest meant psychological games or manipulation, he was then asked what he meant by this. The priest replied:

They play football, the devils. All the games in the world come from the devil. All the games. There's no game that's not like that. Just look at football, they're all going like ooh, ooh. Such a thing is not something that God screams.

Such statements would generally be (re)interpreted as a moral statement about the state of the soul in Romania, how however for the priest, football represents the temptations and corruptions of the modern capitalist entertainment industry. However, the priest makes what for him are empirical claims about the nature of the world. The priest defends his understanding of events and of the world, in the same way that we do by appealing to first person testimony. For the priest, however, this first person testimony comes from demons.

What would happen to our understanding of the world if our analytical tools allowed us to take what this priest is saying seriously as the statements of fact he intended them to be? When doing ethnography, there is the strong normative commitment to take what informants say seriously. This is not just a methodological imperative. Encountering realities different from ours can be a powerful and challenging experience. However, as ethnographers we often report these statements in ways that undermine the reality of what informants tell us. There is a kind of mechanism at work that often leads us to take informant statements about 'supernatural' things like ghosts, witches, or magic as religious belief or as symbolic statements. Treating informant statements as folk beliefs implies that they contain logical, cognitive, and perceptual errors (see, for example, Deeley 2004). While folk belief seems apparently neutral implying only something about distribution within a particular human population, these beliefs, we see, are more socially embedded in action than articulated as something like a series or sets of propositions. In other words, when informants' statements about reality and its contents do not correspond to our own, we tend to respond as though these individuals enact and report on the world differently simply because their reality testing is somehow deficient. We often proceed as though both our readers and our informants must equally subscribe to the logic that things like ghosts and witches do not really exist.

This position has much to do with the kinds of academic and theoretical language available to us when we publish stories from the field. We do have the language of parapsychology but this is largely discredited. The same is true today of models and languages that have emerged from the anthropology of consciousness, a subfield within modern American anthropology. In both cases, to rely on their models and languages does little more than cast doubt on the author's credulity and creditability:

The observability of the supernatural has not been considered an important epistemic problem in folklore. The starting point has been, and probably still is, that serious practitioners of science do not believe in the supernatural, do not see or hear things that do not exist or at least refrain from bringing these into research. But neither are we in the habit of negating or trivialising informants' experiences, perceptions, or encounters with supernatural phenomena. (Knuuttila 2012: 39; translated from Finnish)

Notwithstanding this, the languages of academia are implicitly committed to empiricism and hence to a reality shaped very much in our terms. Even the analytic language used by those who believe that reality and truth are socially and culturally constructed, reflects this bias. As academics, we are a theoried class and the theoretical languages in which we write have an intellectual history that links them to the rise of capitalism and the growth of science within it. Both of these inform Western epistemology and ontology – what is perceived and thought to be real. Yet, for the ethnographer there should also be an epistemological commitment to try to recover the ontological order that makes things like demons, witches and ghosts logical and reasonable (see Holbraad 2008).

This paper will illustrate some of the ways in which our own culture stands in the way of what we wish to achieve analytically. In particular, it suggests some ways in which we could take native statements about things we ourselves do not believe in seriously. Perhaps one way to proceed here is to turn our gaze on ourselves, i.e., look carefully at the logic and foundations of our own belief systems and so learn how to take definitions of reality, community, and the person radically different from our own seriously.

## RHETORICAL MOVES IN DEALING WITH GHOSTS

### *Cultural Heritage and Evolutionary Approaches: Past Traditions and Beliefs*

The early literature on other-than-human persons is for the most part a collection of folklore: legends and memorates (for both definitions and examples, see Honko 1964; Dégh and Vazsonyi 1974). Archives of folk traditions and oral narratives were compiled for the purposes of preserving and documenting cultural heritage. Informant narratives of their experiences simply represented 'tradition'. Informant stories were often seen as directly representing the community's past and more explicitly its past magical-religious beliefs. This distance from the present was seen as unproblematic, inherent and explained by the boundaries this literature drew between magic, myths, shamanism, institutionalised religion. However, discussion and interpretation becomes necessary when accounts of other-than-human persons are given in the present tense.

The 19th century literature on other-than-human persons explained supernatural beliefs as intrinsic features of pre-modern and preliterate societies. The naturalistic evolutionary view of human culture and psyche assumed that seeing ghosts is a feature (and error) of the savage mind:

It remains to sum up in few words the doctrine of souls, in the various phases it has assumed from first to last among mankind. In the attempt to trace its main course through the successive grades of man's intellectual history, the evidence seems to accord best with a theory of its development somewhat to the following effect. At the lowest levels of culture of which we have clear knowledge, the notion of a ghost-soul animating man while in the body, and appearing in dream and vision out of the body, is found deeply ingrained. There is no reason to think that this belief was learnt by savage tribes from contact with higher races, nor that it is a relic of higher culture from which the savage tribes have degenerated; for what is here treated as the primitive animistic doctrine is thoroughly at home among savages, who appear to hold it on the very evidence of their senses, interpreted on the biological principle which seems to them most reasonable. [...] Thenceforth, as we explore human thought onward from savage into barbarian and civilized life, we find a state of theory more conformed to positive science, but in itself less complete and consistent. Far on into civilization, men still act as though in some half-meant way they believed in souls or ghosts of objects, while nevertheless their knowledge of physical science is beyond so crude a philosophy. (Tylor 1871: 499–501)

David J. Hufford (2003) notes that when it comes to studying folklore or folk beliefs today, many 'discontinued' intellectual concepts continue to be employed, reflecting the difficulties in finding adequate theories and methods to account for 'supernatural' beliefs. One recurrent tendency is to treat magic, spirits and ghosts as errors in cognition whose imprimatur can be traced back to Edward Burnett Tylor. Srdjan Smajic (2004), for example, traces how shifts in theories of vision have altered what defines (and explains) a ghost across time. Although Smajic and others like him do not seem to realise it, this reduces ghosts (and experiences with them) to nothing more than a particular failure or error in perception.

When researchers observe the persistence of ghosts in the today's societies, the literature on other-than-human persons applies a wide range of psychological, symbolic, cognitive, sociological and narrative-textual interpretations to explain the (seemingly illogical) continued presence of these other-than-human persons. Alfred Irving Hallowell (1960), who coined the term other-than-human persons, argued that it was less biased than any ethnographic synonym, for example, ghost or spirit, and consequently helped us to better 'place' these persons in any human community. When ghosts are recognised as having a social and cultural existence in the present, they are seen mainly as one expression (or proof) of the potential range of human experiential worlds or indicative paradoxically of either discontinuity or continuity within traditional communities (Taussig 1987). The last position has much in common with early, i.e. 19th century, anthropology and parallel attempts at folkloristic and archival salvage. What makes this gambit appear to be modern (see Taussig 1980) is when that things like ghosts and magic and/or their 'revival' and 'return' are explained as parts of a community's more general attempt at the preservation, reconstruction and re-innovation of its past and culture.

This happens even in highly cited research like Michael Taussig's on the shift(s) to exchange value among South American lowland peasantry (1977). When Taussig turns here to things like a baptised bill that can return with interest to its owner, he resorts to 'magic' dismissively as an explanation. Granted that Taussig does not invoke animism as an explanation here, but because no one believes in this anymore, not even his informants. Taussig goes on to describe the process by which things like a baptised bill 'work' as essentially a form of mystification. The problem is that Taussig's informants are quite clear about how and why such events occur – and this mystification is what Taussig himself attributes and attaches to these events (ibid.: 141). What we find, at best, in accounts of ghosts today are a series of shifts, as in Stephen Greenblatt's study of 17th-century ghosts, between the "the touch of the real" (Greenblatt 1999: 22) and the "fact" a ghost "materializes [...] out of a particular kind of social experience" (ibid.: 23), which eventually consigns ghosts to something outside the empirical world.

To go on, ghost stories are also commonly studied as a form of micro-history or mental history, with the assumption that social and cultural conditions may change but the modes of thought deeply ingrained in storytelling tradition practices still influence everyday life, especially in storytelling contexts. Regardless of the theoretical position one takes today regarding ghosts, the assumption is that other-than-human persons are nothing more than symbolic productions – things that stand for something other than, well, ghosts.

#### *Personal and Collective Psychology: Madness and Traumatic Events*

One way of explaining ghosts, not so popular among ethnographers today but still found from time to time, is madness (a lay diagnosis) or one form of psychiatric illness or another (as diagnosed by psychologists or psychiatrists). This can refer to (and include) individual pathologies, or community-level psychological states and traumas. For example, childhood experiences or incidents and behaviours that have somehow broken cultural norms are often-used explanations for individuals or communities who see ghosts (Spiro 1952; 1953).

For Utz Jeggle (2003), beliefs in magic, ghosts and the supernatural simply represent mental illness. Irrational beliefs and behaviours stem from a failure to suppress or transform the raw drives lurking in the unconscious. Jeggle argues that Empirical Cultural Research should not diffuse the borders between normality and illness in the study of folk belief:

Right at the edge between stubbornness of mind and *idée fixe* lie forms of superstition, expressed through magical rituals that can develop into obsessions. Acknowledging the agony of the eccentricity this entails is part of Empirical Cultural Research; it thereby keeps the respective party from being institutionalized, although such mental representations also belong to the area of study of our field. (Jeggle 2003: 75)

One strategy in encountering irrational beliefs is to attempt to understand the situation and environment that gave rise to this madness whether this term is used or some other synonym from the medical or psychological dictionary is employed instead. Seeing and

believing ghosts, in a community, could then be interpreted as a consequence of a particular incident, especially when something traumatic or violent has taken place (Valk 2006).

Another psychological way of explaining spirits and ghosts and other supernatural beings is to interpret them as products of altered states of consciousness that lead eventually to a particular religious worldview. Such explanations have often been seen as something that evolved from the use of psychoactive substances (for example, Lahelma 2008). Hallucinations related to psychoactive substances are often accorded the status of 'inner truths' that cannot be denied or confirmed by outsiders.

I started getting letters from people who were having what they believed to be psychic, paranormal, or spiritual experiences on DXM (dextromethorphan hydrobromide). As time went on, the number of these letters increased, and I received additional information from psychonauts who have used ketamine in paranormal investigations. [...] People *have* asked me about DXM and paranormal experiences, and in general my response has been, "you're on drugs, it's all in your mind". Unfortunately that doesn't really answer any questions, since people are obviously having these experiences, whether they are delusional or not, and nobody seems to have much idea why. [...] It may surprise you to know that there are very good reasons to suspect that paranormal experiences may involve some of the same brain mechanisms affected by DXM. Whether or not these paranormal experiences have any validity outside of the human brain is entirely a question of faith, and I won't try and make that decision for you. (White 2001 [1997])

One reason drug-induced experiences are given some serious consideration (e.g., Griffiths et al. 2006), despite the fact that they are basically defined as hallucinations, is that some studies have shown that all users, regardless of context, tend to report similar sights and experiences. However, this has still not led to much serious consideration (except perhaps by informants themselves) of the validity of the knowledge or beliefs that users receive in altered states of consciousness (for an exception, see Lilly 1972 [1968]).

#### *Sociological Explanations: Social Change and Resistance to Globalisation*

Ülo Valk (2006) tells of how he heard legends about haunted houses and memorates that expressed intimate experience with the appearance of the dead. Valk further sees the reappearance of ghosts in contemporary Estonia as a shift from rationalist traditions of disbelief towards a 'supernaturalist' worldview. With the process of a wholesale reassessment of the Communist regime and its influence on Estonian culture, traditional folk beliefs were to some extent rediscovered. Further according to Valk, the post-Communist social environment in Estonia is rapidly changing and many people find it difficult to adjust. Ghosts and spirits reappeared in order to reanimate important traditional cultural and social norms of Estonian culture. (Ibid.)

Approaches like Valk's assume that supernatural beliefs must be socially relevant if they are to survive and thrive in collective thought and storytelling genres. Although ghosts are almost always something encountered by solitary witnesses in exceptional



circumstances, these kinds of sociological explanations maintain that ghosts can almost always be best interpreted entirely as social figures (Gordon 2004: 8) that represent societal issues such as the tension between cultural heritage and rapid social change.

One of the ways of framing ghosts includes terms such as resistance to the commercialisation and globalisation of culture, resistance to cultural colonialism, and the fight against the dispossession of cultural heritage (for example, Meyer and Pels 2003; Boyd and Thrush 2011). This strategy may not subject native statements to the kind of epistemological and ontological hegemony described above. However, terms that do not refer to empiricist or (cultural) evolutionary positions can still be equally loaded. The use of sociological or historicising terms and explanations can allow researchers to present informant statements that Western empiricism rejects as impossible while at the same time avoiding dealing with them as though they were real. This is because social factors or influence are seen by investigators not only as informing but also trumping these statements, i.e. distorting for one's informants whatever reality these events might have had. In short, references to social memory, social nostalgia or dispossession of cultural heritage, when it comes to the 'impossible' native statements, tends to have the same ontological result, i.e., the displacement of native statements from the real to the imaginary.

### *Social Constructionist Approaches: Storytelling, Narrative, Fiction*

The linguistic turn in the social and cultural sciences and widespread adoption of social constructionism as a theoretical viewpoint in the study of narratives seems to have a close fit to the position that all knowledge and belief systems must be taken seriously and treated as equally plausible. This would seem to solve the problem of ghosts: if ghosts exist in language and culture, they exist as something more than a social and psychological point of reference. However, as Seppo Knuuttila (2012) remarked, even when accepting the position that all belief systems are equally plausible, this is exactly where most scholars still draw a line between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' degrees and/or versions of cultural or epistemic relativism. This is just the problem with Hufford's (1982a) solution, i.e., that if one stands outside one's intellectual and ethnographic tradition (a big if, that), one can come to the one position (another big if) which, according to Hufford, members of a community can hold regarding things like ghosts – that of a believer and an atheist.

There are constructions of reality that are political and culturally functional and meaningful, regardless of their truth status, but this excludes 'irrational' or 'intuitive' constructions that so obviously fall outside the sphere of publicly negotiated facts – at least as we in the West understand these terms. However, if facts and truths are dependent entirely on context and situation, there will be instances where the situation calls for the fictional construction of ghosts, for example, boy/girl scouts around at a camp fire.

When scholars who study folklore and narrative have done studies on ghosts, the main focus has been on the techniques, linguistic devices and speaker/listener relationships that make a story appear an authentic and credible first-hand experience (or not). No matter how diverse the scholars are or what stance they take on genre and experience and the relationship between them, folklorists' studies of narratives tend to

tread a narrow path between the apparently opposed notions of the individual speaker constrained in formulating stories of experiences by cultural linguistic models and resources, and the idea that something actually experienced must precede the storytelling. It is in how one answers this question about prior experience and how this becomes incorporated into any one genre, that Western beliefs about epistemology and ontology can slip in... almost unnoticed.

The social constructionist viewpoint takes the position that anyone wanting to say something, for example, to tell a story or to communicate in any way, has to mobilise existing linguistic resources and cultural narrative forms to do this (Talja 2001). Often, ethnographers find it easy to focus on the storytelling itself, on the success and failure factors in communication, and neglect the question of what is behind the story. It is clear that traditional forms of storytelling are available and mandatory to use in communication. Hufford (1982b) believes that the senses and feelings give birth to stories and beliefs, and not that the existence of stories and beliefs precede what is sensed. Jan Vansina (2009 [1965]) similarly warns against any immediate rejection of the idea that story traditions might be based on observed fact.

#### OTHER-THAN-HUMAN PERSONS AS MEMBERS OF THE WESTERN COMMUNITY OF PERSONS

The hegemony regarding the facts described above has meant that little serious attention has been given to the roles other-than-human persons can have in a Western community.<sup>2</sup> In pre-modern Western usage the term ghost simply meant spirit. This referred to spirits of all kinds and the term had no particular sinister nuances (Bowyer 1980: 177). For Richard Bowyer (*ibid.*: 191), the fact that the word ghost in the West has multiple meanings and uses led him to believe ghosts held multiple places and roles in the West's natural order of things. In his study of medieval ghost stories, Bowyer (*ibid.*: 177) found that ghosts were "an integral part of [an] immense and ordered spiritual world".

In medieval and Renaissance Spain for example, other-than-human persons, particularly apparitions, were seen as parts of the human community and had a distinct place in the moral and religious order (Christian 1981). 19th century collections of Finnish magic portrayed a social world in which both human and other-than-human persons were very much at home (Köngäs-Maranda 1967). Other-than-human persons' language and other attributes such as appearance were well known for members of the community. Communication and interaction between other-than-human persons and human actors was structured by cultural conventions. (*Ibid.*: 91–92)

In a community like this the role of the dead (ghosts) is much like that of an age group (Davis 1974: 327). They appear to the living not only in memory or history, but in actual conversation and exchange as well. Ghosts that visit the living might be the souls of relatives, although they could also be those of friends and even strangers. Such a community of persons remained intact in Europe until the Reformation. (*Ibid.*: 327–328) It is often thought that the growth of Protestantism cut off the dead as an age group, but the rise of Protestantism did not bring an immediate end to social relations between humans and other-than-human persons. For a long time, even until the 1950s in most of Europe, the ontological order of face-to-face communities integrated the natural and the supernatural (Koski and Enges 2010: 22).

The task then is how to understand ghosts and witches not just as belief or imaginative statements but as members of the human community. James M. Nyce's research (1977; 1987; 2014) on the late 19th century Pennsylvania Dutch world shows how notions of community and person can be different from our own. Ghosts formed part of the community and the interrelations between human and other-than-human persons were not exceptions to any social rule. Instead these interactions were intelligible and predictable, to the extent that any socio-cultural interaction is, because they were rule-governed. The problem for members of this community was then not that other-than-human persons actually exist and were part of the community, but how, as with any actor, to best interact with them. This community, further, can be made up of many kinds of other-than-human persons, although here we focus primarily on ghosts. All these other-than-human persons could have competences and appearances different from human persons, but they were also members of the community. Further, the same rule bound obligations that defined person and community were understood and enacted by them too (Bayard 1938; Nyce 1977; 1987). Most 'social' approaches to such a community of persons tend to deny such persons or relationships exist, or, if they exist, state that they are not rule bound. Either gambit simply reduces these communities to something that mirrors the model of the community one finds in either the West's folk or academic sociology.

For instance, politeness forms made it necessary for one person to greet another when they met. This was not simply a matter of courtesy or good manners but also served to affirm that both parties were persons. If you met a ghost, you were obliged to greet it, otherwise it could become, like anyone else, offended and angry. In speaking to a ghost, moreover, as with any other person, it was necessary to discover its intentions (Gandee 1971: 76, 160). However, the fact that there were only some inherently good and bad spirits made this necessary and perhaps more problematic than with other members of the community.

Several verbal forms of greeting existed that could help reveal the true nature, motives and intentions of any person (Brendle and Troxell 1944: 153; Gandee 1971: 68, 74). If both speakers used the greeting form correctly, then they were both Christians who shared a common body of intentions and expectations. If a ghost remained silent or did not respond the same way to the greeting, it could be an evil and potentially dangerous spirit existing outside of the community of Christian persons. It might therefore be dangerous and potentially have knowledge and power others in the community could only roughly estimate. Further, such a persons might not be inclined to show any (moral) restraint in how they used their power or knowledge (Nyce 1977). When confronted by such a spirit, one had to attempt to break off the interaction as quickly and as politely as possible, which involved using forms of magic that almost everyone in the community knew (Gandee 1971: 45; Nyce 1977). Still for some in the community meeting such other-than-human persons presented something like a strategic opportunity because, if one had sufficient power and knowledge, spirits like these could be harnessed to increase and extend one's (human) competences (Gandee 1971).

A relationship with a Christian ghost entailed certain obligations, of which the most important was to help the ghost. Ghosts were frequently cruel, selfish, greedy persons who had to remain on earth after death because of their sins. Perhaps while alive such a person had murdered someone, and as a ghost he or she might have to return to the

place where the murder occurred and repeat this murder again and again. Only asking for help from a human person and receiving compassion from him or her could free such a spirit. (Ibid.) Ghosts had to initiate conversation in order to persuade someone to help them. How someone could help such spirits was well known in the community. One had to show them what they had never showed anyone while alive – charity, compassion and mercy. Helping a ghost could have spiritual rewards or the ghost might offer you something useful in return, for example wealth, or knowledge, often about one's future. (Ibid.: 172)

In this instance, ghosts and other-than-human persons are not social atoms, nor do they suffer from anomie. Rather they are rule-bound by culture, i.e., have both certain rights and obligations, just like all other members of the community. Other-than-human persons were not problematic for the Pennsylvania Dutch (as for most academics and laypeople today) because their actions and intentions were inexplicable: the problem with ghosts lay elsewhere. It is not that ghosts were in some way others, and somehow unnatural, it was that for the Pennsylvania Dutch they could ensnarl a person in burdensome and difficult social or moral obligations.

Ghosts frighten us now because they *do* fall outside the natural order of things. Unlike the Pennsylvania Dutch, most of us simply do not know how to handle ghosts. Separated as they are today from the normal order of things, ghosts have more sinister connotations. They are anomalous, unpredictable and dangerous (Bowyer 1980: 191). One cannot enter into an intelligible social relationship with them, one in which one's rights and duties are well defined, known and agreed to by all parties. In the West, if we believe in ghosts at all, we tend to fear them. Ghosts generally inhabit or represent "a terrifying vacuum isolated from our normal everyday experiences". (Ibid.: 177) As Bowyer puts it, while medieval ghosts were often experienced as unpleasant, they were not usually terrifying or inexplicable in the same sense as they are today. This is because they were part of a world order and they obeyed its rules. (Ibid.: 190) In the Pennsylvania Dutch world, the same was also true.

Even today, according to some studies, three out of four Americans, for instance, have some level of belief in ghosts, telepathy, witches, magic, or other similar phenomena (Goldstein et al. 2007). Despite studies like this, surprisingly little discussion has been published on the theoretical, i.e., ontological issues related to studying ghosts in Western societies (see, however, Cowdell 2011). As noted above, the tacit ontological and epistemological position is that any informant statement about things like magic or ghosts is not to be taken literally, i.e., glossed over as (and reduced to) belief, before it can become part of any systematic, scientific corpus of knowledge.

## DISCUSSION

When studying folk traditions and folk beliefs, we implicitly assume that traditions our informants live within impair their understanding of what is real. We insert, to compensate for this, a series of explanations for ghosts that reflect the assumptions and biases of Western education and reaffirm a Western notion of reality. To put it another way, what ethnographic analysis often becomes is an attempt to attach native statements to categories and meanings derived from our own (equally traditional and historically formed) understandings of what is possible in the world and what is not.

It is not that there is not a literature on this problem, suggesting solutions to how ethnographers can study religions and beliefs as they are lived and experienced (Priminano 1995; West 2007; Kivari 2012). Strategies proposed recently include modes of collaborative research, involving both the community and the researcher and/or theories that focus on multilocality or multivocality. The endpoint of these strategies tends to be informant/researcher agreement. Unfortunately the question of how and on what basis agreement is reached remains opaque (Boyd 2011: 204). It may be that these strategies still use a golden standard, one reading of reality (ours), to arbitrate discrepancies between our interpretations and explanations of the world and theirs.

Another problem with the idea of equal collaboration is that ethnography and the methodological problems seem to be things that emerge only from individual researcher's practices and choices.<sup>3</sup> Further, as suggested above, collaborative research strategies (among them Lassiter 2005 and Boyd 2011) may not be enough to address the kind of problem we have been describing here, specifically the extent to which cultural analyses are themselves culture bound. The assumption here that once the hierarchy hidden in any ethnographic project, i.e., who holds the pen, is brought to light and talked about, verticality is relatively easy to defeat. However, the accounting we do relies on our own understandings of the world and the statements informants make become framed by current theoretical ideas. In other words, notions like collaborative research and multivocality may not be sufficient to attack the kinds of operation and assumption that make it impossible for us to take native statements at face value. It may not be entirely fair to blame just Lassiter and Boyd here because even George Marcus, who has been writing on collaboration, complicity and ethnography since the 1990s has not been able to do much more than observe that issues of power, inequality and difference play important roles in any kind of collaborative ethnography (for example, Marcus 1998). In other words, notions like collaborative research and multivocality may not be sufficient to attack the kinds of operation and assumption that make it impossible for us to take native statements at face value.

One proposed solution could be what has called the anthropology of experience (Preston 1978; 1980). This strand of the anthropology of experience owes much more to Edward Sapir (1949) than Victor Turner (see Babcock and Macaloon 1987). Sapir's anthropology supports the exploration and ultimate subversion of our own common sense, its categories and meanings, as well as of the intellectual structures and resources that currently inform social sciences and cultural research. To make explicit what stands for truth or experience in other cultures, we need to explore what constitutes common sense for us in ethnography and daily life. Understanding more about the categories and meanings of our own culture can help us understand notions of community and person very different to our own and help us explicate what constitutes empirical reality across cultures. (Bennett 1986; 1999)

The ontological alchemy that transforms an intended informant statement of fact into one of belief occurs at, as Michel Foucault puts it, the capillary level (Foucault 2003: 94). The translation of informant statements into belief implies that what we take as real does not have to be proved or disproved (Hahn 1973). As we have shown, most interpretative strategies avoid the ontological claims informants put before us, and the result is that native statements about the world and how it works are seldom taken as anything more than statements of belief. On the other hand, Western statements, unlike

other statements of belief, are taken to implicitly reflect or refute what we take to be real. The reality testing that occurs in ethnography simply uses Western notions of both 'common sense' and reality as the baseline or gold standard. We get away from the ontological challenges informants put before us by implicitly saying: "This is what they believe as real but we all know it can't be so because it doesn't really exist."

Problems of this order, intractable problems, cannot be settled simply by the introduction of a new theoretical vocabulary or another rhetorical move. No matter how seductive a new vocabulary may seem at the time, a substitution of terms is not enough to remedy what is essentially a difficult problem of ontology and epistemology. Such problems cannot be handled by relabeling or rebranding, no matter how sophisticated. As Jonathan Z. Smith (2004) observed regarding magic:

Abstention "just say 'no'", will not settle "magic". For, unlike a word such as "religion", "magic" is not only a second-order term, located in academic discourse. It is as well a, cross-culturally, native, first order category, occurring in ordinary usage which has deeply influenced the language of the scholar. (Smith 2004: 219)

In other words, whether we use the term magic or not, how we approach phenomena of this kind often, as we have seen, reflects more our understanding of what is real than anything else.

The desire to take our informants seriously, but an inability at a variety of levels to concede that things like ghosts or witches can exist, leads to epistemological operations that deny the credibility of an informant whose statement opposes or diverges from what we take to be real, rational or logical. We have tried to show how at some point in ethnographic research the worldview and hegemonic categories of Western science kick in and native statements 'magically' become statements of belief – not ontological statements. The result is that in our research we often not only reproduce but also reaffirm the epistemological position of Western societies and cultures.

## CONCLUSION

The commitment to an epistemology and ontology we are all trained in leads to native statements about reality treated as though they represent a poetic turn of phrase: a metaphor, symbol, or some other kind of private or public cipher. As we have shown in this article, native statements almost always have to stand for something else.

One response to this is to make ethnography more analytically rigorous by not just relying on our own understanding of what is real to assess native statements. We need to turn the mirror back on ourselves and address not only the question of who holds the pen but what ontology are we committed to and what consequences this has for the kind of ethnography we wish to do.

As we have shown, not even the use of sociological and historicising vocabularies makes the problem of ghosts and magic go away. Today's shifts in interpretive vocabularies may have brought the problem closer to the surface, but the issues we raise are still out of reach. This is largely because what is at work is a kind of intellectual colonialism, a particularly malignant form of ethnocentrism which ethnography ideologically and formally repudiates, but continues to practice under the table and seems unable to

fully acknowledge or overcome. In other words, we as researchers remain both judge and jury when it comes to decide the ultimate reality of what our informants tell us.

The often-unacknowledged resort to Western categories and meanings continues to subvert the researchers' language and intentions, especially when it comes to the study of others' traditions and beliefs (Saler 2000 [1993]; 2009). James G. Carrier (1992) suggested that cultural analysis always requires a kind of double dialectic. It is not enough to focus on what our informants tell us and how we come to know this. It is also necessary to examine and acknowledge the effect that Western vocabulary, beliefs and categories have on how we make sense of informants' statements. In fact much of the failure of the ethnographic enterprise occurs because we are largely unaware that we tend to use folk categories derived from our own culture as though they were legitimate scientific categories. (Ibid.) The temptation, then, to which even very good ethnographers can succumb when confronted with the uncanny, is to draw upon one's knowledge of the human sciences "in a sense [because] there is little else I can do" (Mitchell 1997: 91).

Not all native statements can be accommodated within the conventions of traditional ethnography. Researchers working in areas like magic, religion and witchcraft know all too well the seductions of epistemological reduction. Ultimately anyone choosing any epistemology or ontology that deviates from standard practice has only one leg to stand on. This is the classic position that owes much to Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1937): reality escapes all theoretical attempts to fence it in, ours included. As ethnographers we make much use of this position whenever we cross cultures. However, what we have not addressed is the extent to which we as ethnographers have collaborated in, or responded to, two standard Western reductions (or seductions), i.e., empiricism and naturalism. Gillian Goslinga's (2013: 404) solution to this problem, i.e., "to remain attentive [...] to the intellectual histories of our thinking processes and the delightfully heterogeneous materialities of our worlds" seems too little and well too simple.

The reductive moves and their analytical consequences described here have not received much attention in discussions of essentialism in the social sciences. These critiques seldom have challenged the reduction of native testimony or the implicit taken-for-granted Western standard regarding what is real. In brief, the recent critiques of essentialism we have to date, i.e., the ontological turn, may in fact have helped to perpetuate and reinforce naïve positions on the factual value of informant statements – despite the authors' claims to the contrary. The choice is clear. Either we can continue to believe that our informants lie to us, or we have to take what they tell us seriously. This does mean we need to take native statements not as cultural arabesque or Western figures of speech, i.e., metonyms, metaphors or symbols that stand for something else. Instead, we need to take them for what our informants often tell us they are – factual statements about reality.

## NOTES

1 The first author has been conducting fieldwork in Romania for more than ten years (for some references, see Klimaszewski et al. 2012; Klimaszewski and Nyce 2014), and more recently has focused on the role magic plays in the modernisation of rural northern Romania.

2 There also seem to be few such studies from non-Western communities: this similarly helps confirm what we have written above.

3 Anthropology has long been aware that informants can and do often make claims about reality that the West cannot readily accept as legitimate, rational or empirical. While we may rail against the positivist monopoly on science, like it or not we are still measured and graded by those very same standards. If we wish to do well, and to have our arguments taken seriously, at some point most of us strive to succeed in terms of the epistemology to which we are, like it or not, subservient. This paradoxically is the epistemology most of us in cultural research believe to be deeply problematic. To avoid this dilemma we often pose the issue as a conflict between the more privileged (positivism and its foundational position in the Academy) and the subaltern (those who doubt, even defy, positivism and are often portrayed as something close to a lunatic fringe). This in turn finesses the essential problem, i.e., the way in which positivism, reduced to (or equated with) naive folk belief about facts and the really-real, resonates in both our academic work and the everyday world in which we live. One of the mistakes we often make as ethnographers is to believe that we are either immune to, or can correct, at least to some extent, our own culture's most fundamental categories, for example the real or the empirical, without giving these things the same kind of careful ethnographic analysis that we expect from others when they work outside the West.

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# THE ETHICS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC ATTRACTION: REFLECTIONS ON THE PRODUCTION OF THE FINNO-UGRIC EXHIBITIONS AT THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

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## ABSTRACT

We intend to explore\* the production of the Finno-Ugric exhibitions at the Estonian National Museum. Our particular aim is to reveal methodological changes of ethnographic reproduction and to contextualise the museum's current efforts in ideologically positioning of the permanent exhibition. Through historical-hermeneutical analysis we plan to establish particular museological trends at the Estonian National Museum that have led curators to the current ideological position. The history of the Finno-Ugric displays at the Estonian National Museum and comparative analysis of international museological practices enable us to reveal and interpret different approaches to ethnographic reconstructions. When exhibiting indigenous cultures, one needs to balance ethnographic charisma with the ethics of display. In order to employ the approach of ethical attraction, curators must comprehend indigenous cultural logic while building up ethnographic representations.

KEYWORDS: Finno-Ugric • permanent exhibition • museum • ethnography • ethics

## INTRODUCTION

At the current time the Estonian National Museum (ENM) is going through the process of preparing a new permanent exhibition space. The major display will be dedicated to Estonian cultural developments. A smaller, although still significant, task is to arrange the Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition. The ENM has been involved in research into the Finno-Ugric peoples as kindred ethnic groups to the Estonians since the museum was

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established at the beginning of the 20th century. Simultaneously, Finno-Ugric exhibition practices have been carried out through the whole period of ENM's existence.

Our aim is to discuss the ENM's Finno-Ugric exhibition practices in their historical-conceptual framework. We also intend to elaborate on ideas and strategy behind composing the new Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition, which is now in the final stage of preparation.

We employ historical analysis of the ENM's former Finno-Ugric ethnography displays. Our investigation concentrates on the evolution of museological ideas relating to ethnographic reconstructions. By discussing ideologies behind the ENM's exhibitions, we plan to reflect on the dialogue between domestic and international trends in exhibition making. Our method is based on principles of hermeneutic analysis that presume a continuous interpretation of the ideological mechanism of narrative production in order to reconstruct the line of thought that resulted in the creation of conceptually rather different exhibitions.

This article presents an effort of reflexive analysis, as the authors are members of the current ENM's team that prepares the new permanent exhibition of Finno-Ugric cultures. In addition, we have been involved in arranging a number of temporary exhibitions at the ENM over the last couple of decades. In this way, we carry with us considerable exhibition-making experience and responsibility for the upcoming permanent display. Through this article we reflect on our exhibition narrative and the theoretical principles behind our exhibition team's work.

## MUSEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Museums are powerful tools of identity construction (Karp 1991: 15–16). New exhibitions are always prepared in the context of earlier ones. Museum collections actualise memories of older exhibitions that have influenced the exhibiting process.

Museums act on the crossroads of different cultures and perspectives. Cross-cultural exhibitions challenge and reorganise ethnographers' and visitors' knowledge through experience. An audience must be provided a choice when rearranging its knowledge and feelings (*ibid.*: 22–23). Museum exhibition strategies can be targeted to resemble or approach real-life cultural complexity and ambivalence. Although the classical idea that a museum collection can represent culture adequately is an illusion (see Clifford 1988: 227–228), restored pieces still reflect some sort of authenticity.

In the process of the strategic planning of a permanent exhibition, general questions about stability and change in the exhibition appear. Michael Belcher (1991: 45–47) argues that permanent exhibitions tend to longevity by employing conservative techniques of display that enable objects to remain on view for a long time. These exhibitions are usually overview exhibitions of cultural history that need significant investment of resources. Because of this, the permanent exhibitions tend to appear as metaphors of collective monographs, while temporary displays resemble essays or scholarly articles (Chistov 2007: 111–112; Zasetskaya 2013: 109). But this approach misleads visitors by claiming objectivity. If curators give up an image of authentic ethnographic reality, produced by scholars, new ways of avoiding the feeling of falsehood must be introduced (Baranov 2007: 24).

Temporary exhibitions are usually more innovative and depend less on the complexion of the collections (Arsen'yev 2007: 11). If temporary exhibitions can be created through the free flow of ideas, permanent exhibitions are often seen as more serious statements. The traditional, well-established, approach to exhibition making involves understanding the particularity of a museum object. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991: 388) conceptualises the object as an ethnographic fragment that represents and embodies "a poetics of detachment" and enables appreciation. Object-fragment imitates and potentially reproduces an absent whole and enhances the aura of its 'realness'. Collection-centred exhibitions are created as isolated but amassed mimetic reflections of periods, rituals and environments (ibid.: 388–389; Kõiva 2007: 53). In classical museological strategy the mimetic approach presumes the display of a simple installation of things that are removed from authentic practices, thus making the exhibition environment a storage of stabilised and conserved commodities (Crew and Sims 1991: 159). Mimesis of display can be made more alive by employing the strategy of integrity. Copies of reality become meaningful if ethnographic objects and installations are contextualised through curators' strong and adequate cognitive control.

For instruction to redeem amusement, viewers need principles for looking. They require a context, or framework, for transforming otherwise grotesque, rude, strange, and vulgar artefacts into object lessons. In this way, curators ensure that copied fragment of culture will be rescued from triviality. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 390–393) It must become clear for a visitor that reconstructed pieces of culture represent something deeply meaningful and are solidly grounded by scholarly arguments. This approach does not exclude amusement but filters respectable impressions to a certain extent and aims to guarantee that behind every seemingly random object there is a scientific theory.

In many museums, curators are convinced by objectivism and display objects within this methodological approach. Visitors do not perceive objects as metaphors but as a direct reflection of reality (Baranov 2007: 23–24). In order to avoid the illusion of straightforward presentation, curators must employ other approaches, negotiating their specific ways of showing culture more or less explicitly.

Nuno Porto (2007: 176) suggests using the concept of 'ethnographic installation' to signify "experimental ethnographic production and exhibition-making processes". The installation-directed approach presumes the contextualisation of specific script and scenography, relating those uniquely to a particular theme and museum space. This installation experimentalism is related to the "interpretive turn" and subjectification of relationships in textual anthropology. (Ibid.: 175–177)

This line of thinking leads us to the question of experimentation in (permanent) exhibitions. Contemporary exhibitions embody experimental practices of meaning-making and are sites of knowledge generation (Basu and Macdonald 2007: 2–3). As a result of the "performative turn", exhibitions become mediums for enactment (ibid.: 12). Narrative serves as a "sense-making path" through exhibition landscape, revealing a succession of experiences (Basu 2007: 53). The museum can be understood as "a space of narrative potential" that generates labyrinthine "diversity of paths and stories", while associations "paradoxically take a unicursal form" for every single visitor (ibid.: 67–68; Basu and Macdonald 2007: 15).

As a new tendency, ethnographic museums abandon permanent exhibitions (Forum 2007). Even if permanent displays are not neglected, the character of those displays

changes considerably and classical difference between dominant exhibition genres starts to vanish. A vague distinction between permanent and temporary exhibitions has led contemporary museums to recognise the need to conceptualise permanent displays in a similarly way to temporary ones (Kotilainen 2007: 54). This strategy drives short- and long-term exhibitions closer to each other not only on the temporal, but also the conceptual, scale. The emerging ambivalent borderline between these two classical models of the museum display creates an innovative dialogue between curators and visitors and inspires experimentation.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM'S PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS

The composition of museum collections indicates how collective cultural identities are envisioned and structured, the subjective domain of the self, culture and authenticity marked, value and meaning systems governed by national politics and encodings of the past and the future restricted (Clifford 1988: 217–218). Through the whole history of the ENM, collecting ethnographic items of kindred peoples and producing Finno-Ugric exhibitions has been a prominent task. Historical analysis of these efforts enables one to establish a conceptual framework for current preparation of the new ENM Finno-Ugric exhibition. Ideas concerning the importance of Finno-Ugric cultural efforts were presented from the very beginning of the ENM's existence, simultaneous to the early collecting initiatives.

The ENM obtained its first Finno-Ugric items in 1913 when a collection of Mordvinian objects was donated to the museum.<sup>1</sup> In the same year, prominent Estonian politician and member of the museum's society, Jaan Tõnisson, suggested establishing a department that would revitalise handicrafts and collect foreign (including Finno-Ugric) items for the new department. Interest in the Finno-Ugric theme was articulated following the example of the Finnish museums. The manager of the ENM, Oskar Kallas, presented the Finnish ethnographers Uno Taavi Sirelius and Axel Olai Heikel as examples for future Estonian Finno-Ugrists. In 1915, on the basis of proposal by Kallas, the Department of Foreign Peoples was initiated at the ENM. At that time the museum did not have the resources to organise the collection of Finno-Ugric or other peoples' objects and items were obtained only as donations. (Linnus 1970: 229)

After WWI the Finno-Ugric work of the ENM became more active, with Finnish scholars and politicians providing support for this. In 1925, Finland's Minister of Education, Professor Emil Nestor Setälä, visited Tartu and encouraged Estonian scholars to collect linguistic and folklore evidence in order to build a picture of "systematic proto-culture" both in Finland and Estonia (Setälä 1925: 162–163).

Leaders of the ENM formulated strategic visions concerning the Finno-Ugric research that must be initiated in Estonia. The first director of the ENM, Ilmari Justus Andreas Manninen (1894–1935), wrote in the museum's annual account for 1922 that the ENM must become "the prominent workshop, dedicated to research of the Finno-Ugric peoples" (ERM A, n 1, f 521, l 6). In his public presentations, Manninen also stressed that ethnography of the Finno-Ugric peoples must be present at the ENM (ERM A. Sissetlud kirjad 1925–1926, vihik 44, l 26–29) because the Estonians, as a civilised nation,



cannot forget their kindred peoples, especially those “who are deprived from education and are not able to study their culture by themselves” (ERM A. Väljasaadetud kirjade ära kirjad 1924–1925, vihik 49/ 572, dets 1924). Professor of archaeology at the University of Tartu, and chairman of the ENM’s council, Aarne Michaël Tallgren (1885–1945) also emphasised the need to establish a Finno-Ugric Department at the museum (Tallgren 1921; 1923).

Organising a special unit for the Finno-Ugric peoples’ cultural heritage was a decisive moment in museum’s strategic approach towards the kindred peoples. In 1924, the ENM’s board and later also the general meeting adopted

the decision to establish the Finno-Ugric Department, separated from the Department of Domestic Ethnography. The aim of the Finno-Ugric Department will be to obtain ethnographic and archaeological collections among the closer and more distant kindred peoples and to study the old treasures of these peoples. (ERM A, n 1, f 521, lk 4–5)

Before the department was opened, ENM director Manninen travelled to different museums and analysed (Manninen 1928) the ways they displayed indigenous culture, especially concentrating on the Finno-Ugric exhibitions.

In 1928, four years after this principal decision, the Department of Kindred Peoples Ethnography was opened at the museum. As the department was embodied only in the exhibition, it was also called the Finno-Ugric Ethnographic Collection Display. This first permanent Finno-Ugric exhibition was displayed in two rooms of the ENM building at Raadi Manor in the outskirts of Tartu. In the bigger room textiles were displayed along with wooden items belonging to the Ingrian Finns, Livonians, Karelians, Mordvins, Udmurts, Maris and Hungarians. Apart from single objects, 14 mannequins were installed at the exhibition. The smaller room was dedicated to the Sámi people. The central composition in this room was arranged as a summer tent that became rather popular among the visitors. The exhibition included the museum’s entire Finno-Ugric collection of that time – 545 ethnographic objects. For the ENM this first display has been the only permanent exhibition relating to the Finno-Ugric peoples so far. The exhibition was closed in 1936 and since then the museum has made only temporary exhibitions on Finno-Ugric subject matter.

The exhibition of the Finno-Ugric ethnographic culture was arranged according to the museological standards of the period. The aesthetic of the display was focused on the art-likeness of ethnographica and the illusion of the representation of culture when cut off from its specific context. This way of constructing ethnographic displays was an international trend in the 1920s. This performance strategy also involved realistic representation of the “plastic capacities of the primitive people” (cf. Clifford 1988: 220; Porto 2007: 182). Similarly, at the ENM’s exhibition some mannequins were designed very carefully taking into account contemporary scholarly views on the typical anthropological types of different peoples. This approach, concentrating on hyper realistic likeness of ethnographic replications, dates back to the 19th century. At that time, the public became obsessed with wax mannequins at ethnographic displays. These wax figures captured all the attention, and some scholars (for example, Franz Boas<sup>2</sup>) started to protest against these attempts to copy reality. (Cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 400–401; Conte 2007: 43)



*Photo 1. Sámi conical tent at the Estonian National Museum's first Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition. Photo by Eduard Selleke, before 1932, ERM Fk 668:14.*

The Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition of the 1920s and 1930s was created on the methodological basis introduced by the first permanent ENM exhibition opened at Raadi Manor in 1923 and on public display until 1944. On this first permanent display a holistic approach to Estonian cultural traditions was applied. Departing from national idea that grounded the establishment and earlier strategic developments of the ENM, the exhibition was created as a collage of different cultures that were meaningful to Estonians. Together with Estonian peasant material culture, Baltic German heritage and art objects were displayed. Although rather wide cultural plurality was articulated by the first permanent exhibition, Estonian ethnography dominated the display as a whole. The Finno-Ugric department was opened only for eight years as part of the first permanent exhibition of the ENM. The kindred peoples were seen as a cultural colony of the Estonians (cf. Tallgren 1923). Thus, they proved that, in a certain

sense, Estonian culture is actually spread across vast territories of north eastern Europe and has deep historical roots. For the Finno-Ugric exhibition makers the Estonian permanent display meant that there was no need to invent a style of presentation.

During WWIL, the ENM's building at Raadi was destroyed. After the war, the museum moved temporarily to a former courthouse that still serves as the ENM's main building today. In that building there is no space available for permanent display as it serves mainly as the museum's office and storage. Until the early 1990s, the ENM had only one 110 m<sup>2</sup> room for temporary exhibitions.

In 1994, the next ENM permanent exhibition, entitled *Estonia. Land, People, Culture*, was arranged in a new exhibition house at the museum and was opened for visitors until summer 2015. The exhibition was produced with predominantly Estonian cultural needs in mind. Shortly after Estonia regained independence, it seemed natural that the Estonian ethnography must be put on display in an extensive way. Ethnography was one of the possible ways to publically represent Estonian national ideals, somehow metaphorically embodied in the materiality of folk cultural history. In this situation, the museum curators concentrated purely on an ethno-romantic display of Estonian ethnographic heritage (Runnel et al. 2010: 328). Of 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> of permanent exhibition, 10 m<sup>2</sup> were dedicated to the Baltic Germans, one small display case to the Coastal Swedes and another to the other Estonian traditional minority, the Russian Old Believers. The Finno-Ugric collections were not presented at all, despite the issue of linguistic (and supposedly cultural) proximity and the fact that the ENM collections included

10,000 Finno-Ugric ethnographic items and a huge number of photos, ethnographic drawings and manuscripts. However, this recent permanent exhibition of Estonian traditional culture served as a meaningful contextual tool for Finno-Ugric ethnography at the ENM. This permanent exhibition, the last at the ENM's old exhibition house, demonstrated the framework of museological thinking that the Estonian scholars had reached by the early 1990s.

Since the mid-2000s, the ENM's staff has been in the middle of the process of preparing new permanent exhibitions for the museum's new building, which will open in 2016. The Estonian exhibition of cultural history is conceptualised around the title *Estonian Dialogues*. The idea of the Estonian exhibition team is to demonstrate different, sometimes competing viewpoints on and interpretations of various significant periods and events in the history of Estonia. The other permanent exhibition is dedicated to the Finno-Ugric peoples and is entitled *Uralic Echo*. The new ENM building will be constructed in the Raadi area near the old manor house (where the pre-war exhibitions were arranged). Without a doubt, this new building will provide much better possibilities for representing different themes of Finno-Ugric culture.

#### THE FINNO-UGRIC TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS AT THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

The process of arranging temporary displays has been the way in which the new permanent exhibition<sup>3</sup> team has obtained expertise in exhibiting Finno-Ugric culture. During earlier temporary exhibitions at the ENM, this preparatory purpose was present only rather vaguely. However, since the 1990s most of the temporary exhibitions have been conceptualised (among other purposes) as an introduction for the future permanent exhibition. An overview of these exhibitions enables one to reconstruct a conceptual history of the ENM's approaches to negotiating Finno-Ugric themes with the public.

Since the 1970s, temporary Finno-Ugric displays have been constantly represented at the ENM. The majority of the Soviet Finno-Ugric exhibitions were compendious in character and concentrated on folk art. From these projects the most significant were a few major exhibitions. The first among these enterprises was the collaborative exhibition entitled *Examples of the Finno-Ugric Folk Art from the 19th Century*, carried out together with the State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR and the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR between 1957 and 1960. The next exhibition project, prepared in cooperation with the Latvian Museum of History and State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, was entitled *Finno-Ugric Folk Art* and ran for eight months in 1970 (the main curator of the exhibition was Tiina Vöti from the ENM). The third general exhibition, *Finno-Ugric Ethnic Culture from the Museum's Collections*, was displayed in 1985, constructed under supervision of ENM scholar Heno Sarv and composed on the basis of the museum's collections. (Sikka 1997)

The most successful of these exhibitions was prepared for the international *Baltica* folklore festival in 1989 on the 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> main pavilion of the Estonian Fairs residence in Tallinn. This major display was titled *About Finno-Ugric Folk Art* and prepared by a team of ENM curators under the supervision of Vaike Reemann. Over two months



Photo 2. Finnish and Karelian clothes at the exhibition *Examples of the Finno-Ugric Folk Art from the 19th Century*. Photo by Hudo Rips, 1957, ERM Fk 1263:7.

60,000 people visited the exhibition. The exhibition became significant as the most popular display of Finno-Ugric culture in the history of the ENM. The exhibition was prepared in cooperation with several Finno-Ugric central museums. Apart from the ENM, major museums from Hungary, Finland, and Komi, Mari, Mordovian and Udmurt republics of the USSR were involved in this major collaborative effort. This exhibition was built upon ideas of language kinship and similarities in the Finno-Ugric way of life and material culture. (Reemann 1994)

During the Soviet period, apart from these Finno-Ugric compendium-exhibitions, the ENM organised smaller temporary displays dealing with particular ethnic groups. These exhibitions were also often arranged in collaboration with other Finno-Ugric central museums as exchange exhibitions, concentrating on folk art. Such exhibitions were produced for the Komi (1973), Mari (1975), Udmurts (1977), Hungarians (1979), Mordvins (1982) and Karelians (1983), as well as the Uralic peoples of Western Siberia (1984)<sup>4</sup> and rock carvings from Lake Onega (1985).<sup>5</sup> (Konsin 1984: 147; Sikka 1997; Konksi 2009: 350–351)

These Finno-Ugric exchange exhibitions of the 1970s and 1980s were organised under the aegis of the official policy that encouraged presentation of the ethnography of different Soviet ethnic groups. During the same period, other travelling exhibitions from various parts of the Soviet Union were brought to the ENM for display. For exam-



Photo 3. Sámi display at the exhibition *Examples of the Finno-Ugric Folk Art from the 19th Century*. Photo by Hudo Rips, 1957, ERM Fk 1263:15.

ple, only during the late 1970s were exhibitions presenting the folk art of the Kabardins and Balkars, Lithuanians, Belorussians, Armenians and Uzbeks organised at the museum (Konsin 1984: 147). The scientific secretary of the ENM of that time, Kalju Konsin, explained the need to bring in exhibitions from different parts of the USSR through an exchange of experiences between artisans:

The adept craftsmen and amateur artisans have always indicated lively interest towards this kind of exhibition. Contacts with the other peoples' folk creativity sharpen visitors' eyes for comparative estimation of their own cultural values and provide new inventive ideas for the hobbyist in order to introduce innovative techniques and new variants of ornamentation. (Ibid.)

Apparently, the Finno-Ugric visiting exhibitions were organised in the official framework of a much larger strategy of cultural exchange of practical nature. The Finno-Ugric exhibitions constituted a significant proportion of overall amount of these imported ethnographic presentations. This tendency is hardly a coincidence, although one must acknowledge that reproductions of Finno-Ugric ethnography in the ENM were conceptualised during the Soviet period in a rather different official framework from that of the 1920s and 1930s (cf. Konksi 2007: 30).

Furthermore, the exchange of experiences was supposed to be useful not only for artisans but also for the museum curators themselves. Sharing knowledge of collecting and exhibition practices was also supposed to contribute to an improvement in the ENM's own exhibitions. The general collection policy of socialist museums was reflected in the topics of these exhibitions. According to the dominant approach, "first of all, working tools and household items were collected as folk art objects" (Jaagosild 1971: 3).

At the same time, the conceptual framework of the ENM's Soviet Finno-Ugric exhibitions resembles the first pre-war permanent exhibition to a certain degree. Apart from attempting to stress the aesthetic achievements of working people, these exhibitions had another practical purpose for the curators. Through the Finno-Ugric exhibitions, ENM curators improved and maintained their practical knowledge of the museum's collections.

#### RECENT FINNO-UGRIC DISPLAYS AT THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

At the beginning of the 1990s, museological discourse on collecting methodology and exhibition practice, as well as the role of scholarly discourse in society, changed in Estonia. In recent decades the range of exhibition topics has widened considerably at the ENM. Museum ethnographers have started to search for new concepts, themes and approaches. When organising the Finno-Ugric temporary displays, we have considered the production of the Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition as the eventual aim of all smaller displays. (The Estonian Parliament decided in 1996 that a new ENM building must be constructed, and work in this direction had already begun a few years earlier.) Preparation for the permanent exhibition has continued because the new challenge has entailed the testing of different conceptual approaches. In addition to which, together with other museum researchers and curators, we needed to foster our exhibition making skills.

Several recent temporary Finno-Ugric displays at the ENM have been targeted towards the search for new ways of modelling relationships between the Finno-Ugric peoples. Heno Sarv prepared the very first of these exhibitions in 1998. The exhibition was titled *The Finno-Ugric Wall* and it was concentrated on reconstruction of a shared Finno-Ugric way of life. The display was inspired by the idea, proposed by Finnish historian and professor Kyösti Julku in 1993 at the First Congress of Finno-Ugric History (Julku 1996), that Finno-Ugrians constituted the historically indigenous population across the vast territories of the East European forest zone, and that through millennia they developed a completely autochthonic culture that was perceived by their southern neighbours as rather strange.

The next attempt to find a meaningful way of presenting the Finno-Ugric peoples in the museum's display was made in 2001 by the exhibition, *The Finno-Ugric World and Soul* (curators Art Leete, Svetlana Karm, Ülle Tamla and Heiki Valk). The exhibition was prepared in cooperation with archaeologists and served as an attempt to interpret the archaic worldview of the Finno-Ugrians by concentrating on the beliefs about the Other World, displaying funeral and commemoration rituals and modelling the possible presentation of the World Beyond for different Finno-Ugric peoples.

Another of ENM's exhibition that involved simultaneous representation of different Finno-Ugric cultures was *The Bridal Chest*, installed in 2004 (curator Svetlana Karm). In the exhibition, visitors were able to observe the material side of wedding customs of different Finno-Ugric peoples. The display presented various objects that were used in wedding rituals, or were made especially for a bridal chest or as wedding gifts. Exhibition objects were chosen on the basis of available descriptions of how these artefacts were used in wedding rituals. It appeared that there were relatively few such objects in the ENM's collections as people tend to keep their wedding memorial items rather carefully and usually refused to give them away to museum ethnographers. These items were often inherited from the older generation because losing or giving away these things was understood as bad omens that may predict the fading of marriage luck.

In 2008, the exhibition *A Matter of Honour: The 80th Anniversary of the Opening of the Finno-Ugric Department at the Estonian National Museum* was prepared at the ENM, remaining open for visitors until the late summer of 2009. This exhibition provided an opportunity to travel back in time, bringing fragments of the first ENM Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition to a contemporary audience. In addition, the ethnographic fieldwork milieu of different decades was reconstructed in the display. Curators Svetlana Karm, Marleen Nõmmela and Piret Koosa reintroduced the story of how the Finno-Ugric collections were assembled for the ENM, and outlined different aspects of the museologist's job.

Similarly to earlier decades, the ENM also continued to arrange displays of the Finno-Ugric folk costumes, folk art and handicraft. Some such presentations were organised collaboratively by several parties: the ENM and the Udmurt National Museum, the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi (Siida) and Sámi Duodji (the Sámi Handicraft Association), the Museum of Central Finland and the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum (Sikka 1997). A few other Finno-Ugric exhibitions have concentrated on particular Finno-Ugric groups and sometimes carried out in cooperation with representatives of these groups (for example, Komi and Livonian exhibitions).

One can easily notice that the Finno-Ugric theme has become rather prominent in the ENM's exhibition practice. One of the reasons behind this intensification was a considerable extension of exhibition space at the ENM in the mid 1990s. Exploitation of new exhibition rooms resulted in an overall increase in the number of exhibitions, with



Photo 4. Hill Mari display at the exhibition *The Finno-Ugric Folk Culture*. Photo by Tõnu Kerge, 1985, ERM Fk 2130:11.

the Finno-Ugric efforts forming part of this process. One important motivation here was the decision, made by the museum in the mid 1990s, to start celebrating Kindred Peoples Days with regular Finno-Ugric temporary exhibitions.<sup>6</sup>

This historical overview of the ENM's Finno-Ugric exhibitions indicates that ethnographic displays have become more numerous in recent decades. Apart from quantitative growth, significant change in the character of exhibitions is apparent with, behind this development, a notable ideological shift.

#### ETHICAL CHANGE IN MUSEUM COLLECTION AND REPRESENTATION IDEOLOGY

As already touched upon, the overall strategic aim of the Finno-Ugric displays over the last two decades has been the preparation of ENM staff for the future permanent exhibition. This task has been fulfilled to a somewhat contradictory extent and fashion. Several conceptual tests with experimental displays have proved that some ways of conceptualising exhibitions are not the most successful. The Finno-Ugric World and Soul display forced us to acknowledge that concentrating an exhibition on sensitive aspects of worldview pushes the exhibition towards cognitive-ethical limits. During the exhibition construction process we found ourselves with a dilemma – to demonstrate intriguing but ethically loaded objects or to arrange an ethically safer but at the same time less interesting display. As the preparation period for the temporary display was short, it was too late to propose a new concept for the exhibition and to rearrange the whole design.

We decided to remove from the World and Soul exhibition objects that originally had direct ritual or sacred meaning. We made this choice as a result of information that some items in the museum collection were, perhaps, gathered in doubtful circumstances. In earlier times, ethnographers were sure that they had the ultimate scientific right to study and collect everything, and that nothing could stop them in this (cf. Sandahl 2007: 89). We had the same impression of some aspects of former ENM collecting practices. During the preparation of the World and Soul display we started to realise that this issue might seriously damage our future efforts to exhibit items.

At the end of 2000, the Forest Nenets poet and reindeer herder Yuri Vella visited the ENM. When Vella saw a few spirit figures from his home region in the collection, he became rather confused as there was no way that anybody could give these figures away in a culturally acceptable way. After witnessing this and some other statements or evidence about the conflict between the traditional museological imperative of collecting and exhibiting culture, and indigenous understanding of spiritual logic, we decided to be rather careful when exhibiting indigenous sacred items.

Our decision to avoid exhibiting sacred items is also based on some discussions in ethnographic literature. The problem of ethically doubtful treatment of sacred items by ethnographers and other travellers has deep historical roots. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, a few authors were criticising the methods that ethnographers used to obtain sacred objects, especially from among the Finno-Ugric peoples (see, for example, Ostroumov 1904: 22; Prokoshev 1909: 42–44, 87–88; Kuznetsov 2009 [1906–1907]: 243–244).



The history of collecting and displaying exotic culture has sometimes been rather radical,<sup>7</sup> if we judge by our contemporary ethical standards. The part of this ethnographic tradition concerning objects that we have in our museums now needs to be addressed not only theoretically but also in practical museum work. We have these objects at our disposal and it is unavoidable that we will need to decide how to treat them.

The Khanty ethnographer Tatyana Moldanova has argued that according to Khanty cultural rules, access to sacred object is strictly limited. Moldanova (2013: 133–134) claims that ritual objects are desecralised through public display. The reaction of the indigenous population to the practice of displaying sacred objects in museums is ambivalent. Apart from cultural limitations on acceptable access to these objects, the issue of forced or suspicious conditions of collection is a source of uncertainty. In local museums in Western Siberia the indigenous visitors perceive museum objects and stuffed animals (especially bears<sup>8</sup>) as sacred, carrying traditional meanings and assuming ritual behaviour. Local Russian inhabitants react similarly to the Orthodox icons that were displayed at the same museums (Lysenko 2007: 70–71).

While arranging ethnographic exhibitions, curators must recognise the issue that sacred objects may still have an intimate religious value for the people. Although these items may have been stored for decades, they cannot be treated as fully owned by museums. The ambivalent history of collection and contradictory cultural dialogue we may initiate by exhibiting these objects seriously challenges ethnographers ethically as we prepare these exhibitions.

Old museums with huge collections face the challenge of overcoming their historical legacy of collection practice and ways of interpretation (Kupina 2007: 58–59). Over time, the general emphasis of the ENM Finno-Ugric exhibitions has changed remarkably. Instead of presenting anonymous typologies of material culture, today curators concentrate more intimately on people and their stories. The original owners of museum items and cultural themes are always peoples themselves (Sandahl 2007: 92). If curators intend to honour indigenous world perception, they need to be rather careful in how they treat all objects, not only those items the sacred functions of which have been clearly documented.

All ethnographic items collected and given to museums long ago have a complicated character because of the colonial consequences (Chistov 2007: 109; Engelsman 2007: 118–119; Forum 2007: 125–127; Sandahl 2007: 87–88; Viatte 2007: 25). This suspicion is rooted in the historical legacy of ethnographic museums whose old collections have been gathered in accordance with the ethical circumstances of the period. Eija-Maija Kotilainen (2007: 48–49) argues that this colonial agenda is not applicable in the case of the museums of the smaller peoples (for example, the Finns) in the same sense and extent. The increasing crisis at ethnographic museums since the 1960s was partly related to these “doubts concerning collections” (Viatte 2007: 25–26). These discussions did not touch the ENM until the 1990s and objective displays without possible ethical considerations were made throughout the Soviet period. However, these doubts may already be over as ethnographers can critically assess the situation and make ethically appropriate and thematically intriguing displays. Emphasis on exploring the meaningfulness of collections enables one to include ethical questions in the exhibition process, problems that do not serve as resolute obstructions or demands to exclude objects (ibid.: 26–27).

Recently, discussions concerning the ownership of cultural heritage and the right to interpret collections have become intensive among museum professionals (cf. Kotilainen 2007: 50; Leete 2008). Bente Gullveig Alver and Ørjar Øyen (2007: 18) argue that ethical reflection “invites choice among alternative courses of action”. Although there are no precise rules for making choices, one must try to follow appropriate practice and avoid straightforward announcements when dealing with representation of different cultures. Margaret Mills (2007: 56) also claims that a specific relationship between ethics and truth directs ethnographic presentation away from any simple linearity.

In the case of the World and Soul exhibition we decided in advance to recognise our failure. In order to maintain ethical standards, we tried not to violate indigenous rules for the treatment of religious issues. At the exhibition, we marked some Finno-Ugric otherworldly ideas metaphorically. For example, we presented the road to the Finno-Ugric Other World as a row of fishing traps, hung through the exhibition room. By doing so, we avoided putting on display items that are considered interesting and eye-catching but which may be heavily loaded in ethical terms.

These ethical considerations were also addressed during the preparation of the ENM’s new permanent exhibition, in which we have generally avoid exhibiting explicitly religious items. Despite this, our exhibition team aims to touch upon a few moments of Finno-Ugric vernacular religious practice that will reflect some wider cultural developments.

#### THE NEW FINNO-UGRIC PERMANENT EXHIBITION AT THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

Over the last two decades most of the ENM’s exhibitions have resulted in constructive experiences in regard of the preparation of the new Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition. When putting together different temporary displays the curatorial team (and we among them) of the permanent exhibition gathered practical knowledge of the content and condition of the ENM’s Finno-Ugric collections and developed competence in material culture as well as the everyday living conditions of these ethnic groups. Additionally, several temporary exhibitions have related to themes that have been developed into sub-topics for the future permanent exhibition. For example, the Bridal Chest exhibition revealed that there are relatively few Finno-Ugric wedding-related ethnographic items in the ENM’s collections. The topic itself proved to be both attractive and distinctive for Finno-Ugric cultural connections as wedding rituals articulate peculiar cultural dominants and so we plan to use the wedding topic at our prospective display.

At the same time, it must be admitted that these recent temporary displays have fulfilled this task of preparation unevenly and in a somehow ad-hoc way. Yuri Chistov (2007: 110) argues that museums often search for innovative solutions because of the failure in exhibition policies of recent decades. Even during the 1990s it was rather unrealistic to foresee the actuality of a permanent exhibition or to be sure that a new building would be constructed for the museum at all. However, since the mid 2000s, using temporary exhibition practices, we have systematically concentrated on testing different ideas and technical solutions in order to be ready for the exhibition in the new building.

In 2016, the new ENM building will be opened to visitors. Discussions concerning the overall idea of the display already started more than ten years ago, even before a location for a new building was chosen and the international architectural competition initiated. The competition was started in June 2004 and its results were presented to the public in January 2006.<sup>9</sup> Around the same time, doubts concerning the suitability of the ethnically oriented Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition for the European museological landscape were expressed in public discussions while, at the same time, ethnographic focus was suggested (Runnel *et al.* 2010: 328–329). In the autumn of 2006, a roundtable was organised entitled *Does the ENM Need a Kindred Peoples Permanent Exhibition at the Museum New Building in Raadi and what Kind of Exhibition Must it Be? A wide range of specialists and enthusiasts for the Finno-Ugric theme (ethnologists, linguists, writers, artists, museum curators, students, etc.) discussed the special role of the ENM in providing support to our language relatives in developing their cultures. Participants in the roundtable also emphasised the importance of study of the Finno-Ugric ethnic groups by Finno-Ugric scholars themselves. Public discussions on the prospective permanent exhibition were also organised later. Ethnographers, artists, writers and Finno-Ugric students studying at Estonian universities participated in designing and negotiating the conceptual framework of the exhibition. In addition, museum specialists from Finno-Ugric areas with whom we have met in the course of fieldwork trips in recent years were also involved in these discussions.*

While the public contributed to the museum’s authenticity by supplying information and opinions, the conceptualisation was under control of the exhibition teams, leaving little “space for active interpretation by the audience or shared authorship” (Runnel *et al.* 2010: 333). Today it is a rather normal practice to involve an audience in the construction of a museum’s narratives (*ibid.*: 326; Tatsi 2011: 65). If museum professionals do not seek dialogue with prospective visitors, the exhibition turns into guesswork (Runnel *et al.* 2010: 335). The participation of amateur and expert audiences is always a process with an uncertain nature and outcome. However, various modes of participation are gradually integrated into exhibition practices (Tatsi 2011: 76). In a somewhat modest way the ENM’s Finno-Ugric exhibition team has attempted to keep in contact with both specialists and enthusiasts. In principal the Finno-Ugrians are imagined as becoming



*Photo 5. Bears, Õ and Yoshkin Kot: Finno-Ugric Brand Exhibition (2014–2015) at the Estonian National Museum. Photo by Arp Karm 2014.*

our most important audience, although their involvement in the permanent exhibition process can be fragmentary at best. Although there are plenty of options to negotiate our work with the Estonian audience, it is not clear how much it helps us to get closer to culturally appropriate solutions for the exhibition.

We have been working intensively with the Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition since 2008. The main narrative lines and a scheme of exhibition design have now been established. The model of the prospective exhibition is arranged in a labyrinth-like way in three rooms on two floors with an overall surface area of 1,100 m<sup>2</sup>. As continuous negotiations between scholars, architects, designers, cultural insiders and enthusiasts have revealed, narrating supposedly trivial moments in life as thick and meaningful in a vaguely mystical way serves as a heuristic impulse for people who have no special academic practice in studying Finno-Ugric culture. Indigenous cultures are popularly perceived as natural, authentic and “representing alternatives to the negative consequences of a modern, contemporary way of life” (Mathisen 2004: 17). We aim to display the Finno-Ugric peoples as normal human beings with distinctive cultural heritage. The exhibition team avoids overstressing an exotic image of these people but intends to demonstrate that their culture enables us to negotiate cross-cultural human values.

Our curators’ team decided to concentrate the ENM’s Finno-Ugric exhibition on seemingly usual objects and actions of the Finno-Ugrian peoples through the prism of gender roles (Karm 2011).<sup>10</sup> Concentrating on gender roles enables to keep the idea of the permanent exhibition simple but also socially relevant. The issue of gender-balanced development of a society is a raising topic of discussions in the Estonian public sphere. A few years ago, this theme reached the Estonian museums and made the curators consider the way in which they present male and female issues more carefully.<sup>11</sup> We became intrigued by this emerging discourse in which indigenous or historical traditions may become targets of critique from the viewpoint of contemporary understanding of social correctness.

We plan to display different aspects of gender dialogue among the Finno-Ugric peoples. We attempt to contribute to the social discourse about gender issues by demonstrating that different peoples have generated various balanced models for treating female-male relations’ problem. Many traditional rules appear in the contemporary western social context as rather challenging. People have been traditionally very strict in dividing occupations but, at the same time, folk narratives depict connections between women and men rather ambivalently. This way, we aim to negotiate traditional ethnography and modern gender discourse. Hopefully, this ambivalent dialogue between conservatively gathered material and novel conceptual narratives enables to compose intriguing performative display.

After years of discussing the theme, our team concluded in understanding that there are several reasons for choosing the gender topic for our permanent exhibition. It is relevant in the contemporary public discussions in Estonia and Europe. At the same time, gender rules exist in every society and these norms enable to present different peoples at the museum display in a meaningful way. Besides, there are also practical museological considerations for establishing the topic as one can always find from museum collections ethnographic objects that can be related to female and male agents of culture.

The theme of gender-related cultural behaviour is not unique among the Finno-Ugrians although this topic enables us to demonstrate a wide range of cultural par-

ticularities. It is an attempt to metaphorically turn the museum into “a real cradle of searching for solutions to actual problems of social practice” (Arsen’yev 2007: 14). Gender relations will be ethnographically reflected in material items, photographs and folk narratives. This cognitive connection is supported by the idea that, at the museum, an object becomes a metaphor (cf. Baranov 2007: 22).

At the museum, the Finno-Ugric connections will be articulated by the interactive image of the language tree, the presentation of the history of ideas about the Finno-Ugric peoples and a number of dialogic moments in the prospective display of ethnographic objects. Contemporary social problems (articulated through a gender paradigm, again) will be mediated by a collage-like video display. The exhibition space will be arranged in the form of three-dimensional labyrinth.<sup>12</sup> By employing a kind of a labyrinthine aesthetic we partly reflect these attempts to negotiate contemporary developments in the understanding of Finno-Ugric identity.

By the spring season of 2014, the exhibition team had settled the conceptual discussions. Next our group will deal with the textual and practical design of the chosen ideas. We suppose that the historical legacy of the ENM’s Finno-Ugric exhibitions and dialogue with contemporary museological thinking will result in a display that supports the Finno-Ugric indigenous groups’ dignity and enables visitors to enjoy the presentation.

## DISCUSSION

The preparation of the ENM’s new Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition has evolved from the historical legacy of scientific and museological efforts made by the museum ethnographers over decades. In addition to searching for a good idea for the future permanent display, the ambivalent connection between the ethical dimension of cultural logic and a demand for ethnographic charisma has been the focus of our discussions. When preparing cultural reproduction at a museum, impression and respect may easily contradict to each other. Strategically, the aim of the future display is to depart from contemporary development of museum philosophies while at the same time avoiding imitation of other permanent exhibitions in similar museums.

Preparing exhibitions always involves an ambivalent play on the borderlands of academic solidity and artistic playfulness, emotion and conceptualisation (Conte 2007: 44). These ethnographic manifestations employ and detect an uncertain cognitive area in search of something unsettled and illuminating. Philosophical museums encourage visitors to recognise the intended conceptual vagueness as the foundation of any human knowledge. These museums also demonstrate continuation and fragmentation in development of culture, evolution of various self-identifications and cultural distinctiveness. Ethnographic museums connect people and constitute points of social synthesis, relativising immediate reactions and impressions in order to discover the diversity of the world and to locate questions that provoke thought. (Ibid.: 44–47)

Our historical analysis revealed that the first exhibition efforts in the 1920s and 1930s indicate that ENM curators were well aware of contemporary museological trends. They followed good exhibition practices of the time and produced solid ethnographic displays that reflected reality in a way that was supposed to dispose structural taxonomies of culture and create an aura of lifelikeness. After WWII, the Finno-Ugric dis-

plays were reintroduced at the ENM predominantly from the 1970s. Until the end of the Soviet period, the museum's exhibitions reflected a conservation of the style of the 1920s. Public policy avoided emphasising issues of shared cultural identity (cf. Kõiva 2007: 49–51), thus the need for inter-cultural exchange of experience was stressed. This approach enabled the museum ethnographers to reject political pressure and to praise contemporary socialist developments (Konksi 2007: 33). At the same time, the topic of related cultural identities remained semi-hidden. During the 1990s, exhibition experiments and testing of mixed displays with classical and postmodern approaches began. The new permanent exhibition is still in the process of preparation but conceptual condensation points are now clarified. This enables us to analyse the visionary aspect of this exhibition-making in its century-long historical context.

In this article, we touched upon the problem of the historical frame and contemporary efforts to create Finno-Ugric ethnographic displays at the ENM. Our team's contextualisation attempt aims to move towards the new permanent exhibition through continuous reconceptualisation of displays and experimentation that have enabled a style of production that takes into account the entire historical legacy available. However, this historically rooted approach introduces the problem of innovation and the question of the possibility of radical changes in this long-term development.

In the course of the preparation of the ENM's new permanent exhibition, an ideological conflict of choice appears between conservative and experimental approaches. According to the traditionalist museological view, permanent exhibitions tend to be more conservative than temporary displays. Anyhow, in some museums, permanent exhibition curators also employ experimental conceptual frames and artist design. The ENM's Finno-Ugric permanent exhibition team stays at the crossroads of traditional museology and innovation by trying to involve both to some degree. This effort is not an ill-defined museological fumbling but a conscious choice that involves intensive thinking and decision-making on every aspect of prospective ethnographic representation. We are aware that it is complicated to forecast the actual intellectual and emotional results of this combination of conservatism and originality.

Our performative strategy also involves intellectual and perceptual conflict between selections of attractive and/or ethical styles of representation. Our team has recognised this ideological area as the domain of some crucial choices and has decided to follow ethical demands unconditionally. At the same time we attempt to develop solutions that enable us to maintain high standards of ethnographic charm without violating any ethical imperatives. In order to meet the challenge of combining expected conservative systematics and desired innovation, as well as managing our ethical approach and elaborating on aesthetic qualities, our aim is to develop a strategy of ethical attraction.

This study represents an attempt at partly auto-ethnographic reflection and analysis regarding the practice of ethnographic representation. We completed this examination before we could see the final result of the analysed exhibition-making process. At this moment, our analysis enables us to detect troubles, doubts, and uncertainties in exhibition production.

In the course of this inconclusive phase in exhibition making, uncertainty and doubt are good tools that stimulate an ethical approach and nurture our quest for innovation in ethnographic display. This situation involves the potential of conceptual fragmentarity, hopefully urging our future audience to think along with us. Further analysis of

the permanent exhibition production from a temporal distance will enable us to contextualise this process differently. However, the incompleteness of the exhibition process enabled us to employ our currently unique cognitive position, although it may be carried along by somewhat naïve hopes and anticipation of the potentially enchanting influence our exhibition will have.

## NOTES

1 Today the ENM's Finno-Ugric collections include 10,000 ethnographic objects. 90 per cent of these items have been collected since the 1960s and originate from the first half of, or the mid, 20th century. As the collecting strategy dictated that attention was paid predominantly to classical ethnography, the objects that were obtained were mainly classified as traditional. In the Estonian context, traditional ethnography means that these items were supposed to represent the culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

2 In his correspondence Franz Boas criticised the overly perfect resemblance of museum wax figures to real people. According to Boas, there must be a demarcation line between nature and the copy. The difference between plastic art and nature must be stressed, not hidden. (Rony 1996: 243)

3 The exhibition team includes ethnographers, collection managers and ENM pedagogs, scholars from the University of Tartu, the Jan&Ken architect studio and the Velvet design agency.

4 The exhibition was brought from the Tomsk Museum of Regional History. The Tomsk Museum is not a Finno-Ugric museum although Tomsk ethnographers focus very much on the Ob-Ugrian and Samoyed people and thus this exhibition can be presented in this list. It was hardly a coincidence that the Tomsk exhibition was brought to the ENM – the Finno-Ugric motivation played its role.

5 The rock carving display was made in collaboration with the Estonian Department of the All-Union Society of Geodesy and Astronomy. These rock carvings are considered early evidence of the Uralic people's art and cosmology.

6 Kindred Peoples Days have been celebrated in Estonia every October since 1989. At every festival the Finno-Ugric indigenous folklore groups present performances. Since 2011, Kindred Peoples Day (the third Saturday of October) has been a national holiday in Estonia.

7 Early Soviet collecting practices could be even harsher as they were combined with repressions. For example, Il'yakhov (1998) describes a case in Yakutia where, in 1932, during the massive persecution of shamans, a local culture house room was full of shamanic garments, confiscated from repressed shamans.

8 The bear is a highly honoured animal in the Khanty and Mansi religion. The bear is considered a son of the main god, Numi Torem, who was sent to the peoples. In addition, all images with faces are considered alive (Chernetsov 1987).

9 The museum's new building is based on the Memory Field project (architects Dan Dorell, Lina Ghotmeh, Tsuyoshi Tane). They related the idea of the ENM's new home to Estonia's dramatic past. The former Soviet military airport runway is included in the project as a sign of occupation. The slightly inclined roof of the new building symbolises rising to the sky, moving towards the future. (New Building)

10 Target group inquires revealed that people considered genderly division of everyday culture 'sexy' (Runnel et al. 2010: 333), however, the Finno-Ugric exhibition team made the choice of a theme independently from this audience-related opinion.

11 In 2007, the Tartu Toy Museum and the ENM were investigated by the Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The toy museum was accused of organising

Boys' Day. During this gathering, children could play with toys that were historically considered appropriate for boys. The ENM was blamed for arranging a workshop for boys who could study traditional male handicrafts. The Commissioner demanded that museums not advertise any events by using gender-related messages, neither could they place any gender-based restrictions on access to these events. In the Estonian daily newspapers the problem of sexism at museums was discussed in a rather lively way. The Commissioner's act was evaluated as the initiation of irreversible changes in Estonian society (Ojakivi 2007; SLÖL 2007). The dominant force of the Estonian political opposition, the Centrist Party, treated this case as an example of the government's political failures (Osa 2008).

12 The Finno-Ugric folk art exhibition of 1989 was also designed by an "in a way labyrinthine composition" (Reemann 1994: 62), although this resemblance is merely coincidental.

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ERM A – Estonian National Museum archive.

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# EXPLORING ENGAGEMENT REPERTOIRES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE MUSEUM PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

In our paper, we have developed a list of modes for audience engagement on social media on the basis of the Facebook posts of selected museums in Latvia and Estonia. Within the frame of our study, the museums' Facebook posts covering a timespan of one year have been analysed using the method of close reading and applying the principles of grounded theory. A multi-dimensional approach to various modes of engagement is proposed in order to involve different visitors in the activities of the museum, and considering different functions of the message. The results of the paper are applicable when considering diverse repertoires for modes of engagement with the museum's audiences on social media, as well as when engaging with them on-site. The paper contributes to the trend of democratisation within the museum context by exploring the potential of museums when forging their relationships with their visitors.

KEYWORDS: Estonia • Latvia • museums • online engagement • social media

## INTRODUCTION

Recent years in contemporary societies have been characterised by the development of a democratic worldview accompanied by technological progress. This trend has also found its way into museums, which stress, probably more than ever, the need to become relevant to society (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010) and in particular, the need to be "in the service of society and its development" (ICOM 2010–2015). The museums respond to the changing needs of society by balancing their traditional functions, such as collecting, conservation, curatorship, research, communication (Mensch 1992) and the new commitments that are related to the interpretation of the cultural needs of the

community with a focus on the individual and liberty of information (ICOM 1974). Digitisation and democratisation trends are reflected in the museum institution and in museum relationships with audiences (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). The importance of focusing on the dialogue with audiences turns museums into places “where audiences can actively engage in a process of meaning construction and self-identification” (Stylianou-Lambert 2010: 137). Web 2.0 tools provide museums with a great participatory potential online allowing them to respond to democratisation and experimenting with audiences on social media. However, not all museums are open to intense online communication for both subjective and objective reasons (Vilcāne 2013; Lotina 2014).

Both online and on-site environments offer good audience engagement possibilities, although in this study we focus on online engagement from the perspective of the museums. The aim of the study is to explore what different engagement modes museums have developed to communicate with their audiences online. With social media engagement we understand “a multi way interaction between and among organization and digital communities that could take many forms, using social media channels to facilitate that interaction” (Heldman et al. 2013: 5), thus social media provide the context for our study. To help us achieve our aim we have developed an analytical grid consisting of two main components: a list of audience engagement modes that embraces online museum activities, and adaptation of the model of sign functions. This model was initially created by Roman Jakobson (1960) and later developed by Tony Thwaites, Lloyd Davis and Warwick Mules (2002). The decision to adopt the model of sign functions deals with the engagement modes present in different kinds of Facebook post by considering the complexity of the manifestations of engagement mode. However, we convey the semiotic approach to the sign’s functions in the social media context by analysing the different aspects of the ‘message’ as it relates to modes of engagement. This approach allows us to look beyond the content of a Facebook post and consider such aspects as textually, visually or the audibly embedded notion of various engagement modes. In this way, even though our primary aim is to explore engagement modes in social media, we can also map engagement modes offline because certain aspects surrounding the message exist independently from the particular medium chosen to convey the message. At the same time, we also consider the potential of social media to reach out to the museums’ audiences and provoke interaction between the museum and the audience. There are couple of reasons to do this, which we will elaborate upon.

Firstly, while previous studies cover museum communication and relationship with audience online and offline (Russo et al. 2007; Durbin 2009; Kelly 2009; Russo and Peacock 2009) and research democratisation trends in museums (Stylianou-Lambert 2010; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011), we rely on the notion of social media. Social media communication demands trust and helps to reduce social distance between communicators and receivers (Servaes and Malikhao 2005). Secondly, social media facilitate exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences (ibid.) so it can be used in museum democratisation processes. Social media as such is grounded in the second generation Web, or the ‘participative Web’, and there are many social networking sites, each having its own specifics (Durbin 2009). At the primary stage of development the Internet was used to gain the information on how Web 2.0 opens up new ways to engage users by meeting, sharing, collaborating, as well as learning about audiences, interact-

ing them directly and allowing one-to-many communication (Kelly 2009; Russo and Peacock 2009). Thus, social media is considered to be a growing issue in the museum environment although few museums have clear strategies for engaging communities as most users do not participate very much (Russo et al. 2007). Therefore it demands much effort from the museum as communicator to overcome this barrier of the somewhat passive routines of users. We suggest that in order to do so, diverse modes of engagement can be used as a repertoire to assist this effort.

This article presents research about museum online communication with users in two Baltic countries, Estonia and Latvia. Facebook was used to collect data on museum communication. Both of these Baltic countries share many similarities, including a common historical background. The awareness of the democratisation of museums among the practitioners and among the academic community is additionally supported by the growing number of academic publications in the field of museum participation (Lepik 2013; Lotina 2014; Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2014). The timespan of the posts analysed is from October 2013–September 2014; sampling includes two Latvian and two Estonian museums that are active on Facebook. The method of close reading coupled with the principles of grounded theory (specifically initial, focused and axial coding) allowed us to collect data and identify analytical categories, presenting museum online communication conceptualised through diverse engagement modes. In our study we do not reflect the audience perspective on online engagement: considering the aim of our study, our sample helps to outline the museum's perspective.

In the first sections of the study both online and on-site engagement modes are reviewed. We also define our own conceptual engagement modes in museums based on previous studies and our own research experience. The next section underpins the methodology used and explains the development of the analytical grid as a tool for data analysis. The final section of the paper contains analysis of the results and conclusory discussion.

## THE LITERATURE REVIEW

For the needs of the research we use the term engagement to study the relationship between museums and online audiences because we consider engagement is a broader term capable of including all social media activities of both organisation and digital community. In fact, the term engagement has been applied in different fields (information technology, various sectors of culture, marketing, etc.) and has been used to describe a wide range of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual activities on the individual or public level, even though understanding of the term has occasionally been taken for granted. Peter Dahlgren (2006: 24) argues “engagement generally refers to subjective states. That is, engagement indicates a mobilized, focused attention on some object. It is in a sense a prerequisite for participation.” This definition allows us to consider engagement as crucial for participation and thus for museum democratisation.

Previous applications of the term public engagement involve both online and offline activities (Buraimo et al. 2011; National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement 2014) and can be organised in a traditional or innovative, even experimental manner. The engagement involves a wide spectrum of individual and public activities starting

from hardly visible individual psychological processes such as engaging the public with art works or small stimuli – for example, colours or lights – to gain their attention. For the needs of this research on public engagement in museums we have adapted the rather general understanding of social media engagement “as a multi way interaction between and among an organization and digital communities that could take many forms, using social media channels to facilitate that interaction” (Heldman et al. 2013: 5).

As previously mentioned, engagement is a widely applied concept despite there being several definitions of the term. Some studies use the type of activity to distinguish various modes of engagement. To mention some of them: the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2014) in Bristol categorises engagement activities: (1) informing; (2) consulting; (3) collaborating. Further, each mode of engagement involves several subdivisions (for example informing also involves inspiring audiences, education, improving access, etc.). The study of digital engagement classifies a framework for online engagement specifically with arts and culture: (1) access covers “a range of activities centred around discovering what’s on, filtering opportunities and planning attendance or participation”; (2) learning refers to “a range of activities with an educational purpose such as searching information or improving creative skills”; (3) experience refers to an activity where the user is “experiencing the full creative or artistic work online”; (4) sharing refers to sharing content, experiences and opinions; (5) creating content demands the most sophisticated skills and behaviour as it involves the use of the Internet “to assist with the creative process itself” (MTM London 2010: 26).

Only a few sources conceptualise engagement in the museum context by focusing attention on the engagement process (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2006; Bitgood 2013). Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2006) uses varied human needs as the basis for engagement in order to explain why an individual chooses to engage with a museum, identifying four types of engagement – intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social. Bitgood (2013) uses a continuum of attention to explain the process of engagement with museums. In accordance with the Bitgood’s Attention Value model engagement is the highest level of attention and there are three stages of attention: capture, focus, and engage (ibid.: 194). Thus engagement with museum collections is associated with learning and requires deeper processing and longer viewing time than the focus level of attention. Summarising the above, the approaches to explaining why and how engagement occurs depend less on context – the motivation to engage or the stages of attention would also take place outside engagement with museum collections. Referring to sources identifying the type of engagement activity, there is no agreement among the different sources because engagement activities depend on the aim that is to be achieved using these activities, which are thus context sensitive. Therefore we suggest that in the specific research context – museum audience engagement online – we have to develop our own engagement modes (see our engagement modes in the Methods and Materials section below). Regarding the previously mentioned MTM London 2010 study of digital engagement in the arts and the similarities to our research topic, we can learn how to develop engagement modes. However, for us it is significant to differentiate between audiences (a general audience, professionals, stakeholders) and therefore we can only use ideas for content of engagement activity.

We review the specifics of social media, and specifically Facebook, from the museum perspective to be aware if there are some limitations which should be taken into account.



On the basis of previous research, suggested social media practice for museums includes: (1) encouraging networks and connections; (2) taking risks; (3) acknowledging that a healthy community will self-monitor and self-correct; (4) remembering that some areas will still need 'discipline' and organisational input; (5) learning from users (Kelly 2009: 12). However there are some reasons why museums might have a cautious attitude towards social networking sites instead of following the above-mentioned recommendations. The social media environment for museum professionals may seem trivial (Lotina 2014) and not an appropriate communication platform for the museum institution because in the social media environment entertainment and commercialisation are placed next to substantial content (Jenkins et al. 2006) which may seem to create a conflict. This challenge for the museum is reinforced by the fact that most people find museums to be trustworthy and reliable (Rosenzweig and Thelen 2000; Stylianou-Lambert 2010: 139). Our research results will also give an insight into how Latvian and Estonian museum communication copes with these challenges.

Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010: 65) suggest that "being active" online and carefully choosing with what social media to engage is significant in reaching the target group. In this study we focus only on Facebook and comment on the specifics of this social media portal. The authors of this article argue that this social networking site constrains participation because it "supports media uploads upon which others can comment, 'like' or recirculate, but little more" (Lewis et al. 2010: 356). Consequently despite the fact that the Web 2.0 platform has participatory potential, the daily usage practice of social media does not help to strengthen participation, an idea that is supported by other authors in the specific context of museums (Russo et al. 2007). However, the online environment is in a constant process of technological development, meaning that innovative tools open up new options to interact with users; therefore to some extent the communicators always have to experiment with social media to understand how these new possibilities can be used in their work.

Each museum's online engagement modes should correspond with the goals and functions of that museum, something that is particularly true of the communication function, which defines the content of engagement activities. André Desvallées and François Mairesse (2010: 29) claim that communication is the instrument with which to present the value that museums create in order to become relevant for society. These authors also define communication as the presentation of research undertaken into collections, and as the provision of information. Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti (see West 2012: 110) argue that initiating controversial discussions and inviting participants to engage in discussion is also part of the museum's communication with society. Peter van Mensch (1992) refers to museum communication using the broader terms of exhibition design and education. In the contemporary world "museums struggle to attract communities and compete for the leisure time of the audience with other leisure time offers" (Falk 2009: 186); through communication and marketing museums strive to provide access and reach new audiences who would otherwise never go near a cultural institution (Ovenden 2004). A fight for visitors' interest encourages entertainment in the museum as it is considered the most influential instrument to involve audiences (Hermes 2006; Jenkins 2006). Thus, when communicating on social media, museums are challenged to engage users in a communicative way, to market, to entertain, to educate and to bring up socially significant issues, etc. Thus it is significant to find a balance

between communicating, marketing and entertainment on one hand and the missionary functions of museum on the other.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

### *Sample and Data Collection*

The source of data is profiles of Latvian and Estonian museums in Facebook. The usage practice of social media in Latvia and Estonia is different. Facebook is the most used social network in Estonia, also among museums. The Latvian Internet Association (2014) listed statistics on its website confirming the following are the most popular social network services in Latvia: the local Latvian network Draugi.lv – engages 52 per cent of all Latvian Internet users or 32 per cent of inhabitants (January, 2013); Facebook.com engages 33 per cent of all Internet users or 20 per cent of inhabitants (April, 2013); Twitter.com accounts for 10 per cent of all Internet users or 6 per cent of inhabitants (January, 2013). Latvian museums that are engaged in social media use all three of these social networking sites. To provide data from both countries we collected data only from Facebook as each social network site has its own communication specifics. Estonian museums use Facebook more actively and their Facebook pages have gained on average more recorded attention from the friends of the museums (in the form of likes and friends) than Latvian museums (Lotina and Lepik 2013) because the latter share their presence across several active social networking sites.

The sample includes four museums, two institutions in each country, with the sample representing ethnographic museums and art museums, all of which have active Facebook communication. In Latvia, the sample consists of the Ethnographic Open Air Museum of Latvia (in this text presented as LV EM) and Art Museum Riga Bourse which is the affiliate of the Latvian National Museum of Art (in the text presented as LV RB). The sample from the Ethnographic Open Air Museum of Latvia consists of 875 posts, while Riga Bourse 281. In Estonia the sample includes The Art Museum of Estonia KUMU (cited as EE KUMU) with 173 posts and the Estonian National Museum's (cited as EE ENM) 208 posts. The selection of the museums is explained by the diverse nature of these organisations and consequently the potential diversity of engagement modes and communication. We argue that if different types of museum displayed comparable results, the model we use to understand communication through different engagement modes could be used for any museum. To collect the content created by museums, we used the free software program *Digital Footprints* and retrieved the museums' Facebook posts between October 2013 and September 2014 (12 months in total in order to cover various seasons and occasions throughout the year). The retrieved data included post (text and visual material) and all the related information, including users' feedback. Because of the aims of this study, our main interest was focused on the museum-created content because the research questions stress museum communication.

The aim of the paper is to understand how museums communicate online through different engagement modes and to develop an analytical grid consisting of different engagement modes and functions of language. The development of the analytical grid is explained below. The first phase of the data analysis started with close reading and labelling of the diverse analytical categories museums use to communicate with online communities. The second phase of analysis involved coding and a generalisation of each analytical category to generate a list of dominant categories that describe the online communication of museum in terms of engagement modes. By applying the principles of initial, focused and axial coding (Charmaz 2006) to the data corpus we extracted the characteristics intrinsic to each mode of engagement.

First we defined the audience engagement modes that are displayed in the museums' Facebook contents. To develop these categories, different sources were used to get insights into a variety of perspectives on the audience engagement discussed in the theoretical review. We mixed different theoretical approaches and our own empirical experience to develop a comprehensive list of engagement modes that are significant for the museums. The first stage of development categories started with close reading of retrieved Facebook content to identify the main engagement modes. The second round included the application of engagement categories to content and was followed by several redefinitions of engagement modes. As we conducted our study in the two relevant languages (Latvian and Estonian), each researcher needed to work individually during data collection and the first stages of analysis. Later on, after initial close reading and coding, Skype or face-to-face meetings were arranged in order to come to an agreement and achieve inter-coder reliability for the analytical categories used to identify modes of engagement. Finally we developed our own list of online audience engagement modes and their detailed descriptions as they relate to the context of museums. The list includes: (1) informing; (2) marketing; (3) consulting; (4) collaboration; (5) connecting with stakeholders; (6) connecting with participants/audiences; (7) connecting with professionals.

From our perspective 'informing' refers to strictly educational activities and excludes any promotional intentions on behalf of the museum, the exhibitions or other products offered by an organisation or stakeholder. 'Marketing and advertising' refers to promotion of any of museum activities and contains the invitation to attend the museum, its stakeholders or to participate in related events, including functional information about access. Occasionally, educational information may also be a part of promotion because posting marketing information does not exclude delivering educational content. To make promotion of the museum more attractive, museum posts enchain users' attention by adding playful activities like quizzes and other type of game with or without prizes. A type of marketing related post strives to trigger emotions in users and so messages may integrate emotional motifs such as sadness, joy, etc. For example, a post containing a funny picture or joke is considered as engaging attractor of attention. The 'consulting' category refers to the posts that actively raise issues and debates and invite feedback from users, such as expressions of opinion. Posts under this label may include socially significant issues, for example, politically, socially and historically sensitive matters and decisions, controversial issues. The main intention of this category

is to label the posts that invite collective expertise from the community although it excludes inviting the visitor to attend the museum or event that is labelled as marketing and excludes invitation to participate in activities labelled 'collaboration'. Collaboration refers to the posts that invite users to participate in social processes, to act as volunteers, fundraisers, donors, etc. This type of post stresses the significance of a temporary activity that is about to happen and refers to activities beyond temporary verbal or written expressions. The 'connect with stakeholders' category emphasises the museum's role as stakeholder in the network of related organisations and includes reposts to news posted by others; it is influenced by Facebook's sharing function thus supporting the goals of other institutions. 'Connect with participants/audiences' refers to the posts that stress the duration of the museum's relationship with a community. It might contain information that provokes emotions by sharing memories and strengthening the link of publics with the organisation by allowing the museum to look into that organisation's processes – shared information or pictures reflecting a less formal type of organisation. The 'connect with professionals' category refers to the users who already have some kind of professional knowledge in the specific field of museum. These posts inform the online community about events like scientific conferences, thematic workshops, press conferences for journalists, etc. These posts show that the museum organisation is part of a professional network, it communicates with and is trusted by colleagues.

These categories reflect list of online community engagement modes that from the perspective of other authors are viewed separately. Our analytical grid is based on previous analysis of online content (Lotina and Lepik 2013) and was developed for the specific purpose of exploring online audience engagement modes in the social media communication of museums.

Roman Jakobson (1960) developed a model with which to investigate the language in the variety of its functions where each of the factors in the model determines a different function of language. The model by Jakobson has become well established in both linguistics and in many other domains (Ephratt 2008: 1913). We used the later adaptation of this classical model developed by Tony Thwaites, Lloyd Davis and Warwick Mules (2002) to investigate the functions of messages that museums create in Facebook. In the grid we included the following message functions: (1) content; (2) code; (3) form; (4) addresser; (5) contact; (6) addressee; (7) context (see Table 1). Regarding the online environment and specifics of this research we neglected the element of the addresser. The reason for doing so is that the imagined addresser is always the same – a museum – even if there can be several senders, different people working in the institution and posting in the name of the museum.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section of research reflects the results and the analysis of the results from the perspective audience engagement modes. From a number of the museums' Facebook posts we have generated examples of museum communication in terms of the engagement modes: (1) informing; (2) marketing; (3) consulting; (4) collaborating; (5) connecting with stakeholders; (6) connecting with participants/audiences; (7) connecting with professionals. The modes of engagement in this paper are conceptualised through differ-

ent aspects of communication. Communication can be framed through several aspects as has been done and widely applied in models of the communicative functions of language (Jakobson 1960; Thwaites *et al.* 2002). In Table 1 we can find the message functions presented to enable the analysis of the engagement modes of the museums. Each of these communicative functions helps to add depth to the message and make the repertoire of the museums' communication more nuanced not only in terms of the content, but also other functions.

### *Informing*

Compared to other modes of engagement, informing can be considered one of the most dominant ways to engage museum friends on Facebook. Regarding the content, museum messages often display educative and informative characteristics and thus a large number of posts can be categorised as informative audience engagement mode. The created content allows us to generalise about several ideal types of engagement mode: (1) educative and informative descriptions of museum objects and/or activities; (2) information related to the broader context within which the museum works – for example, in the case of ethnographic museums it is cultural traditions, including traditional skills, food, holidays, while in the case of art museums it is the history of art, stories about artists, etc.; (3) interesting facts that both captivate and educate. For example, a typical message representing how a museum informs its audience about educational content: “The holidays are just about to arrive. From our blog you can find a story about gingerbreads, and a nice recipe.” (EE ENM December 23, 2013).

The text museums create is rich and thus meant not only to teach or inform but also to amuse readers and create an emotional response. The informing mode of engagement follows the code or genre of short stories or pictures to create the proper atmosphere, both for the museum and the other educative materials that aim to introduce the topics covered by the museum.

The context of messages is defined by the events taking place in the museum and in the broader context also by cultural traditions like Christmas festivities, etc., significant events that provides motivation for the museum activities such as anniversaries (birthdays of artists, etc.) or any kind of topicality defined by the specific nature of each museum. Another contextual background for the museum is related to delivering information about the unique museum items that are part of the collections. The contact between parties can be described as a teacher-pupil relationship as museum-created content conveys its vast knowledge to the online community. Because of the diversity of themes that museums cover, audience interest can become divided and thus their interest in using the learning opportunities provided by the museum may be rather short-term. The addressees of the museum posts can be derived from the contact: as museums can be treated as an education institution, meaning the addressees could be potentially anyone (Lepik and Carpentier 2013) visiting the museum's Facebook page.

## Marketing

Marketing related posts form the highest number of museum messages in Facebook, something that is also closely related to the fact that almost any event hosted by museums or their stakeholders can be promoted actively and repeatedly: in the form of several reminders when looking forward to the event, reports during the event, and reflections afterwards. Thus, marketing as a mode of engagement is conceptualised by following the analytical categories of content: (1) Promotional information about the museum, its events and the production process of museum products. (2) Playful activities such as quizzes, competitions and games organised to attract the attention of users together with encouragement to participate in these activities composes another part of museum communication. The analytical categories show that language is not only informative and persuasive but also entertaining and teasing, as in the example below:

In fact, a cow is hidden in the courtyard of KUMU. On the hour one can hear sounds of Alpic horns, the entire courtyard is filled with doors taking you to artworks, Ping Pong and parallel worlds. You can download the treasure map of the courtyard from here. (EE KUMU July 21, 2014)

(3) The museum also regularly keep users updated about the institution's and/or related persons' appearances in traditional and online media. (4) Eventually, museums use Facebook as a newsboard to post functional information about prices, opening hours, access limitations to the museum or its digital resources. Museums used to supplement promotional content with educational material, thus often avoiding simple adverts and producing versatile and well-written content, as in the message below:

Eugène Laermans is one of the most outstanding figures in Belgian art. His works most directly express the Flemish sense of life creating a unified image of the landscapes and people of his native land. You can see this artwork in the *Impressions and Parallels* exhibition. (LV RB December 19, 2013)

The market-related content can be viewed predominantly in shape of genres such as advertisements or promotional information, and invitations or 'teasers' from the museums' collections. Within marketing the overall emotional elements work to evoke interest of potential visitors, being related to joy, eagerness, curiosity, etc. Different means of advertising are considered hereby as follows: instead of one-time advertisements visitors to the museum's Facebook page can be continually reminded about the event through encouragement to participate. In addition to mediatised advertising and public relationships, promoting the museum elsewhere is linked to the Facebook news feed: such examples include links to TV or radio broadcasts that relate to museum content. In such broadcast, the museum is the topic, or a museum representative is a guest on the broadcast.

The context that defines marketing communication overlaps with the context of the informative mode of engagement, although compared to informing there are differences in the relationship between the museum and the online community. The marketing related content defines that it can be characterised as a short-term traditional museum–visitor relationship based on museum invitation issued to users to attend and experience products offered by the organisation. On the basis of the contact, the

addressees of marketing-related posts can be anyone, although regarding the particular events, we may as well consider more or less clear target groups who are kept in mind by the museum professionals. The “treasure map of the courtyard”, mentioned previously, probably has in mind a playful activity that engages younger museum audience members (children and adolescents) or those associated with them (parents or teachers) who are possibly considering some interesting activity for their children or pupils.

### *Consulting*

The engagement mode related to consultation demonstrates that it is an existing practice although not an everyday habit. The content of messages communicates: (1) the need for collective expertise; (2) an invitation to share emotions; (3) the raising of socially significant issues; (4) requests for feedback following usage of consulting information. Analysis of content posted over a year shows that organisations have asked users online for advice about the use of mobile application or the most effective advertisements. A typical message demonstrating the need for collective expertise is:

Recently in the museum’s photo archive an old box was found full of completely unknown glass-plate photos and negatives from the 1930s. The pictures were probably taken in Latvia but we have no information about when or where or who the people are. Here are some of the pictures, perhaps we will find some clues. (LV EM February 11, 2014)

When consulting, the code used can be described as part of a discussion or argumentation, or an invitation to express one’s opinion. Consulting can be said to be asking questions of, and seeking advice from, members of museum’s online community. Eventually, because one element of consulting is a two-way process, the museums also present feedback on the usage of the information received from these consultants. In this way, the significance of the consultation process and the important role of visitors-as-consultants is stressed.

These results indicate that institutions rather operate in an environment in which there is a certain amount of need to consult their online communities. This mode of engagement defines the temporary, but also potentially continuous, relationship between the museum and the online audiences in which the museum takes the role of seeker of advice from informal external experts. When consulting, museums are attending to all of their online friends in a way that opens up the possibility for visitors to become stakeholders. The relationship in the consulting engagement mode *per se* is a temporary one, and thus the role of stakeholder is also temporary; nevertheless, the possibility to consult a museum is not limited, there is the potential that a person who has consulted a museum once, might also be interested in a similar type of engagement mode in the future.

## *Collaboration*

Just like consultation, collaboration is also not widely spread in the Facebook content created by the museums. In the year under analysis the analytical categories include: (1) an invitation to participate in research related to socially significant problems; (2) volunteers' work reflections – gratitude, invitations; (3) gratitude for a donation the museum had received; (4) participation possibilities (announcements, invitations, updates) in museum projects such as art competitions, etc. Communication with both potential and existing volunteers and donors indicates that online communication does not present the entire spectrum of engagement related to engagement of various groups; in fact it does show the significance of volunteer work for these organisation. The online environment is apparently not the platform most used by museums to establish and sustain communication with volunteers and donors; rather, museums communicate with these groups without the mediation of social networked sites in face-to-face situations.

Similarly to consulting, the (code of) collaboration is manifested in terms of invitations (to contribute something as a donation, participate in research, etc.) or gratitude (feedback related to collaborations). The main difference is, though, in the relative size of the contribution: in case of consulting the opinion or expertise of potential audiences of the museum is asked, yet in case of collaboration, the museum's friends are invited to act in some way: contributing more or less tangibly in terms of voluntary work, responding to a questionnaire, etc. The collaboration, in some cases, also occurs without invitation from the museum – that is, someone finds her or himself ready to contribute artefacts and brings them to the museum as a voluntary donation. In this case, the museum's professionals may be caught by surprise:

The Estonian Art Museum has received an unprecedented grand gift. A living classic of Estonian avant-gard art, Raul Meel, has given the museum all the works from his exhibition at the Estonian Art Museum. The Estonian Art Museum has never received such a gift before. (EE KUMU May 9, 2014)

We may assume that notifications about such acts and the publication of gratitude from the museum may provoke interest in other potential museum-goers who may also want to see themselves as contributors, although this assumption needs confirmation from further research.

The context of this engagement mode is related to situations where museums are willing to invite and accept the input of the audience using the online environment. This engagement mode establishes both temporary and continuous relationships between museums and audiences. It is hardly possible to identify an unequivocal role for each part as a museum and a partner give and take at the same time. In the case of continuous relationship a more balanced level of receiving and giving are established, otherwise one party would not be interested in a long term relationship. The addressees of the collaborative engagement mode are firstly stakeholders (donors, volunteers, etc.) who have contributed to the museum. Yet, considering the nature of social media, by posting such news to the online community the museum can indirectly interest of all their online community members in becoming potential stakeholders.



### *Connect with Stakeholders*

Museums clearly communicate to their online community that they are part of wider network presenting relationships with a variety of stakeholders on Facebook, in various ways: (1) giving information about stakeholder's media appearances; (2) giving information about cooperative activities such as learning each from other, visits, common projects, asking for and providing expertise; 3) greetings and gratitude to stakeholders. The example below presents how the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia displays its connections: in this case the community is informed about the fact that the museum has been chosen as the place to shoot the video *Cake to Bake* of the band *Foreigners* representing Latvia in the Eurovision song contest: "Today, the Liiv farmstead at the museum is full of 'Foreigners' :) Do they bake something for the coming Eurovision in Copenhagen?" (LV EM March 12, 2014). The museum also played with the words of the song to create a more engaging text that can be understood only if the reader is familiar with the lyrics. The code of this mode of communication aims to represent the museum as part of a wider network, emphasising the ties this memory institution has with similar institutions and their stakeholders. This bond can be described in terms of a friendship, where the official mask of the museum has been somewhat shifted and the developments of the museum and the gratitude of its professionals to their stakeholders are exposed.

The connection to stakeholders is shaped by the context in which the museum professionals themselves are in the position of learner, experiencing new things (that need to be shared with their friends) presented by their partners. Online communication shows that the museum-stakeholder relationship within a wider network of professional institutions might be both temporary or continuous, depending on the relationship with each stakeholder. On the one hand, as possible addressees for this mode of engagement – everyone who visits the museum's Facebook – site can be considered, while on the other hand, the relationship with the stakeholders mentioned above is also nourished in Facebook.

### *Connecting with Participants/Audiences*

Connecting with participants and audiences is a well-represented engagement mode in the Facebook content created by museums. It has the following characteristics: (1) Presenting the 'hidden' face of the organisation, discovering inner processes that might be hidden for publics in any other day. For example by showing that museum professionals learn during visits to other museums, the ways in which exhibitions are developed, moving collections to new spaces, etc.; (2) sharing memories and other emotional content, displaying human feelings such as nostalgia; (3) (seasonal) greetings and gratitude: "The exhibition *Double Reality* by Latvian born American artist Vija Celmins was attended by 19,646 visitors. Thank you for the wonderful reviews!" (LV RB June 25, 2014); (4) updating museum blogs (engaging in discussion) as a tool that helps to sustain the relationship with online communities. As is the case in relation to stakeholders, connection with participants/audiences aims to represent the museum as part of a wider network and show its friendly or homely face, although the focus in this mode

of engagement remains mainly on audiences and participants in the museum. Shared memories and past reflections dominate as a code with participants and audiences, reminding them about events enjoyed together or holidays celebrated in the same culture. Even more thoroughly, the works and processes performed out of sight of the visitors are introduced within this mode of engagement. A good example is links to blog posts by the Estonian National Museum explaining the reasoning and emotions behind the setting up of a new temporary exhibition, or reminding people from time to time about the construction process of the new museum building.

Cultural traditions and past events are the most prominent factors that form the context for this engagement mode, as well as topicalities and events in the museum or events experienced by museum professionals now or in the past. Connecting with participants and audiences is a mode of engagement which potentially helps to sustain a continuous relationship with visitors-as-stakeholders, reminding them about the interests they have in common with the museum and opening to them the possibility of becoming members of the audience and becoming active participants in the activities of a museum (Runnel et al. 2014).

### *Connecting with Professionals*

This mode of engagement is visible in Facebook content but the specifics of this communication are defined by the continuous relationship between professionals – between a museum and other professional organisations or individuals. A restricted amount of communication would be accessible publicly, and the content in this case involves rather functional announcements, professional achievements, reflection of scientific activity: (1) information related to scientific matters such as defence of PhD theses, conferences, new research information and other professional events outside the museum; (2) job or stakeholder announcements – the search for employees, artists or craftsmen, participants in traditional fairs; (3) professional achievements such as prizes won or books published by colleagues; (4) planned purchases. Museums use language that might be described as informative when posting professional-oriented messages online.

At the same time it is important to stress that museums are willing to have professional discussions with the online community, for example, the museum publishes annual visitor statistics, although this information can become debate within the museum and among visitors, possibly affecting culture policy and the subsidies earmarked for museums. There are several examples demonstrating that the initiator of such a discussion is a user and that museums are happily to engage.

In the case of connecting with professionals, the code used to accompany the post is functional and evokes professional interest, specifically discussing the museum's activities and achievements. The broader context of this engagement mode is mainly management and curatorship activities, being used when a new employee is needed or something professionally interesting has happened or is about to. As has been mentioned above, the continuous relationship between the museum and other professional organisations and individuals shapes this mode of engagement, thus the addressees in this case are people who are also considered to be from professional communities.

To summarise the analytical categories of engagement modes describing museum communication the selected museums often create rich and versatile communication, making it difficult to refer to each separate example to an exact audience engagement mode. Museums used to create enjoyable and educative content, thus attracting the attention of the reader, although this did not challenge the user to respond; however, once users have demonstrated that they are active online, museums are ready to engage in discussion with an online community, thus extending the borders of initial communication and engagement mode.

In addition to the aforementioned message functions analysed in this study, there is also the aspect of the form used to communicate content. The forms of each different engagement mode partly overlap. Replying to the museum generating captures for shared links is widespread among all engagement modes. Storytelling is stressed as the significant mode in which to communicate messages when marketing a museum or informing users. Specific to marketing-related content, museums generate teasing and playful activities such as games or competitions thus provoking interest in the events. For marketing and professional purposes museums also use functional notifications to inform their audiences and partners, without expecting any feedback. Discussions and argumentation from the museum are displayed if users (audiences and/or stakeholders) are willing to have a debate, and also when the museum has invited users' opinions. Gratitude and greetings are often used to connect with stakeholders and audiences. Summarising this, there are slight differences in the form of communication in each engagement mode.

## CONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION

In our paper, we analysed the modes of social media engagement of selected museums in Latvia and Estonia. The modes of engagement, which are (1) informing; (2) marketing; (3) consulting; (4); collaborating; (5) connecting with stakeholders; (6) connecting with participants; (7) connecting with professionals, were dealt with through various message functions indicating the possibilities that museums have in their repertoires to attract the attention of potential visitors. The modes of engagement can vary in the length and type of possible relationship to the museums' audiences, the type of content and the code of the message, and the ways in which possible addressees are engaged. Some modes of engagement are articulated more often (such as informing and marketing), while others are used more carefully (like consulting or connecting with other professionals). These findings allow us to discuss some of the features related to the modes of engagement used on the museums' Facebook pages.

Both modes of engagement and message function applied by museums in social media have been analysed above as separate analytical categories, in a way, as purified entities or ideal types, yet also our analysis has indicated the different relationships that may occur between these engagement modes or message functions. Critically speaking, a post by a museum *per se* can convey a mix of modes of engagement, for example, being sometimes both informative and advertising, or connecting with participants and stakeholders: "This week our ethnographers visited ancient musical instrument master craftsman Eduards Klints. He showed us his work and demonstrated several instru-

ments.” (LV EM May 12, 2013) Similar traits of message functions can be shared across several modes of engagement, for example, the code consisting of invitation can be a part of both the consulting and collaborating modes of engagement, it is the extent of the expected contribution that differs in these two cases.

In fact, the examples of modes of engagement we can see on social media are just the tip of the iceberg. Thus, the research regarding engagement modes could be continued by analysing the reasoning and attitudes behind content production, including a study of the museum professionals who create Facebook posts. Different ways to engage museum visitors may also be played out on the spot, so it is possible to study the modes of engagement in different on the spot activities, as has also been mentioned in Lotina 2014. Both ways to engage visitors can be treated as complementary, whereas the museum professionals in a particular institution can pick the repertoires that suit their audiences. Similarly, the perception and response to one or another choice from these repertoires can depend on the potential addressee, on his or her interpretation. All of the modes of engagement present in social media or on Facebook in particular can also exist in other contexts and channels, and can be analysed by applying our analytical contribution. For example, the marketing mode of engagement has been used to promote the museum in a news list, while invitation to reply to a questionnaire about a museum-related topic are related to collaborating, etc.

To conclude, we propose a multi-dimensional approach to the various modes of engagement, which, together, constitute a museum’s engagement repertoire, in order to involve different (potential) visitors in the activities of the museum. Inevitably, the content itself is a powerful component in constructing a message for a museum’s audiences, yet in order to establish a desired relationship, the latent aspects of the message – the functions of the message – also need to be considered. Audiences, naturally, have their intentionality and interpretations, which may also affect the ways of perceiving the modes of engagement, yet in the case of social media its possibility to provide multi-lateral interaction allows it to bring meaningful participatory activity a step closer for both the museum and its audiences.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

LV EM – The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia  
LV RB – Art Museum Riga Bourse (affiliate of the Latvian National Museum of Art)  
EE KUMU – KUMU, Art Museum of Estonia  
EE ENM – Estonian National Museum

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Table 1. Review of modes of engagement and functions of language.

	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Marketing &amp; Advertising</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Collaborating</b>	<b>Connecting with stakeholders</b>	<b>Connecting with participants/ audiences</b>	<b>Connecting with professionals</b>
<b>Content</b>	Educational; Informative descriptions of the objects/activities; Informative descriptions of the contexts; Interesting facts and stories	Promotional information about the museum and events; playful activities; notifications about appearances in media; news board for functional information	The need for collective expertise; invitation to share emotions; increasing socially significant issues; feedback following usage of the consulting information	Invitation to participate in research; volunteers' work invitations and reflections; gratitude for donations; collaboration possibilities	Informing about stakeholder media appearances; informing about cooperation activities; greetings and gratitude to stakeholders	Inside works and processes of the organisation; sharing memories and other emotional content; (seasonal) greetings and gratitude	Information related to scientific and/or professional matters and other professional events outside the museum; job or stakeholder announcements; professional achievements; planned purchases
<b>Code</b>	Stories, pictures, recipes and other learning/educative material; reflections to create atmosphere	Promotional information; functional information; provoking interest and emotion; invitation; educational promotional information; repetitive messages; mediated advertising and public relationships	Discussion and argumentation; invitation to express opinion, asking for advice; reflecting the results of consulting	Invitation to collaborate: donate, volunteer, etc.; encouragement of on-going processes; examples and gratitude for recent collaboration	Gratitude to partners; representation of museum as part of network; representation of museums as developing organisations	Shared memories and reflections on the past; showing the other face of the museum; greetings and reflections to create atmosphere	Functional information; provoking professional interest and specifically discussing the museum's activities; reminder
<b>Context</b>	Traditions related to seasons, festivals; topicalities in the field; interesting objects from collections	Traditional festivals; museum topicalities; up-coming events; interesting objects from the collections	A situation in which consulting interest groups on Facebook is considered necessary	Supporting research; work with volunteers and donors	Events in partner organisations	Cultural traditions; past events	New colleagues are needed; a professional event outside the museum

	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Marketing &amp; Advertising</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Collaborating</b>	<b>Connecting with stakeholders</b>	<b>Connecting with participants/ audiences</b>	<b>Connecting with professionals</b>
<b>Form</b>	Storytelling; reply; captions; conversation	Invitation; storytelling; reposts; captions; games; competitions, notification, reminder	reply; captions; conversation	Invitation; gratitude	Gratitude to partners; notifications;	Conversation; providing feedback; captions; gratitude	Notifications; captures
<b>Addressee</b>	All people	All people; target group	All people; potential visitors-stakeholders	All people; potential visitors-stakeholders	All people; visitors-stakeholders; other organisations	All people; visitors-stakeholders	Professional individuals and organisations
<b>Contact</b>	A temporary 'teacher-pupil' relationship as part of which the museum shares its knowledge	A temporary 'traditional museum-visitor relationship' in which the museum invites its visitors to come and experience the contents of the museum	A temporary/continuous relationship between the museum and external experts in which the museum asks for the advice from its friends	A temporary/continuous relationship between partners in which the friends have something to contribute and the museum is in a position to receive something	A temporary/continuous relationship with a wider network of professional institutions and visitor-stakeholders in which the purpose of the museum is to be visible in its network	A continuous relationship with the visitor-stakeholders	A continuous relationship with professional individuals and organisations



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## NOTES AND REVIEWS

### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD IN BENGALI FOLKLORE

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#### INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how the concept of motherhood in Bangladesh and West Bengal (jointly called Greater Bengal before 1947) is used in four contexts, and then attempts to interpret why motherhood is attributed to human women who are not biological mothers, to selected goddesses and deities, and to the landmass known as Bengal until 1947. The first context is the actual biological mother and child relationship and its presence in the basic family unit. In this context, she is known as *mā* ('mother'). The second context is the assumed mother and child relationship, like step-mother and stepchild, foster mother and foster child, etc., and its presence in the basic family unit. This form of attribution is also made to women of a previous generation inside the extended family, like father's sister (*piśi-mā*), mother's sister (*maśi-mā*), and father's brother's wife (*kāki-mā*) and to women of a junior generation, like a daughter or a daughter-in-law. The third is the attribution of motherhood to unrelated women outside the family unit where the custom is to address them as a *mā*. The fourth is the attribution of motherhood to selected goddesses and deities that are culturally constructed and maintained with storylines mainly in

the oral tradition. It should be noted that the matching word for a male parent in the basic family unit is *bābā*, and it is also used as a form of address and a sign of affection to boys of the next generation. However, it is only occasionally used as a description or as a form of address to male deities or gods. In the fourth context, both Hindus and Muslims are known to refer to the landmass of what used to be Bengal as a *mā*. However, Muslims of Bengal do not honour the convention of referring to goddesses and deities as a *mā*. Table 1 summarises the four contexts in which motherhood is attributed by Bengali culture.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions here are: Given that the word *mā* means a woman in a basic mother-child dyad, how and why is the word used outside that context and what social functions does it serve? Does attribution of motherhood have an impact on empowering females in a highly patriarchal society? What, if any, is the underlying logic that explains the popularity of the storylines narrated here?

The three questions are prompted by three different intellectual traditions. The first of them emerged as structural-functionalism,

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and variations of it were introduced by William R. Bascom (1954), Bronislaw Malinowski (2001 [1927]), Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952), and others. In recent times, it has been called neofunctionalism (Gans 1972; Alexander 1998; Luhman 2000 [1995]; Friedkin 2004). The basic position in this tradition is that storylines evolve in a social setting to perform some important functions. The second tradition has come to be known as gender studies, or studies of gender relations where attention is paid to the subtle, unconscious, and daily exercises of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that are prompted by gender roles (Schneir 1994). Emphasis

is placed on how gender is an important mechanism by which power and resources are distributed in society (Beauvoir 1989; Fallaize 1998). The third intellectual tradition is influenced by Marxist thought (Marx and Engels 1970 [1845]; Marx 2009 [1844]), which proposes that religious and political ideologies in a society create a form of consciousness which, in turn, help disguise several forms of alienation (Israel 1971). They give the appearance of logical explanations of phenomena, and give the impression of being “logic in a popular form” (Marx 2009 [1844]; Banerjee 2010 [2002]).

Table 1. Four contexts of attribution of motherhood in Bengali folklore.

Context	Relationship	Attribution of Motherhood
Basic nuclear family	Biological mother/child dyad	The woman in the biological dyad is described and addressed as <i>mā</i>
Extended family	Assumed mother/child dyad, as in stepmother/stepchild	The woman in the assumed dyad is often described and addressed as <i>mā</i>
	Aunts who belong to the previous generation, like father’s sister, mother’s sister, or father’s brother’s wife	Women from the previous generation are described and addressed as <i>piśi-mā</i> , or <i>maśi-mā</i> , or <i>kāki-mā</i>
	Young women who belong to the immediate next generation, like daughters, daughters-in-law	The women from the immediate next generation are described and addressed as <i>mā</i> (meaning ‘daughter’) or <i>bou-mā</i> (meaning ‘daughter-in-law’)
Greater community beyond the extended family	Women in supervisory position to servants	Addressed as <i>mā</i> , or as <i>piśi-mā</i> , <i>maśi-mā</i> , <i>kaki-mā</i> or as <i>dīdi</i> (meaning ‘an older sister’)
	Women assumed to be from the previous or next generation (women assumed to be from the same generation are seen as sibling equivalents and not addressed as <i>mā</i> )	Women assumed to be from a previous generation are addressed as <i>piśi-mā</i> , or <i>maśi-mā</i> , or <i>kāki-mā</i>
Culturally constructed goddesses and deities in the greater community for Hindus	Goddesses and deities for Hindus	Goddesses and deities are described and addressed with a prefix of <i>mā</i> by Hindus
Culturally constructed disdain for goddesses that are seen as idols by Muslims The landmass known as Bengal before 1947, now Bangladesh and West Bengal	The host country and culture called Bengal (Bangladesh and West Bengal) – all people of Bengali origin are seen as her children	Bangladesh and/or West Bengal seen as mother by all

## METHODOLOGY

Storytelling formed the basic design of the study. The second author of this work is of Hindu Bengali origin, and retains native fluency in the Bengali language. His American-born daughter, the first author of this study, asked him why he addressed her as Māmoni (meaning 'jewel of a mother'). He answered that it is customary in the Bengali language for a father to address his daughter as a *mā*, meaning 'mother'. Then he went on to recall how in Bengal (now Bangladesh and West Bengal) it is customary to address a woman of the junior generation as a *mā*. Further, the word *mā* is used to address women of a senior generation, goddesses (who are socially constructed) of Bengal, and the landmass of what used to be Bengal. The Bengali father also remembered how the stories he narrates to his daughter were told to him by his mother when he was a child.

In this case, the focus was on the Bengali father, who has learned to address his daughter as a *mā*. His daughter then asked him to elaborate on who else in Bengali culture is addressed as a *mā* and how the convention prescribes the use of the word *mā* to women who are not biological mothers.

Narrating a series of storylines, the father began describing how Bengali culture teaches where the word *mā* is to be used. Such usages apply not only to biological mothers, but also to culturally constructed deities and goddesses, and to the landmass of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

### THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH A WOMAN IS ADDRESSED AS A MOTHER (*MĀ*)

The word *mā* is used, either as a free-standing form of address, or as a prefix (as in Mā Durgā, meaning 'Mother Durgā') or as a suffix (as in *kāki-mā*, or *māśi-mā* meaning an aunt who is the wife of father's brother or an aunt who is mother's sister). The term

is also used for non-kin women and for selected goddesses and deities.

The word *mā* is used where there is a basic dyad of a mother and a child. It is also used as a form of address used by the child to the mother. Thus in this context the word has two usages: a description of the role of a female parent, and as a form of address to that female parent.

The word *mā* may also be used when the female parent is not a biological mother, but is a stepmother or a foster mother. At times the person with a stepmother role is not addressed as *mā*, but is addressed by her first name. In such contexts, the role of the stepmother as a member of the family is tacitly accepted, but the respect owed a mother is not formally conferred. Further, often an aunt, like a father's sister, or a mother's sister, or a father's brother's wife (the Bengali language has exact words designating how and where in the family tree she is an aunt) is seen as a *mā* with an add-on suffix to the kinship terminology. Thus the kinship term for a mother's sister is *māśi*, and the description of that woman becomes *māśi-mā*. The form of address for that person then also becomes *māśi-mā*. Often the subsequent generation awards this attribution of motherhood to female members of the previous generation. Women in supervisory or otherwise authority positions in the extended family are usually addressed by their servants as a *mā*.

The next form of attribution is done by members of a senior generation, usually a father, or a father-in-law or a mother or a mother-in-law, to a daughter or a daughter-in-law. The word *bou* means a bride, and here the form of address becomes a *bou-mā*. Often women outside the family, especially women from high status families in the community are addressed as *mā*. Here there is no biological family but motherhood is attributed as a form of honour.

There is a large number of goddesses and deities that are culturally constructed and maintained in Bengal. Some of these

goddesses perform multiple functions, like providing protection from evil monsters or outside invaders and, simultaneously, providing a gift of food or a cure for an ugly disease.

#### GODDESSES IN BENGAL AND NORTH INDIA

Some goddesses, like Durgā, her incarnates, and her two daughters (Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī) are worshipped in Bengal (both Bangladesh and West Bengal) as well as in North India (Kinsley 1988; Hawley and Wulff 1996; Jacobsen et al. 2009; Chatterjee 2010; Chakravarty 2012). They are immensely popular in the Bengal region, and are sometimes referred to as Bengali goddesses (Maity 1988; 1989; Chatterjee 2010). It is a custom among Bengali Hindus to address these goddesses as a *mā*.

It should be noted that the stories presented below represent a local and folkloric development in Bangladesh and West Bengal. They were narrated by the Bengali father engaged in storytelling to his daughter. At times, the local Bengali stories differ slightly from the ones in North Indian Hindu tradition. For example, Satī and Pārvatī are not referred to as a *mā* in the Bengali tradition. Ola-Bibi and Bon-Bibi are not usually found in North India, and they too are not referred to as a *mā*.

#### *Satī, the First Incarnation of Durgā but Not Quite a Mā*

The legend of Satī, the first incarnate of Durgā, is one that ends in tragedy (Sati 2014). Satī, the beautiful youngest daughter of King Dakṣa, had always loved and worshipped Lord Śiva, god of destruction and one of the most powerful forms of god. After years of prayer and refusing all other men, Satī is finally approached by Śiva who asked her to marry him. However, Dakṣa, disgusted with Śiva's wildness, forbade his daughter to enter into the union. When Satī said that she would

marry no other man, her father shunned her and condemned her to banishment with her husband. The two retreated to the mountains and lived their lives in exile for many years. When Satī heard that her father was hosting all the gods in a large communal worship, with the exception of Śiva, she was overcome with grief at missing her natal family. She went to see her father with Śiva's permission. However, upon returning home, she was met with malice and found that Dakṣa's hatred of her husband was stronger than ever. Feeling rage towards her father and upset at the dishonour of her husband, Satī prayed again to Śiva, vowing to return as a daughter to a father she could respect. She then stepped into a fire and immolated herself. (It should be noted that the narrative about Dakṣa's daughter is spelled as Satī, and the practice of immolating a widow at her husband's funeral pyre is spelled suttee.)

So heartbroken over the death of his beloved, Śiva manifested as the terrifying Virabhadra, a monster with every weapon and hundreds of arms. He killed everything in his path and beheaded Dakṣa. Afterwards, he travelled the world carrying Satī's burned body aloft, performing the Tāṇḍava dance, which is the source of all creation and destruction. The fifty-one places where parts of Satī's body fell are now considered holy places, called *śakti-pīthas*, or seats of power. Once her body was fully gone, Śiva retreated into the mountains and refused to come out of his self-imposed isolation. (For somewhat alternative versions of this narrative, see Doniger 2004; 2010.)

Satī exists somewhere between the plane of mortal human women and the great goddesses like Durgā. Thus her role and function is a somewhat contradictory one. Her story is remarkable in her defiance of her father, and utterly romantic in the depiction of Śiva's mourning. However, beyond that defiance and romanticism is one of the strongest cases for Hinduism's patriarchal society. There is no denying that Satī is powerful, but this is all in relation to Śiva. She has the ability to pull Śiva, the model hermit, out of his lonely

and austere lifestyle, and also to throw him back there. It is through Saṭī that we can limit Śiva into one of his two poles, the first being ascetic and the second erotic and passionate (Kinsley 1988: 38).

In addition, the story of Saṭī functions as the exemplar for the Hindu woman. If she has failed her husband in any way, and his death has preceded hers, she is expected to perform the (now outlawed) ritual of suttee, or immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Women who performed suttee were forever memorialised and worshipped for their goddess-like behaviour (Wadley 1977). In short, the story of Saṭī functions as a method for socialising women in how to treat men, specifically their fathers and husbands. A woman's loyalty to her husband is held above all else.

It should be noted that Saṭī is not addressed as *mā*. The attribution of motherhood never happens to Saṭī. She does not have any biological children, and Bengali Hindus do not see her as a mother figure.

### *Pārvatī, the Second Incarnation of Durgā but Not Quite a Mā*

Pārvatī, meaning 'she who is of the mountain', is primarily seen as Śiva's wife, and her presence in the world is important because she is the mother of Śiva's children. Pārvatī is born to Himāvat, the Himalayan Mountains, and throughout her life she performs great feats of austerity in order to prove her ability to be Śiva's wife. She sits in the middle of four raging fires during the summer months, stands on one leg for years, and lives entirely in the mountainous wilderness. After several trials, Śiva agrees to marry Pārvatī, and the entire Hindu pantheon partakes in the marriage ceremony. Even though she produces two sons, she does not actually become impregnated and give birth vaginally to either child. However, she still manages to lactate and breast-feed her children. Kārttikeya comes out of the Ganges River, and Gaṇeśa is shaped by Pārvatī, from her sweat and dirt. Gaṇeśa,

made to be fiercely protective of Pārvatī, denies Śiva entry into Pārvatī's home in the mountains, and so Śiva becomes angry and decapitates his son. Śiva's actions infuriate Pārvatī, and in order to make amends with his wife, he replaces Gaṇeśa's head with that of a baby elephant and makes the young god immensely powerful. There are many ballads and legends that focus on the four as a happy family (Kinsley 1988). She also produces two daughters, Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth, and Sarasvatī, goddess of learning. Their place in Bengali folklore is discussed later.

The image of Pārvatī focuses on her 'sweet-heart' nature. Like Saṭī, her role in humanity is to domesticate the great god Śiva, to pull him from his asceticism and into reality, and most importantly to put godly children on the Earth. Yes, she is a mother, and though it is assumed that she consummated her marriage with Śiva, her children are born as extra-uterine miracles (Erndl 1993: 6). According to Wadley (1977), childbirth in the Hindu tradition is one of the most impure times in a woman's life as it is so temporally distant from virginity. Breast-feeding is a method of purifying both the mother and child after such an event. Pārvatī, although formally not addressed as a mother, manages to retain her chaste, desirable, young and pure status. Her function is to provide an exemplar of the ultimate female role.

### *Durgā, a Goddess and a Mā*

The folklore of Saṭī and Pārvatī begets a strengthening of patriarchal ideals, specifically of the ideal woman and wife, whose power manifests in their virginity, chastity, and loyalty. However, the goddesses Durgā and Kālī cannot easily be pigeonholed. First, the goddesses are more human and are tied to their male consorts. Kālī and Durgā, who in no way are human, are recognised as mothers to human-kind. Their divinity is physically marked with extra arms that hold weapons, third eyes, and a being of immense power below their feet. In the case of Durgā,

a lion or tiger mount, and in the case of Kālī, the god Śiva. Both are referred to popularly as Mā Durgā and Mā Kālī.

Durgā is, arguably, one of Bengal's most revered and celebrated goddess. Shaktism, one of the three sects of Hinduism that are more monotheistic in their rituals, worships Durgā. The other two, Shaivism and Vaishnavism, worship Śiva and Viṣṇu respectfully, both males (Kinsley 1988: 95–98). The myth of Durgā is as follows. Mahiṣāśura, a water-buffalo demon was granted a boon by Śiva that no man or god would ever be able to kill him. As Mahiṣāśura ran amok, killing both people and gods, the great gods were all incapable of killing him. With the fate of the world in their hands, they created Durgā from Pārvatī. Each god gave her one of their fearsome weapons, so that each of her ten hands held the most valuable materials in the world. Himāvat, Pārvatī's father, gave her a great lion mount. Durgā went to war with the demon, and defeated him in a bloody fashion.

There are several critical differences between Durgā and Pārvatī, or Satī. The major one is that although Durgā was created from the male gods, her role is always one of a protector. The situation warranted a superior warrior who could extinguish evil and nurture good, and who was most critically female. Durgā's lieutenants in her battles against male demons are an all-female group of mother goddesses. And Durgā always wins. Although in recent tradition she has been called Śiva's wife, because of her affiliation with Pārvatī, Durgā is portrayed almost always separate from men and forever a maiden. Also unlike Pārvatī, Durgā is born fully formed, without a human-like childhood. Her trials of proving herself as a goddess were action oriented, instead of passive. Durgā has two daughters who are also goddesses: Sarasvatī (goddess of learning) and Lakṣmī (goddess of wealth).

What possible function could Durgā hold in the patriarchal society of Bengal? She does not temper the gods, and is not the archetypical wife and daughter. She represents femininity as an indirect challenge to the tradi-

tional role of the female popularised by legends, and by myths of Satī and Pārvatī. She is the embodiment of female power that is not submissive to a male dominated cultural system. She is, however, not outside of this system, as she does maintain the crucial component of intact virginity. In the male dominated cultural system of Bengal, Durgā is the ultimate mother. She is a great warrior who can destroy all demons and gods, and acts on behalf of the gods and protects the welfare of humanity.

Unlike Satī and Pārvatī, Durgā is seen as Mā Durgā, meaning she is a universal mother. She protects her children from evil monsters. She also carries the nickname Annadā, meaning 'she who brings the gift of food grains', and thus, protects humanity from famines.

#### *Kālī, a Goddess and a Mā*

Our analysis of Durgā threatened the black and white quality of many of the studies of females in Hindu folklore; that women in Bengali Hindu folklore must either support patriarchal values or deny them. Kālī even further dismantles this divide. Whereas many goddesses are often described by their fair beauty, Kālī is dark and terrifying. Kālī means black. She is naked, and only covers herself with a skirt made of severed arms, a necklace of decapitated heads, and serpent bracelets. Like Durgā, she is ardently celebrated in Bengal. Her myth is as follows. Durgā is fighting the great demon Raktabīja, who can reproduce himself with every drop of his blood that hits the earth. Durgā, frustrated that she and her *mātrikās* ('little goddesses') cannot seem to kill this demon, cuts off the head of Raktabīja and places it over her tongue, swallowing each drop of his blood so that it does not fall to the ground (Kinsley 1988). The blood of the beast transforms Durgā into Kālī.

Kālī has some important devotees and admirers. It can be suggested that she has had strong political support in Bengal over several centuries. The nature of such support

is manifested by the poetry and songs written by Ramprasad Sen (1720–1781) that are still recited and sung by her devotees and admirers. Anthony Firingi (d. 1836), a Portuguese Catholic who settled in Bengal, composed many songs to honour her. Ramkrishna Paramhansa, born Gadadhar Chattopadhaya (1836–1886), is alleged to have carried on conversations with Kālī almost every day. Ramkrishna's disciple Swami Vivekananda, born Narendranath Dutta (1863–1902), wrote poems celebrating the presence of Kālī, and his poem (written in English) *Kali the Mother* is still recited by school children. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhaya (1838–1894), a famous Bengali novelist who is often compared with the Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), wrote novels about how disciples of Kālī offered sacrifices to her. During the 19th century, there were groups of bandits (called *thugees*, adopted by the English language as 'thug') who were devotees of Kālī. Sumanta Banerjee (2010 [2002]) has observed that Kālī has moved a long way in popularity, from being a deity of bandits in a jungle to a resident goddess in large temples in and around urban Kolkata (formerly Calcutta).

#### *Chīnnamastā, a Goddess and a Mā*

Chīnnamastā means 'she who has decapitated herself'. She is another incarnate of Durgā and of Kālī. This goddess is a representation of extreme violence. She is so bloodthirsty that she has beheaded herself, has blood spurting out of her body, and she is holding her decapitated head in one hand with its mouth open. Blood is falling into the open mouth of her severed head. However, even in this form of extreme violence, she is offering protection to her earth-children.

#### *Candī, a Goddess and a Mā*

Candī is another incarnate of Durgā, particularly popular in eastern India and Bangladesh. She is often shown with either eight

or ten arms, seated on a lion. There are many folktales and songs describing her power to protect her earth-children. She is the central figure in *Chandi-mangal*, a book of songs and verses in medieval Bengal (circa 15th or 16th century). Candī is seen as a *mā*, and is addressed as Mā Candī.

#### *Ṣaṣṭhī, a Goddess and a Mā*

Ṣaṣṭhī is a goddess of fertility. She is venerated and seen as a giver of male children. In rural Bengal, women acquire respect and power by becoming the mother of male children. For this reason, women worship Ṣaṣṭhī. She is addressed as Mā Ṣaṣṭhī.

#### *Lakṣmī, a Goddess and a Mā*

Lakṣmī is a goddess who, when pleased with her devotees, rewards them with wealth. She is also known as Kamalā, which means 'the goddess who sits on a blooming lotus flower'. She is a daughter of Durgā. Lakṣmī is seen as a *mā*, and an idol representing her is often left on an altar in Hindu households throughout the year.

#### *Sarasvatī, a Goddess and a Mā*

Sarasvatī is a goddess who is seen as another daughter of Durgā and, like Lakṣmī, is not a biological daughter of Durgā. She is the goddess of knowledge and, when pleased by a group of devotees, rewards them with a gift of knowledge. Thus devotees who require the acquisition of knowledge must please her and offer worship services to her. Sarasvatī is seen as a *mā*, and is often worshipped during the winter months.

#### *Manasā, a Goddess and a Mā*

Unlike Durgā, her incarnations, and her daughters, Manasā is a local goddess in Ben-

gal. In a land where there are many varieties of snakes, she is in control of all snakes. Displeasing her means inviting snake bites followed by painful death. The following story portrays her power (see Chatterjee 2010: 114–116). Chand the Merchant was a wealthy and very successful businessman. Manaśā wanted him to worship her, but he was not interested in doing so. Manaśā, out of profound rage, made his merchant ships sink and his six sons die from snake bites. She also threatened him that his seventh son, Lakśmindar, too will die of snake bite. Chand built a well-guarded palace for Lakśmindar and his newlywed wife Behulā. However, somehow one of Manaśā's snakes got inside that palace, and succeeded in planting a bite on him. Lakśmindar too was thus a victim of snake bite. Behulā, the newlywed wife of Lakśmindar, refused to accept her husband's death. She built a small boat made out of banana leaves, placed her husband's body in it, and then got in it herself. She then began rowing the boat downstream, in search of heaven to plead with the gods there.

Behulā, as the story goes, did succeed in reaching heaven, and got her husband's life back. This involved a political settlement with Manaśā, where Chand agreed to offer worship to Manaśā. However, a compromise was reached where Chand would offer worship to Manaśā only with his left hand, since his right hand was already designated for worship to Śiva. It should be noted that in Bengali culture the right hand is designated for worshipping, for eating dinner, and for other activities that are seen as 'clean and respectful'. The left hand, however, is used for 'unclean activities'. Thus Chand's proposed worship of Manaśā involved a political settlement, where the worship was offered with the unclean hand.

The story of Behulā is perhaps another example of creating role models for women who are chaste and dedicated to their husbands. A recently introduced theatre in Kolkata, called Chand Baniker Pala (meaning 'story of Chand the Merchant'), claims that the story of Behulā was introduced to per-

petuate the exploitation of women. Behulā remains a human female in Bengali folklore. She is not a goddess, and is not a *mā*. Manaśā, however, is a goddess, and is seen as Mā Manaśā.

#### *Śitalā, a Goddess and a Mā*

Śitalā is a goddess dedicated to the disease of smallpox. When one contracts smallpox, the linguistic convention to describe the situation is: "She (or he) is receiving kindness from Śitalā". Offering worship services to Śitalā (and by the right hand) involves a tacit bargain. It means that Śitalā is being worshipped, and as a result she would not send her "kindness" to the children of earth. She is a goddess, and is a *mā*.

#### *The Islamisation of Deities: Ola-Bibi and Bon-Bibi*

Two female characters, Ola-Bibi and Bon-Bibi, do not carry goddess status, and neither do they carry the title of *mā*. To Hindus, she was known as Oladevi in the 19th century. She was a deity who provided protection from cholera (Oladevi 2013). The word *bibi* is of Islamic origin and it means 'a lady of the house'. Muslims are not allowed to confer goddess status to an imaginary figure or an idol. However, they too needed protection from cholera and the tigers of Sunderban forests. So, it seems, they created local folk heroines for protection and gave them a suffix of *bibi* (Nicholas 2003).

#### *The Landmass of Bengal (before 1947) as a Mā*

The two geopolitical entities, Bangladesh (an independent nation state) and West Bengal (a state within the Republic of India) were known as Greater Bengal and was a province in British India. In 1947, Bengal was partitioned into two halves, the eastern part becoming East Pakistan and the western part



becoming West Bengal. In 1971, East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh. After acquiring nationhood, Bangladesh adopted a popular Bengali song, *Amar Sonar Bangla* ('My golden Bengal') composed by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Thakur (1861–1941) as its national anthem. The poet is also known by his Anglicised name, Rabindranath Tagore.

The song by Rabindranath envisions the landmass of Greater Bengal as a mother. However, he was not the first poet or musician to attribute motherhood to this landmass. During the latter part of the 19th century, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838–1894) published a novel called *Anandamath* ('An Abode of Joy'). In this novel, a group of Hindu monks are depicted singing a song called *Bande Mataram* ('We Praise the Mother'). It appears that it is Mother Bengal who is being praised, and the song became a solidarity chant for freedom fighters in the region. Many other Bengali poets and songwriters of the time also composed music praising Mother Bengal.

The song, *Amar Sonar Bangla*, in addition to being the national anthem of Bangladesh, remains a popular song in West Bengal. It appears that the concepts of Greater Bengal before 1947, and that of Bangladesh and West Bengal as separate entities since 1947, continue to carry some loyalties to persons of Bengali origin. However, Mother Bengal never acquired the status of a goddess, and perhaps for that reason, never posed a threat to the monotheistic theology of Islam.

#### RETURNING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At this point, we return to the three research questions posed earlier in this paper. What are the functions served by attributions of motherhood? There seem to be several functions served by the storylines. The first of these functions is that these stories, without the attribution of motherhood (as in Satī, Pārvatī, and Behulā), provide role models

for socialisation of women in Hindu communities. These roles are presented by the culture as "proper and desirable" womanhood. Bascom (1954) came to this same conclusion when he suggested that folklore has several different functions. It allows "socially approved outlets" for individuals to escape repression in society. It also validates cultural practices and stresses the teaching of these rituals and society's approved values to the younger generation. Further, folklore functions as an instrument of social pressure to achieve social control.

To these observations by Bascom, we add that another function served by the attribution of motherhood to women, especially in its use in the extended family and the community, is that it infuses incest taboo between older men and younger women. A young woman who is addressed as a *mā* cannot be approached as sexually available, since the use of the word *mā* suggests incest and creates a barrier between them. Yet other functions served by the use of the word *mā* to goddesses and deities is that she provides protection from evil outsiders and is imagined to bring a gift of food grains (as is done in the use of the name Annadā, which in Sanskrit means 'she who brings the gift of food'). The landmass of Bengal, despite being very fertile, has seen many famines over time.

The Muslims, however, do not honour the convention of culturally constructed goddesses and deities who are seen as idols, although Hindus do. However, both honour the landmass of Bengal as a *mā*.

What function could be served by the attribution of motherhood to the landmass of Bengal? From the 19th century and thereafter, many writers and musicians introduced poems and songs praising Mother Bengal. Such poetry and music supported a Bengali identity and ethnic pride in being a Bengali. It continues to this day.

Does attribution of motherhood have an impact on empowering females in a highly patriarchal society? Biological motherhood (especially of male offspring) creates relevance and purpose for females. Attribution of

motherhood to females who are not biological mothers gives the appearance of empowerment of human women in a highly patriarchal extended family and community.

A work by John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (1996) has suggested that the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have maintained a vision of the divine as a male being, and have limited the portrayal of the divine as female. On the other hand, Hinduism, as reflected in its storylines, has presented the vision of the divine as mostly female. Here the female goddesses are immensely powerful, yet are very nurturing of humankind. Saumitra Chakravarty (2012: 1) has added:

Worship of female goddesses belongs primarily to the domain of womenfolk and is part of their daily struggle against adversity through a plea of divine intervention. Simple worship forms part of the large repertoire of rituals, chanting and narration through which rural women seek to placate powerful rural goddesses.

This form of worship is the only safeguard that villagers have against the many ills that plague their daily lives – poverty, disease, invasion after invasion by various warlords, massive floods and cyclones, crop failure, and domestic distress. The storylines are a part of a rich oral tradition preserved largely within the sanctity of the home by rural women.

It appears that the attribution of motherhood to the goddesses is an acknowledgement of their popularity and power. However, the same is not true for human women in the community and the family. Empowerment for them comes mostly through biological motherhood of male children.

Does the attribution of motherhood to the landmass of Bengal provide a form of empowerment to persons of Bengali origin? Quite possibly it does. However, such empowerment has less to do with gender and more to do with religion. Praising Mother Bengal began from persons of Bengali Hindu origin (in the novel called *Anandamath* by Bankim

Chandra Chattopadhyaya) and has remained a solidarity chant by Bengali Hindu people.

What is the underlying logic in the storylines narrated? Karl Marx had observed that religious and other ideologies often disguise the suffering of the masses (Marx and Engels 1970 [1845]). Joachim Israel (1971) elaborated how religion fosters various forms of alienation and serves as a popular logic to oppressed masses. Using the same observation by Marx, seen as “logic in popular form”, Banerjee (2010 [2002]) has outlined how the myths, storylines and folklore are popular inventions that offer to make sense of human existence in a hostile environment. They create cognitive consonance for village masses in an environment that is otherwise either ambiguous or hostile.

What form of underlying logical structure emerged in the storylines supporting Bengali ethnicity? It appears that in Bangladesh a conflict of storylines has emerged. One such storyline calls for creating loyalty to an Islamic society. The other creates loyalty to an ethno-lingual Bengali society. A similar situation has also emerged in West Bengal, where one storyline supports Mother Bengal and, therefore, an ethno-lingual Bengali society. The other supports Mother India, a large, federated modern state. Taken together, the storylines contribute to divided loyalties in both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is observed that the Bengali word *mā* is used in four contexts. The first of these four represents a biological kinship, and the word *mā* denotes a basic mother-child dyad. The second and the third contexts use the same word to denote women in the extended family and the community. The fourth context uses the word as a form of address to culturally constructed goddesses and to the landmass of what used to be Bengal before 1947.

It is further observed that addressing goddesses as *mā* is multifunctional in Bengali

society. Hinduism (and Bengali Hinduism in particular) has presented the vision of the divine mostly as female. Here the female goddesses are immensely powerful, yet they still nurture humankind. The storylines they offer give the appearance of a logical cohesion and explanation about what life is to the people of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

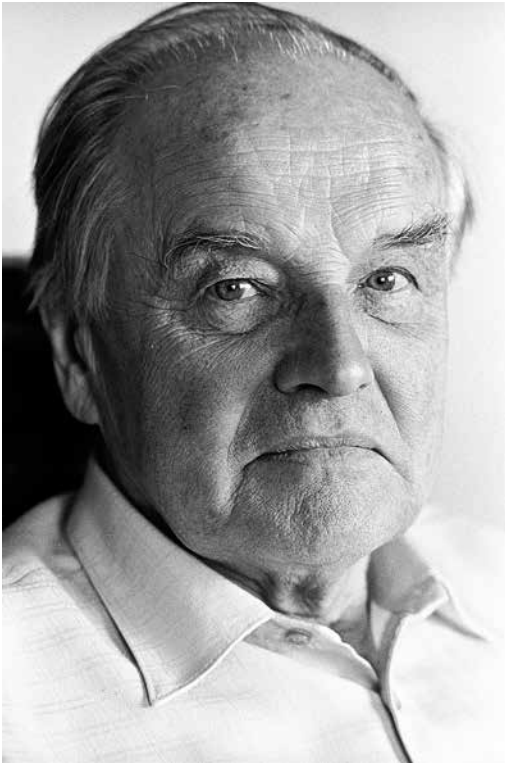
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# THE DEPARTURE OF AN ERA IN ESTONIAN ETHNOLOGY

Commemorating Dr Ants Viires (December 23, 1918 – March 18, 2015)

Aivar Jürgenson



Many years ago, people started calling Ants Viires the grand old man of Estonian ethnology. This was certainly motivated by his comprehensive approach to the subject. For him, folk culture was an integrated whole and everything was worth studying – the material as well as the spiritual culture, social relations, linguistic aspects and the questions of identity and mentality that pervade many topics, along with the themes of cultural continuity and innovation. During his long career as a scholar, Ants Viires was able to deal with all this. He was supported on the one hand by his broad-based education – having started his university studies as a philologist, he graduated as an ethnographer. And on the

other hand, there was his vast interest in the humanities, which through the decades was converted into deep encyclopaedic erudition. It is no wonder that Ants Viires was an active contributor to journals dealing with language, history, folklore, and naturally, ethnology. It is also no wonder that the works completed under his direction include extensive encyclopaedic anthologies about Estonian folk culture (Viires and Vunder 1998; 2008), lexicons (Viires 1995; 2007), works of popular science that presented a synthesised version of folk culture (Viires 2004a; 2004b). It is probably no exaggeration to say that 20th-century Estonian ethnology is hard to imagine without Ants Viires – the best part of it mostly looks like him.

The 20th century was a century of political and ideological somersaults which significantly determined the fate of Estonia's humanities and the scientists dealing with it. In the whirlwind of World War I, the large European empires collapsed, and many new nation-states rose from their ruins. Among others, the Russian Tsarist state also fell, and the Republic of Estonia was born on its western edge in 1918. In that same year, Ants Viires was born in Tartu, the most important city in the southern part of the Estonian Republic. In retrospect this coincidence seems very symbolic, considering Ants Viires's contribution to the elucidation of Estonian folk culture. Within a few years, Estonian ethnography became an academic discipline in the new republic. And by the 1930s, when Ants Viires graduated from secondary school, it had reached an international level.

If the Estonians acquired their own state in World War I, then they lost it again in World War II. If during the pre-war era, Estonian ethnology was one of the impor-

tant branches of national culture research, the Soviet authorities immediately started to bring pressure to bear on this research. The pressure extended to terminology: the name of the Estonian National Museum, the main Estonian ethnology centre, was changed to the State Ethnographic Museum – the old name seemed too nationalistic to the new authorities. Many research topics had become objectionable; and a large number of the Estonian ethnologists and folklorists had escaped across the sea to foreign countries in fear of the approaching Soviet forces (Gustav Ränk, Oskar Loorits, Eerik Laid, Ilmar Talve, and Helmut Hagar). The borders were closed, and the development of Estonian ethnology was split into two branches, one that was under ideological pressure in Estonia, and the other in the free world, but separated from its people and research materials.

Ants Viires started his studies at the University of Tartu in 1937, but due to the war he did not graduate until 1945. During this time, the regime in Estonia changed several times – in 1940, the Soviet occupation liquidated the Republic of Estonia; in 1941, the German occupation liquidated the Soviet occupation; and in 1944, the Soviet occupation in turn replaced the Germany occupation. During those uncertain times, Ants Viires managed to work at the Estonian National Museum, and after the war, to start his postgraduate studies at the Tartu State University. But now the new authorities revealed their repressive countenance. During the German occupation, as a good linguist Ants Viires had been recruited into the German Army for a few months and worked as a translator, which ended up creating a blemish on the young ethnologist's CV. It was impossible for him to find work in his speciality. Incidental non-staff positions at several research institutions, language lessons at a technical school – and he was able to get by. However, this series of misadventures did not dampen his interest in research, quite the opposite. In 1955, Ants Viires defended his scientific degree at the Tartu State University with a research paper on traditional Estonian woodworking. This

study in one of the most important handicraft fields was published in 1960 and is still a significant milestone in Estonian ethnological research (the second edition, with high-quality photographic material, appeared quite recently in 2006).

In the meanwhile, a change of direction occurred in Soviet society (the so-called Khrushchev Thaw), bringing fresh winds and somewhat loosening the ideological grip on research. It opened up new prospects for those who had been forced out of their beloved specialities for political reasons. In the interim, at the initiative of broadminded archaeologist Harri Moora, a working group of ethnographers was formed in the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences in Tallinn. Starting in 1956, we can find Ants Viires's name on the Institute of History payroll. The Institute of History became Ants Viires's place of employment for many decades, initially in the archaeological section, and starting in 1968, as the leader of the team of ethnographers.

In 1977, when an independent ethnography sector was established at the Institute of History, Ants Viires was named acting head until a competition could be organised. However, someone in the institute's Communist Party bureau remembered Ants Viires's wartime translating work, and also the fact that he was not a member of the Communist Party and it was decided that, despite his high scientific qualifications, such a person could not be allowed to manage Soviet social science. However, Ants Viires was undoubtedly the leader of Estonian ethnological research and had acquired an international reputation. Thus, he still became the head of the ethnographic sector in 1983, a position that he held until 1996, when he had reached a ripe old age.

These facts about his career are not just the chronology of a person's life – here we see conflict between power and spirit; we see choices that barely existed; the devastating dogmatic hurdles that the unintelligent authorities set in the path of a talented and principled person. And we see people who

did not even think about going along with a stupid self-important ideology.

The opportunities at the time were limited – during the Soviet years, ethnologists did not go on field trips to South America or Australia; neither were students or scientists offered scholarships in Western universities where they could participate in the fresh currents of the scientific world. I remember when I was a doctoral candidate about 15 years ago and was given the opportunity to spend several years, with only short intervening gaps, at different foreign universities, Ants Viires, the supervisor of my doctoral thesis, gave me every encouragement. Naturally he knew my foreign curators and naturally they knew him, because, in the slightly freer atmosphere that had developed during the previous decades, the possibility to attend international conferences had developed. Yes, but he was still sorry that he had not had the opportunities in his youth that were suddenly opening up in the 1990s. His youth coincided with the war years, and later the era of Stalinist repressions. He has written how the “repulsively vile word usage” that he encountered while reading a supposedly respectable historical work on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dissuaded him. And he realised that it would not be possible to go along with such an ideology.

One can imagine that for many nationally minded people, traditional culture provided an opportunity to escape the repugnant political reality. Traditional culture and national thought have gone hand-in-hand throughout the history of ethnology; the most famous researchers of traditional culture both in Estonia and elsewhere have also been the most charismatic carriers of the nationalist spirit, like bridges between the past and present. For me, the bridge between the pre-war Republic of Estonia and the present Republic of Estonia has always been comprised of the people who came out of the intervening ‘red muck’ without losing their dignity. Ants Viires is undoubtedly one of those people.

Ants Viires was also a bridge in the context of his speciality. In the Soviet period,

a clear distinction was made between ethnography and the study of folklore. In 1940, part of the Estonian National Museum was made into the State Literary Museum, and the Estonian Folklore Archives were moved to the new museum. However the material culture stayed at the Ethnographic Museum. Researchers of folk culture were also educated separately – for decades the future ethnographers were taught in the university’s history department, and studied ethnography as an ‘auxiliary science’ and folk culture in the form of material culture, while the folklorists were taught folklore along with the Estonian language and literature in the philology department. The sister sciences were separated from each other and practitioners knew little about what was going on in the other. Ants Viires was one of the few people for whom folk culture was always one integrated whole. On the one hand he has written articles about the fields related to traditional material culture like tools, vehicles, fishing tools, folk architecture, food and agriculture, etc. At the same time, he has compiled numerous interesting studies about folk religion, including the possible shamanist aspects of the Estonian ethnic religion. Being able to orientate equally well in the material and spiritual culture of the nation has enabled him to reach original conclusions, to notice things that a researcher with a more one-sided education and interests would not notice. It is quite natural that a scholar with such great erudition would be considered a valued professional adviser in Estonia and abroad. For a long time, he was a member of the Research Council of the Estonian National Museum (from 1957 until his death), the Open Air Museum (from 1957) and the Institute of History (from 1969). Most prominent internationally is his involvement with the research council of *Ethnologia Europaea*, Europe’s most important journal of ethnology (1983).

Ants Viires’s outstanding scientific achievements have been recognised by many foreign scientific organisations. In Finland, the Finno-Ugric Society (1964), Kalevala Society (1965), Archaeological Society of Fin-

land (1970), and Finnish Literature Society (1981) all invited him to be a foreign member; and the Hungarian Ethnographic Society made him an honorary member. In 1982, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Helsinki. He was also a foreign member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters and a member, and later honorary member, of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in Sweden.

He has also been named an honorary member of the University of Tartu. In 1996, Dr Ants Viires was awarded the Order of the National Coat of Arms, 4th class for his outstanding achievements in the promotion of Estonian ethnology. For his great contribution to Estonian science, Ants Viires has been recognised by the Open Estonia Foundation, the Estonian National Culture Foundation and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. For his lifetime achievements, he received the Estonian State Cultural Award in 2007 and the University of Tartu's Contribution to Estonian National Identity Award in 2009.

Finally, there is one more memory that shows that ethnology is not an insignificant matter and, if taken in hand by a thorough knowledgeable scientist with an erudite background, even something small can be investigated and become something great. At meetings, Ants Viires often recalled how some time around 1940, the linguist professor Paul Ariste had told him how important it was to write – he told the young ethnologist to write about whatever came to mind, even about pants buttons, just to write. The idea germinated and Ants wrote. He wrote a long and thorough article about buttons, going back to Viking-era buttons, medieval buttons and finally ending with the modern buttons from later centuries.

Ants Viires's erudition has benefited many young colleagues; he has dispensed practical advice to ethnologists, folklorists, historians, linguists and others. As the supervisor of my doctoral thesis, he helped me with objective critical comments and directed my attention to nuances that would otherwise have been overlooked. His thorough knowledge of Esto-

nian culture helped me to tighten up the thesis in many ways. Afterwards, when researching various topics, I also turned to him for advice and always received pragmatic help.

In a scientific journal it is appropriate to speak about the departed primarily in a scientific context. Ants Viires comprised an entire epoch and his unusually long life and a mind that was alert until the end, allowed him to participate in practically an entire century – an extremely eventful and complicated century. This century influenced him, but in his field – in ethnology – he significantly influenced the century. However, Ants Viires was much more than a scientist. He translated many interesting and even sensational literary works (for example, Aldous Huxley's psychedelic *Doors of Perception*). He has written and published poetry, including the voluminous *Seitsme maa ja seitsme mere taha* (Beyond the Seven Lands and Seven Seas; Viires 1991). And we should not overlook that he was a bicycle enthusiast – and, as we know, riding a bicycle impacts mental creation in some mysterious way.

Farewell, Ants Viires – a great scientist and all-around creator!

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TOIVO SIKKA (MAY 22, 1962 – MAY 23, 2015)



The Estonian ethnology and museum world has suffered a serious loss. On May 23, 2015 Toivo Sikka passed away after a long and painful illness. His life ceased at 53 years and a day. For 28 years of that time, Toivo Sikka was an employee at the Estonian National Museum, filling the positions of senior researcher and managing editor. Between 1992 and 2007 he also held the post of research secretary and his thoroughly written reports of the Estonian National Museum's activities, which are published in the museum's yearbooks, are from these years.

From 2007 Toivo Sikka was also the managing editor of the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, an international academic journal that was jointly founded by the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum and the University of Tartu.

It is precisely in the capacity of editor that Toivo Sikka excelled professionally. His extraordinarily painstaking attention to detail ensured that writers could rely on solid support. He checked all the names in their spellings, whether it be people or places, multiple times. One could also safely entrust old illegible manuscript texts

to Toivo Sikka because he was able to decipher them by some mysterious intuition. He went about this task with great zeal and enthusiasm.

Toivo Sikka did not wish to be a writer himself, but there was no way around it. Thus he ended up being one of the authors included in the One Hundred Years of the Estonian National Museum collection. In this work, his research focused on a time of dramatic change, i.e. those that took place in Estonian society, and primarily in the Estonian National Museum, before and after Estonia's regaining of independence in 1991.

In addition to editing and writing, Toivo Sikka was also the curator of several exhibitions held at the Estonian National Museum. As an ethnologist, he specialised in studying blacksmithery and blacksmiths. He was also responsible for the compilation of the respective section of the museum's permanent exhibition, which was prepared in 1994. With his characteristic diligence he devoted himself to this theme and consequently delivered several lectures on Estonian blacksmiths and the history of Estonian blacksmithery.

Toivo Sikka was a man with broad cultural interests. He was an active member of multiple societies and organisations, but his greatest passion was dedicated to philately. His colleagues helped him in this endeavour by saving envelopes with remarkable stamps or by sending him postcards from abroad. He was a meticulous and systematic stamp collector, just as he was in all his other projects and pursuits.

Toivo Sikka also participated in sport. He was a superb long-distance runner and participated in many competitions as well as folk runs. He ran around the lakes in Viljandi and Ülemiste several times and took part in several marathons, including the Tartu Ski Marathon.

Toivo Sikka was the archetype of a time-honoured intellectual with a wide range of interests; in addition he kept an alert mind and developed himself both physically and spiritually.

Estonian National Museum  
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## NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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- Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1987. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1989. Authoring Lives. – *Journal of Folklore Research* 26 (2): 123–149.
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