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ENCOUNTERING UNCERTAINTIES IN ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

GUEST EDITORS
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Cover image

Finnish Heritage Agency, Finno-Ugric Photo Collection, Woman working at the flax field, Photographer Tyyni Vahter 1942, SUK390:75, ID: I077016.

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Encountering Uncertainties in Ethnology and Folklore

Special Issue

Vol. 23.1

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Hande Birkalan-Gedik, Katre Kikas and Konrad J. Kuhn

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Encountering Uncertainties in Ethnology and Folklore: Actors – Milieus – Strategies. An Introduction

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A woman is working in a field. She is working with her hands, her gaze focused on the ground. Because the sun is low, the shadow of the woman working is silhouetted against the field. One can imagine, in the background, an agricultural environment with more fields. In the foreground, carefully cut and laid down plants are visible. But a second, larger shadow is dominant, and to some, this shadow may look irritating. This shadow has the shape of a person but is strangely conical towards the bottom. The shadow dominates the picture, and it almost seems as though the woman is looking away from it. Does the working woman know that someone is approaching? Has she noticed the person? Is the situation threatening?

The shadow belongs to the Finnish ethnographic researcher and photographer Tyyni Ilma Vahter (1886–1969). A closer look reveals the camera in her hand, just when the picture was taken. Vahter took the picture and, perhaps accidentally or deliberately—we do not know for sure—also herself. The Finnish Heritage Agency’s archival records reveal that the photo was taken in 1942 in East Karelia during field research. The woman working in a flax field is part of the project documenting “common people” in their everyday work. These work situations were often posed, suggesting that the case might be “staged.” By showing the researcher as a ‘ghostly’ silhouette, it becomes clear that both the field partners and the researchers are always involved in the construction of ethnographic knowledge.

On the other hand, in its ethereal uncertainty and latent menace, the image also refers to the general uncertainty inherent in every ethnographic research project. Even the specific field situation was shaped by great uncertainty, as the photo was taken during the so-called Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union, when ethnographic research was only possible in close relation to military conflicts—in the

shadow of the war—so to speak. Thus, ethnographers were those who are mostly prone to uncertainty; their research was always exposed to constant change and other uncertainties—perhaps just as the shadow dominated this photograph.

Uncertainties play a great role in anthropological knowledge, theorization, methodology, and history writing. They can arise from major crises—environmental disasters, economic upheavals, wars, and pandemics—but they can also proliferate in everyday crises and conflicts, emerging from larger or smaller ruptures in the web of life. As such, uncertainties prompt epistemological questions and methodological quandaries in the hopes of understanding, making sense of, and reshaping our worlds both in the present and in the past.

According to social anthropologist Richard Jenkins, uncertainties arise from the interplay between our expectations, which stem from our knowledge—or what we believe we know—and the occurrences that take place. Therefore, when considering the future, it is important to recognize that unexpectedness is not an inherent feature of events; instead, it is a retrospective assessment of those events within their context after they have begun to unfold (2013, 8). Jenkins begins by discussing the ubiquity of the unexpected in everyday life and how humans try to manage this uncertainty through social norms and cultural constructs. He criticizes the tendency of sociology and social anthropology to focus on the notions of predictability and linearity, neglecting the crucial role that contingency plays in both individual lives and social change.

In line with Jenkins' assertions, we are well aware that uncertainties in different forms of "field" work can arise in various situations: Beginning with the most common, known ones, ethnologists and folklorists grapple with several questions before entering the field, during interactions with their informants, and even after exiting the field when writing up their findings in articles or books. These uncertainties may range from practical concerns about identifying and collaborating with informants to navigating disruptions and challenges posed by political instabilities, crises, or personal circumstances.

In some cases, uncertainties can also pertain to dangerous settings, called "crisis-ridden" settings, such as fieldwork in actual war zones or going to the field after natural disasters. This topic has been one of the most tackled by anthropologists and ethnologists. Besides, one can also think about episodic crises, apparent and unapparent risks, and instabilities, which may derive from a specific field situation. Several articles in *Ethnography in Unstable Places: Everyday Lives in Contexts of Dramatic Political Change* (Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002), for example, explore the connections between political instabilities and social lives and how these, at times, are taken-for-granted understandings of society. In a different fieldwork setting, Hagberg and Körling found themselves in a situation where first-hand ethnographic fieldwork became impossible in their Malian fieldwork, so they had to avert to analyze Malian media and public debate following the *coup d'état* instead (2014).

Other examples of uncertainties in the field illustrate that ruptures can be radical and often forceful forms of discontinuity, particularly for anthropologists working in context of violence. *Anthropology under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture* (Nordstrom and Robben 1997) focuses on the epistemological dimensions of violence

that can affect the fieldworkers and the people they do fieldwork with amidst armed conflict. These examples underscore that uncertainty is an inherent and multifaceted aspect of fieldwork, shaped not only by external crises and instabilities but also by the need for adaptability in the face of evolving challenges.

Besides these extreme fieldwork situations, which we can broadly label as uncertainties *in* and *from* the field, the past few years also taught us that traditional forms of fieldwork—and, as a matter of fact, archival work—became almost impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic. As for planning the field, we are asked to make more and more risk assessments in our projects and think about alternative plans. We also came to witness that the deep uncertainties and risks do not affect only fieldwork but also the supposedly “stable” and “unshakeable” realm of the archives, which became questionable during the time of the pandemic. Uncertainties derived from the pandemic appeared to be framing principles to guide research, and, this time, prompted researchers to find alternatives when archives were shut down for long periods, and documents became inaccessible. These conditions resulted in postponing the research or adapting to the digital options—so even designing plans A, B, and C has not been limited to fieldwork. On the part of institutions, the pandemic demanded institutional plans to keep the archives accessible for researchers even for limited periods.

We can thus say that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a fundamental change in how ethnology and folklore research is conducted, prompting a reassessment of research practices and designs, a heightened awareness of potential risks, and the development of creative strategies to ensure ongoing accessibility to essential resources. However, the uncertainties embedded in archival research are not limited to the ones caused by pandemics, as one can never be sure what one finds in the archive; the uncertainties surrounding archives are fundamental and omnipresent. Archival sources can be fragmentary and difficult to read or come in a language that is not easily accessible to the researcher. Moreover, sources can be dispersed between different archives, or, in some cases, the sources might just repeat something that the researcher already knows. Sometimes, it is unknown how one or other piece of information reached the archive, so one cannot be sure of their trustworthiness. Sometimes, these ambiguities leave the researcher in despair; however, at other times, they may result in new insights.

Ann Laura Stoler, who is working in colonial archives, has written that archives themselves are “epistemological experiments” (2002, 87) based on “uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to the changing imperial world” (2009, 4). Thus, to use them productively, one needs to understand the logic behind their creation, and this cannot be achieved by only reading *against* the “archival grain,” one needs to start with reading *along* the archival grain” (2002, 100). Kati Mikkola, Pia Olsson, and Eija Stark (2019) have emphasized that historically, cultural heritage archives are often connected to national entities and tend to marginalize other nationalities living in the vicinity. This can be shown, for example, with archival policies in Finland, neglecting the heritage of minority people (Roma and Sami) while highlighting national unity. The question of openness towards other ethnic groups is closely connected to the particularities of

certain situations. To this end, Liina Saarlo (2023) has analyzed the contents of the Estonian Folklore Archives from a historical perspective. She underscored that during the interwar period of independence, Estonian folklorists showed a genuine interest in the heritage of minority groups, while the periods before (in the context of the national awakening) and after (during the Soviet occupation) were characterized by strict focuses on the heritage of Estonians.

Besides highlighting only one ethnic group, archives tend to be selective on the topics they include—the focus is clearly on the heritage that shows the leading group in a positive light. Gyanendra Pandey has named this process “un-archiving”—as some topics get included in institutional archives, while those left out are rendered trivial and inconsequential (2017, 4). In a collection of articles, Pandey and his colleagues delve into the realm of the “trifling”—events, persons, and actions that are considered so mundane and ordinary that they have become naturalized and invisible because they do not fit into any archival categories. They stress that their purpose is not only to uncover what has been “unarchived” in earlier times but also to hope for more inclusive archival practices (Pandey 2017 et al., 17).

Creating digital archives is one possibility to make archives more inclusive and incorporate materials that did not fit into the traditional institutions. For example, Karin Barber and P. F. De Moraes Farias discuss the challenges of studying and archiving emergent genres and phenomena that formerly have been regarded too trivial or obscure to get the attention of the researchers (2009). They describe their digital archive of Nigerian folk religion as including different confessions and communities and different types of documents. They stress that their archive “brings together discourses which are normally thought of as belonging to separate spheres” (2009, 12).

Besides widening the scope of the documents, digital archives also have other features that help to lessen the uncertainties and ambiguities connected to archival research. Using digitized material allows one to research materials from different archives side by side, to lessen the need to travel and the dependence on the official opening hours of the institutions. However, digitization does not only resolve ambiguities but brings about new ones—as the resources are limited, often only one part (usually the one considered most valuable) of the collection gets digitized, marginalizing collections that can only be consulted in material form; sometimes the digital image is partial, leaving out text in the margins or on the other side.

Dealing with Uncertainties: Actors – Milieus – Strategies

This special issue, *Encountering Uncertainties in Ethnology and Folklore: Actors – Milieus – Strategies*, presents papers dealing with uncertainties in fieldwork and archives. The issue explores lessons to take from our disciplinary pasts dealing with different uncertainties and their implications for our disciplinary futures. The contributors aim to look at the notion of “uncertainties” from the perspectives of involved actors, exploring the social, political, and disciplinary milieus they worked or operated in and present their strategies to overcome or navigate the problems they face. This issue takes up our collegial conversations, having taken place at the SIEF 2023 Congress

in Brno, Czech Republic, at the panel organized in the context of the Working Group “Historical Approaches to Cultural Analysis,” which explored different contexts of uncertainties in the disciplinary pasts of ethnology and folklore and their implications for disciplinary futures.

Our original questions, which we discussed at the SIEF Conference, find resonance in actual, lived experiences of different actors from various national ethnological and folklore traditions, with more reflection in the special issue. How did uncertainties, great and small, in daily life and *longue durées* affect the development of ethnographic issues in different political and research contexts? What methods did socio-cultural anthropologists and folklorists develop to deal with uncertainties, and to what success? If fieldwork itself can be conceptualized as how ethnographers engaged with uncertainties, how was it uniquely deployed in national traditions? Which dialogue, documentation, data collection methods, and the researcher’s engagement and commitment in the study’s context were used? How can these differing responses help us understand and represent today’s world?

Continuing the discussion with this special issue of “Cultural Analysis,” we aim to shed light on alternative disciplinary models and practices capable of elaborating different ways of approaching crisis, the unknown, and the unpredictable in current times. Taking the “field” and the “archive” both as sites and contexts of research (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), the contributors in this special issue continue to ask questions regarding different circumstances of uncertainties and how they affect ethnographic and archival research in different personal, political and research contexts. These can lead to fractured lives of the actors involved and discontinuities in the institutional milieus, which can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, such as through changes in economic, political, and social conditions, as well as through the introduction of new technologies, which also, in turn, are influenced by uncertainties. As a result, researchers must adapt to new contexts and find strategies to navigate them.

In exploring the embeddedness of these contexts with a wide range of uncertainties, several questions emerge: Can a fieldworker’s experience of unexpected or unplanned events lead to key understandings and reconsiderations of the field and her/his fieldwork? If yes, how did ethnologists in the past engage with uncertainties, and what strategies did they develop for dealing with uncertainties? Which methods of dialogue, documentation, data collection, and engagement and commitment of the researcher were used to face uncertainties? With these questions and other new ones, contributors aim to shed light on different moments in the disciplinary pasts, where uncertainties become a pressing issue for researchers to develop strategies and, while recognizing instability, fragmentation, or sudden change, adapt their methods to navigate and make sense of shifting cultural, social, or historical contexts.

With their historical focus from the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, our contributors deal with several cases imbued with doubt and uncertainty. The historical range of the papers varies, mainly focusing on the distinct interplays of uncertainty, modernity, and nationalism in various historical and political contexts. Paying special attention to how practices of ethnology and folklore can adapt to changing societal pressures, the authors examine the strategies folklorists and col-

lectors employ in navigating personal, political, institutional, and social uncertainties across different regions, in different biographies and institutional milieus.

While most of the contributions deal with scientific actors shaped by multiple uncertainties connected to their particular milieus, these milieus—often disciplinary, but also political and always shaped by historical junctures—likewise become visible. Regarding strategies, we find actual persons involved in uncertain conditions developing practical and conscious strategies to overcome (or to learn to live with) difficulties. However, some strategies only become tangible in historical retrospect and thus cannot be traced back to conscious decisions over time. Rather, they depend on opportunities and conjunctures that arise. Strategies involved are often directed towards the future—actors look for ways to embed contested or traumatic pasts and hope for a future without ambiguities.

Insights and Perspectives: Contributions to this Special Issue

The Special Issue opens with an article by Hande Birkalan-Gedik, who tackles how political upheavals and disruptions in fieldwork can lead to innovative methods and strategies in ethnological and folklore research. Birkalan-Gedik illuminates the collaborations between Pertev Naili Boratav, the founder of academic folklore studies in Turkey, and his wife, Hayrünnisa Boratav, during several political turmoil and uncertainties. While these uncertainties hindered the research and collection activities of Pertev Naili Boratav, they also prompted the couple to look for strategies to overcome these uncertainties. Birkalan-Gedik underlines that the couple had to adapt themselves to the inaccessibility of the field—as Pertev Naili Boratav moved to France—by creatively restructuring their scholarly activities. Hayrünnisa Boratav took on significant roles in collecting folklore material in Turkey, evolving from a supporter to a key collaborator for Pertev Naili Boratav. Birkalan-Gedik argues that while this partnership challenges the traditional “two-person single career” model of Western anthropology, one should also recognize both partners’ emotional and intellectual contributions. Furthermore, this collaboration can be a creative way to rethink uncertainties not as barriers but as conditions that reshape research approaches, as the story of the Boratavs demonstrates that uncertainties can lead to creative adaptations, reshaping the boundaries of collaboration in fieldwork.

In the following article, Katre Kikas explores the relationship between folklore collecting and modernity during Jakob Hurt’s folklore campaign (1888–1907) in Estonia. With a focus on three domains of uncertainties—education, morality, and local social attitudes—found in the letters of three folklore collectors: Helene Maasen, Jaan Gutves, and Jaan Saalverk, Kikas provides insights into the broader implications of modernity on folklore scholarship and its cultural significance. Kikas underlines that the collectors often expressed anxieties about participating in intellectual activities despite limited formal education, sending “immoral” material, which received criticism from family or communities. These uncertainties, however, also allowed them to assert their connection to modernity. Hurt’s campaign positioned folklore as a tool for constructing a modern national identity, and the collectors engaged in this by writ-

ing letters and contributing to the national cause. Their participation bridged the gap between local traditions and national aspirations and provided a space to negotiate personal uncertainties amid societal change, highlighting folklore's role in the modernizing process.

In the following article, Sanna Kähkönen examines the uncertainties surrounding the societal impact of Finnish ethnologists during the Continuation War (1941–1944). By analyzing so-called “non-scientific” articles addressing a wider popular readership but written by ethnologists, the author investigates how these researchers navigated ideological pressures, particularly the Greater Finland concept. Kähkönen argues that uncertainties stem from methodological challenges: interpreting fragmented archival material and discerning whether political or propaganda motives influenced the knowledge shared by ethnologists. The article focuses on the actors, namely ethnologists, who produced knowledge that justified the Finnish occupation of East Karelia. Institutions, such as the State Scientific East Karelia Committee, played a strategic role by funding and guiding research to support nationalist claims. Ethnologists used various strategies, including appealing to kinship ideologies and scientific credibility, to influence public perceptions. However, the article raises questions about the intentionality behind their work and the degree to which they may have engaged in self-censorship or consciously participated in state propaganda.

The following article by Ave Goršič focuses on uncertainties while exploring the Estonian folklorists and folkloristics during the political and institutional upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Estonia transitioned from Soviet rule to independence, scholars navigated challenges in research funding, disciplinary directions, and institutional structures, which created different periods of uncertainties with different issues. She focuses on actors such as folklorists and institutions like the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) and examines their responses to these ongoing challenges. She underlines that the strategies for adaptation included the proposal of merging folklore institutions under one roof and revitalizing archives to serve both research and public use. While the reestablishment of the EFA in 1995 marked a return to stability, hesitations persisted regarding funding and the role of humanities in a changing political landscape. The article also highlights debates about restructuring, collecting new forms of folklore, and balancing tradition with modern research methods.

The last article by Kelly Fitzgerald focuses on the uncertainties surrounding the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC), which the Irish Government established to collect Irish folklore from 1935 to 1970. IFC members carried out fieldwork in rural Irish-speaking communities, documenting all aspects of traditional knowledge. IFC was established twelve years after the end of the Irish Civil War. However, the dividing lines and political uncertainties created by the Treaty negotiated with the British Empire were still alive. Fitzgerald stresses that the people involved in the IFC founding fell on both sides of the 1921–1922 Treaty Debate. She brings out that this inclusiveness (which made the IFC a rather peculiar endeavor at the time) was possible because the focus of the IFC was on past heritage. This helped the members to keep aside tensions connected to the present and created a foundation for imagining a united future.

As we introduce the special issue to our readers, we take the opportunity to thank all our authors, who thought of uncertainties together and reflected on the different aspects of the concept—actors, milieus, and strategies—in their valuable contributions. Our *special* thanks for the *special issue* go to Kaisa Langer and Dani Schrire, who generously agreed to write the response papers and commented on the general frameworks of uncertainties. Their contributions help not only to link the individual contributions on a content level, but also to expand these historically argued reflections in the sense of contemporary ethnography.

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Fieldwork in Times of Uncertainty: Hayrünnisa Boratav, Pertev Naili Boratav, and Their Collaboration in Folklore

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“La pensée n’est qu’un éclair au milieu d’une longue nuit. Mais c’est cet éclair qui est tout.”¹

—Henri Poincaré (1854–1912)

Abstract

This article examines the collaborations of Pertev Naili Boratav, the doyen of modern folklore studies in Turkey, and his wife, Hayrünnisa Boratav, in collecting Turkish folklore during a period when the field became inaccessible to Pertev Naili Boratav due to personal and political uncertainties. Drawing from interviews and archival sources, it explores how their partnership, which initially emerged as a creative solution, evolved into a lasting scholarly collaboration, highlighting Hayrünnisa Boratav’s significant, independent contributions to collecting folklore material. Engaging with the “two-person, single career” model, it proposes an expanded perspective that considers the material and emotional aspects of labor in fieldwork and the ‘two-person, single career’ model under new lights.

Keywords: Uncertainties in fieldwork; disciplinary history; folklore studies in Turkey; anthropologists’/folklorists’ wives; “two-person, single career” discussions

Introduction: Understanding “Uncertainties”

Uncertainties in fieldwork can arise in various situations, oscillating between the predictable and the unforeseen. Moreover, temporary hurdles may block access to collaborators, while long-term, political, academic, or personal disruptions can disconnect scholars from the field, turning challenges into perpetual struggles that deeply affect scholarly lives. One of the greatest difficulties arises when field access becomes impossible and may become inaccessible for first-hand ethnographic observation. Hagberg and Körling (2014) pressed ethnographers to find alternative paths. Political turmoil or violence can cause ruptures that detach ethnographers from their field (Holbraad, Kapferer, and Sauma 2019). Does the lack of access make ethnographers “less effective,” as it disrupts the seamless success narratives that often heroize fieldworkers? Alternatively, does it inspire greater creativity in finding solutions to fieldwork challenges for ethnographers? Understanding the contexts in

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which ethnographies are “broken,” as Contreras (2019) suggests, is crucial to grasping how scholars adapt to the situations and how they do anthropology and folklore.

In 1952, Pertev Naili Boratav (1907–1998), the doyen of modern folklore studies in Turkey, had to leave his country due to political pressures. He settled permanently in Paris, where, for the next seven years, academic obligations and limited financial resources prevented him from visiting Turkey. During this period, he advised his wife, Hayrünnisa Boratav (née Bige (1907–2004),² a schoolteacher who later became a teacher of German, to collect folklore materials in Turkey from a distance. Their scholarly partnership, which had originally developed in response to the sociopolitical challenges of the 1930s, continued to flourish even when Pertev Naili Boratav was eventually able to resume fieldwork in Turkey in the following decades.

In this paper, I challenge the view of “uncertainties” in fieldwork as merely temporary incidents. Drawing from the Boratavs’ life stories, I explore how personal and political factors constitute what I term “perpetual challenges.” I examine the strategies the couple employed to overcome uncertain situations, such as collaborative fieldwork and writing activities. At the same time, I highlight Hayrünnisa Boratav’s significant contributions beyond the oft-discussed “two-person, single career” model that typically portrays the spouse as a supporter, assisting the primary scholar while putting aside her career.

Elaborated by the US sociologist Hanna Papanek in the 1970s, the concept ‘two-person, single career’ is used for referring to the social praxis and expectation that, within a couple, the wife would bend her interests and own career to support the career of her husband. Not only does she assume family duties, but she also contributes practically and intellectually to the professional activities of her husband, although remaining in the shadow or hidden (Salvucci 2021). This model, according to Papanek, develops mainly in the middle-class intellectual milieu and “is fully congruent with the stereotype of the wife as supporter, comforter, backstage manager, home maintainer, and main rearer of children” (1973, 853; also see Bauer 1998).

In early anthropological practice, this dynamic has been observed in numerous instances where the wife of an anthropologist, while actively involved in tasks such as conducting fieldwork or assisting with the writing of scholarly works, remained uncredited and overlooked as a contributor. For instance, Elsie Masson, Bronislaw Malinowski’s wife, contributed to his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands by helping with notetaking, editing, and managing the household (Salvucci 2021). Similarly, Edith Turner became a prominent anthropologist in her own right after collaborating with Victor Turner on his early work (Turner 1987 and 2015). Other examples of collaborations by husband-wife anthropologists include Rosemary and Raymond Firth (Firth 1972; Firth and Brown 2023) and Elizabeth and Robert Fernea (1989; also see Gottlieb 1995), whose cases were tackled in various biographical and self-reflexive texts.

Besides the “two-person, single career” model, there are also several examples that illustrate the successful dual-professional couples, such as the Swiss novelist Noel Roger (aka Hélène Dufour (1874–1953), and anthropologist Eugène Pittard (1867–1962), who has done fieldwork in Romania, Albania, and Turkey. Other well-known, more contemporary anthropologist couples, such as Margery and Arthur Wolf; Hildred and

Clifford Geertz, and Laura and Paul Bohannon, are important examples where female anthropologists are recognized for their own independent work (for more details, see Girke 2020).

I suppose that there is a need to understand such cases better and ask the right questions: have women been marginalized in all cases, or is it the representation of these couples by other scholars? Should we, as feminists and feminist anthropologists, look at factors other than the material side of fieldwork labor? Do not the fieldwork and related activities, such as making and maintaining contacts, taking notes and photographs, or writing and editing texts, also contain emotional labor, as emotions are integral to knowing processes? (Jaggar 1989). Furthermore, as I find the term “equity” to be very profound, I also find Felix Girke’s views illuminating for the case of Boratavs. Girke underlines that working in the field as part of a team, rather than alone, is not meant to establish a hierarchy but to emphasize the distinct expectations anthropologists may encounter. It also highlights how certain partnerships, such as researchers and parents, influence how they approach issues of balance and fairness in their work.

Amidst the uncertainties and disruptions of time, I highlight both contributors’ significant and independent roles, although I recognize that the power imbalances within academic marriages cannot be fully leveled out. My example of Pertev Naili and Hayrünnisa Boratav shows that both partners maintained distinct, active roles. My alternative treatment reveals the intricate dynamics of their collaboration and offers unique details in this academic partnership. What follows is an attempt to reconstruct the couple’s collaboration based on interviews (Birkalan 1994; Aydın 1998; Boratav, K. 1998), archival documents, and scholarly works on and by the Boratavs. These sources provide valuable insights into how the couple navigated uncertainties together while also allowing us to analyze the effects this collaboration may have had on folklore studies in Turkey, as their situation had effects beyond personal instances. I rely on an interpretive reading, piecing together fragments to form a coherent narrative, as is often necessary with archival materials and interviews. Addressing the issue of inaccessibility in the Boratavs case contributes to the methodological discourse on fieldwork challenges, a rarely openly discussed topic until recent years, mainly because of the pandemics and wars (see Introduction).

Long before the concept of “self-reflexivity” was widely debated in ethnographic fieldwork, neither Hayrünnisa nor Pertev Naili Boratav lengthily commented on the contexts in which they collected folklore in their publications. However, they meticulously documented folktales, providing details such as the names, ages, and occupations of the tellers, along with the dates and places of collection. This is most visible in the archival material. Besides, Pertev Naili Boratav emphasized the importance of field collections both in our interviews (1994) and in his writings (e.g., on folktales and tale-tellers, see Boratav 1967 [1982a]; and on folklore and folk literature methodology, see Boratav 1942 [2000]). When the couple did not personally gather materials, they credited the names of the collectors.

Political Turmoil and Personal Contexts: The 1930s–1940s

The hardships Pertev Naili and Hayrünnisa Boratav experienced in the 1940s and beyond stem from the political climate of Turkey (and the world) in the 1930s, which were often intertwined with personal truces. Starting in the 1930s and well into the 1940s, Nazism and the racial version of Turkish nationalism gained popularity among certain Turkish nationalists. Inspired by the narratives of the “master race” prevalent in Europe, it was epitomized in the production of a national narrative based on “race” in the 1930s (Birkalan-Gedik 2018; 2025b; Cagaptay 2007). In this period, what was labeled as ‘left’ inclined towards Marxist ideas, and it was considered as the ‘antagonists’ of the racist group.

The 1940s saw aggressive campaigns against academics when the right-wing extremists targeted Ankara University professors, accusing them of indoctrinating their students with foreign ideologies through their lectures and publications, promoting anti-nationalist sentiments, and corrupting the minds of Turkish youth. Accusations against three Ankara University professors in 1947 of “promoting leftism” in their classes were voiced by the perpetrators in the racist-Turanist trial (1944–1947).³ According to İlhan Başgöz, one of Boratav’s students, who became a renowned scholar of Turkish folklore in the USA, the accusers emerged from “an alliance of the right wing of the ruling party and the newly established Democratic Party which went to the extreme right in cultural affairs” and “controlled the Ministry of Education” (1972, 173). Besides, Turkey’s alignment with the US in 1947 also fueled anti-communist feelings (Örnek and Üngör 2013) and conceded Turkey to receive the promised military and economic aid from the Truman Doctrine.

The nationalist agitations against academics at Ankara University (Mumcu 1990; Dinçşahin 2015), in particular, the case of Boratav, have been discussed at great length, accentuating how false communist accusations escalated into what could be described as a “witch-hunt” during the 1930s and 1940s (Başgöz 1972; Birkalan 1995, 2000, 2001; Birkalan-Gedik 2025a; Çetik 2019, 1998; Öztürkmen 2005). These events culminated in Pertev Naili Boratav’s departure from Turkey in 1952 and had profound personal and professional consequences for the Boratavs, forcing them to develop new strategies for continuing their academic work under increasingly politically hostile conditions.

A Life Together: Pertev Naili Boratav and Hayrünnisa Boratav

In order to understand the deep and affectionate bond between Hayrünnisa and Pertev Naili Boratav and how they employed the husband-wife collaboration in their professional careers, we need to look at the milieus in which they were born, grew up, and experienced the social and apolitical realities of the time.

Pertev Naili Boratav was born on September 2, 1907, as the second child of his family in Zlatograd (Darıdere), a town today part of Bulgaria. His father, Abdurrahman Naili, was a *kaymakam*, a district governor who served in several cities in Anatolia, and the family moved frequently due to his work. Eventually, they settled in Mudurnu, in the northwest Marmara region, where Pertev Naili Boratav received his early edu-

cation from his mother. Their close relationship led him to develop an interest in the story-telling tradition as he started collecting folktales from his mother (Birkalan 1995, 36). He had a sister, who passed away when he was young and two brothers: Müeyyet Boratav and Can Boratav (Birkalan 1995; Çetik 2019), who had to go against the increasing right-wing discourse as well.

Boratav, moving to Istanbul with his grandmother and uncle, attended Kumkapı Fransız Lisesi, the French Highschool in Kumkapı (Collège de l'Assomption) between 1921 and 1924. During this period, Istanbul was under the occupation of the Allied Powers. Later, he enrolled in Istanbul Lisesi (Istanbul Highschool), a government school that provided instruction in German (Birkalan 1995, 37). As he mastered two foreign languages, he had access to reading publications in folklore, sociology, and ethnography in their original languages. At Istanbul Lisesi, Boratav met Hilmi Ziya [Ülken] (1901–1974), a renowned Turkish sociologist who had an interest in folk literature. Ülken introduced Boratav to folklore, literature, and sociology.⁴ His solid background in analyzing folklore materials owes to Ülken's expertise in sociological analysis and in cultural movements, particularly nineteenth-century European romantic nationalism (Birkalan 1995; Birkalan-Gedik 2025a). Even after moving to Istanbul, Pertev Naili Boratav traveled to Mudurnu, where he spent several summers visiting his family and collecting folktales from his mother (Birkalan 1995, 36-37).

Pertev Naili Boratav enrolled at the Department of Turkish Literature at Darülfünûn (renamed and restructured as Istanbul University in 1933). He applied for a scholarship to study in Europe and visited Paris for a month in 1928, getting accustomed to the customs of a different culture and beginning to master international scholarship on folklore (Birkalan 1995, 42). He learned about the scholarship of Arnold van Gennep and translated van Gennep's *Le Folklore* in 1939 (Birkalan 1995).

With his increasing interest in folklore, Boratav started serving as an assistant at the newly established Türkiyât Enstitüsü (Institute of Turkish Studies), where two professors notably influenced Boratav's studies: French comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), who lectured on the mythologies of Turkish peoples at this institution and whose lectures Boratav translated from French to Turkish; and Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966), a prominent literary scholar and parliamentary member, who played a crucial role in Boratav's scholarly development in various ways.

A politically significant incident took place at the university in 1932 while Boratav was an assistant to Fuad Köprülü. Boratav recounted that the case was about Zeki Velidi [Togan] (1890–1970), a Bashkir who took part in the Turkestan liberation movement and immigrated to Turkey in 1925, becoming the chair of Turkish History at the Istanbul Dârülfünûn in 1927. He presented ideas contrary to the Turkish history thesis and criticized the assertions of Reşit Galip [Baydur] (1893–1934), a medical doctor and a politician with nationalist inclinations who later served as minister of education. At the First Turkish History Congress (1932), Baydur argued that there was an inland sea in Central Asia, and it dried up later. Zeki Velidi Togan rejected this argument as non-scientific. Togan's criticism was not only of the thesis itself but also of Reşit Galip [Baydur], who disseminated and defended the thesis on Turkish History. A combination of personal and political conflicts led Baydur to launch an anti-campaign in the

Turkish newspapers against Togan, who was dismissed from the university for his ideas. Moreover, at the university, Baydur declared that he was grateful for not being Zeki Velidi Togan's student. Pertev Naili Boratav, on the other hand, supported Togan's position by sending a protest telegram to the university with his friends. He underlined that he was happy to be Togan's student, which eventually led to some investigations. As Boratav emphasized in our interview, Köprülü could not defend him publicly and advised him to leave the university (Birkalan 1995, 42).

Important in this incident is the powerful political positions of the scholarly elite—who moved in-between locations in the production of racial knowledge—Turkish parliament, political associations, and the university, creating impediments on Boratav's academic life. After this incident, Boratav left Istanbul University and taught as a Turkish literature teacher in Konya between 1932 and 1936 at Konya Erkek Öğretmen Okulu (School for Male Teachers) and Konya Lisesi (Konya High School). In Beyşehir-Konya, Boratav also performed his first military service, as according to the system operating then, his school service counted as time in the military. Konya played an important role in the life of Pertev Naili and Hayrünnisa Boratav even before his appointment as a teacher there. The two first met each other in this city when Pertev Naili was on a school trip to Konya, and Hayrünnisa Boratav was a literature teacher in Konya in the early 1930s (Birkalan 1995, 43).

Hayrünnisa Boratav (Bige) was born in 1907 in İzmir. Her mother was Muhsine, and her father was Nedim, who died of smallpox before she was born (Kansu 2004, 6). She had a sister named Halide. Her father Nedim⁵ was a member of a prominent elite family in Mytilene—a city on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean, which remained under the Ottoman rule until the 1912-Balkan wars. After losing her husband, Muhsine raised her children alone, working as a teacher and a tailor—sewing gas masks for the Turkish military to make ends meet. Struggling with poverty, Muhsine placed Hayrünnisa in an orphanage in Bursa, but Hayrünnisa ran away and returned to her mother's home. After the Greek invasion of Bursa in 1920, the family relocated to Istanbul. Muhsine married Sabri, who helped Hayrünnisa and her sister enroll at the Adana Muallim Mektebi (Adana Teacher's School) through his connections. She graduated from the school in 1927 (Kansu 2004, 6). Amidst continuing wars, Hayrünnisa Bige struggled to pursue her education. It is also possible that her strong, dominant personality is due to her early life struggles, which seem to have played a crucial role in her life story. Her efforts towards receiving higher education also reveal her recognition of the new republic's visions for women, as she deemed education crucial to gain a better social and economic status. The Kemalist gender policies, which granted rights to Turkish women ahead of many European countries, such as France, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland, significantly shaped her future paths, as she became one of the first schoolteachers in the new republic, aligning with the regime's goal of modernizing women through education. Her intellectual upbringing also prepared her for a life of scholarly pursuits alongside her husband.

Her relationship with Pertev Naili Boratav was rekindled in Konya, leading to their marriage on December 6th, 1934. Hayrünnisa Boratav had noted that their marriage ceremony took place in an empty house where they only had a few plates, some

glasses, and only a few furniture, even using Pertev Naili's curtains from his military service as their living room curtains (Birkalan 1995, 45). The couple had two sons: Korkut Boratav, born in 1935, became a professor of economics at Ankara University-Turkey; and Murat Boratav (1943–2011) became a professor of physics at the Laboratoire de Physique Nucléaire et de Hautes Energies (Laboratory of Nuclear and High Energy Physics) and at Pierre and Marie Curie University-France. Hayrünnisa Boratav balanced domestic responsibilities, childcare, and teaching duties with help from Sıdıka Boratav, Pertev Naili's mother, and other family members (Çetik 2019, 52, 57).

In 1936, Pertev Naili Boratav received a scholarship to study ancient languages, including Greek, Latin, Hittite, and Assyrian, at Friedrich Wilhelm Universität-Berlin (later Humboldt University). According to archive material in Berlin, he was registered at the Friedrich Wilhelm-Universität in Berlin on October 25, 1936, with student number 1051/125. Leaving her little baby Korkut with Pertev Naili's mother, Sıdıka Boratav, Hayrünnisa Boratav joined him. They stayed with Family Ostrah and then with Family Bergman (H. Boratav, Student index cards, Humboldt University).

In Berlin, Boratav's studies were interrupted. During a conversation with some students from Turkey, who clearly subscribed to Nazi ideology, Pertev Naili Boratav declared his oppositional views, which became the grounds for his recall to Turkey:

In a conversation among friends, I criticized Nazism and declared my liberal ideas. After this incident, they recalled me without any notice, without informing me beforehand ... without telling me anything... What did I do? Had they told me, I would have written a letter of defense and submitted it. Besides, there were Germans who really did not like the ideology of Hitler, too. (Boratav 1994)

This incident was yet another case that created negative effects on Boratav's scholarly career. However, later, it was found out that the right-wing Turkish students, who actively supported the racist ideology, stood behind these accusations. They were backed by the student inspector Reşat Şemsettin [Sirer] (1903–1953), who was not particularly sympathetic to Boratav. Sirer became the minister of education in 1946 and played a key role in the university events in 1948 leading to Boratav's trial.

Hayrünnisa Boratav remained in Berlin a little longer, continuing her German classes between 1936 and 1937, hoping to be qualified to teach German in Turkey. In her index cards at the university, she was identified as *strebsam*—"ambitious" or "hardworking." Upon her return to Turkey, she wanted to continue working as a German teacher by enrolling in some certificate programs. Only after 1941, however, did she become a teacher at Ankara High School for Girls and later at Ankara State Conservatory.

As for the investigations from his visit to Berlin, Boratav had noted that he appealed to the Ministry of Education and reported on the events in Germany. As he waited for the results, he worked as a librarian at the Mülkiye Mektebi (School of Political Studies) and published several articles in journals *Yurt ve Dünya* (Homeland and the world) and *Ülkü* (the Ideal) (Birkalan 1995, 47; Birkalan-Gedik 2025a), which were clearly anti-racist journals, and were marginalized by the intensifying Turkist

circles in post-war Turkey. During this time, the family faced financial difficulties, as they depended on Hayrünnisa Boratav's teacher's salary and on the small amount that Boratav received from his library job. At the end of lengthy investigations, it was understood that Boratav's discussions and conversations were indeed exaggerated and misinterpreted. In order to make it up to Boratav, he was assigned as a professor to the Faculty of Language and History-Geography, in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature in 1938 (Birkalan 1995, 46-47).

Pertev Naili Boratav introduced folklore and folk literature classes to the curricula of the Faculty of Language and History-Geography, Department of Turkish Language and Literature in 1938 (Boratav, P. 1982b, 103) and established the Department of Turkish Folklore and Folk Literature at Ankara University in 1946–1947 academic year. In 1948, that department, the only one of its kind in Turkey, was closed due to nationalist agitation against academics. Pertev Naili Boratav was one of three lecturers at Ankara University accused of propagating communism in their classes.⁶ Boratav's case began in 1948 with allegations fundamentally focusing on his interpretations of nationalism. His opponents, mostly Pan-Turkist ideologues, tried "inventing" several cases through which they could accuse him.

In his defense, which he presented in 1950, Pertev Naili Boratav commented extensively on his understanding of nationalism and underscored his position as a teacher and Turkish intellectual (Çetik 1998a). After a lengthy trial between June 1948 and February 1950, Boratav was acquitted of all charges. However, he had no job to return to, as the accusers succeeded in passing a special decree at the Turkish Grand National Assembly to cut off departmental funding (Birkalan 1995; Birkalan-Gedik 2025a). He had to find other alternatives to his livelihood. Although he hoped for another position in Turkey, the extreme nationalist actors prevented him from teaching and publishing, turning this period into "perpetual uncertainties," a term I alluded to at the beginning of my paper.

With the help of some of his colleagues, a temporary solution was created: Pertev Naili Boratav purchased books in Ankara on Turkish language, literature, culture, folklore, and politics and shipped them to the Stanford University Library's Hoover Collection. Since Boratav was never officially discharged from the university and only the departmental funding was cut off to stop his classes, he continued to receive a small portion of his university salary (*açık maaşı*, in Turkish). These two sources became his primary income source for approximately four years (Birkalan 1995, 75). Hayrünnisa Boratav contributed to the family budget by working as a teacher and translator. With Wolfram Eberhard (1908–1989), she translated his *Chinesische Volksmärchen* (Chinese folktales) into Turkish as *Çin Hikâyeleri* and assisted Pertev Naili with other German texts. With her husband, she translated works by Heinrich Heine (1797–18856) (Boratav, H. and Boratav, P. 1945, 1946, 1948). While selecting these established works was significant, the motivation behind these translations was not solely academic. Hayrünnisa Boratav's language skills enabled her to contribute financially, as translations became a crucial source of income for the family in the midst of economic instabilities. Hayrünnisa Boratav recalled those days in the following way:

I was a teacher at the state conservatory when they expelled Pertev from the university. Pertev could not go to France, yet. The state did not give him a job; they put him under surveillance. We had very difficult years. We had children and I took care of them. You know, [our eldest son] Korkut Boratav is now a professor. When he was a child, they did not let anyone sit next to him at school because allegedly, he was the child of a communist. They did not talk to him. We almost went hungry for four years. (Aydın 1998, 9)

During this time, Wolfram Eberhard, (although not a Jew himself), a renowned sociologist and Sinologist who had to find refuge in Turkey during the Nazi oppression in Germany (Boratav, H 1994),⁷ was also forced to leave Turkey in 1948. He found an appointment at Stanford University in the US. During a visit to the Boratavs in Turkey, he proposed that Pertev Naili Boratav come to the United States and seek a position there.

Hayrünnisa Boratav recounted that Pertev Naili Boratav left for Paris on May 1, 1952, waiting to obtain a visa for the United States. She underlined that Pertev Naili Boratav could not write “even a word,” as he and several of his colleagues could not continue their work at the university (Birkalan 1995, 75). During this time, Hayrünnisa Boratav took on a more active role in their research, demonstrating the resilience of their scholarly partnership in the face of political uncertainty.

Pertev Naili Boratav’s hopes of being accepted to the United States were frustrated while he awaited acceptance. He had explained that the Americans had rejected his application because the Turkish government had deceitfully warned them that he was still a communist threat (Birkalan 1995). The rejection of his visa application was the last attempt to hinder Pertev Naili Boratav’s academic activities. With the help of his friend, French ethnologist Louis Bazin (1920–2011), he could look for other options in France. From 1952, Pertev Naili Boratav continued his scholarly work in France, teaching and researching at École Pratique des Hautes Études (School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences). As of October 1, 1952, he started working as a *chargé de recherche* at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [National Center for Scientific Research] (Boratav, H. 1978, 10). Boratav talked about his experience in the following manner:

C.N.R.S is not a teaching institute; it’s a research institute.⁸ They help scholars financially and offer scholars opportunities according to the degree of their studies. I became Maître de Recherche at C.N.R.S. in the January of 1966. At the same time, there is an institution named École Pratique des Hautes Études which provides scholars with an opportunity to follow [...] conferences. I started as *chargé de conférence*... [...] Between 1963 and 1976, I worked at the sixth section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études and taught Ottoman paleography. From 1965 until my retirement, I directed courses on the Old Ottoman script... That meant that researchers who wanted to do research came to my classes to study Ottoman texts... On the one hand, research at Recherche Scientifique, on the other hand directing courses at École Pratique des Hautes Études conferences... In 1972, I was supposed to retire but due to my distinguished work, they expanded my retirement. I retired in 1974. (Birkalan 1995, 78)

As a result, the family suffered uncertainty until—partially—they were reunited when Murat Boratav, the second son of the Boratav family, joined his father in France at the age of eleven in 1954),⁹ where they relocated to a house-pension in Montgeron, in the southeastern suburbs of Paris. Having retired in 1957, Hayrünnisa Boratav could join them later (Kansu 2004), likely in 1958 when she moved to France, after which the family moved to Ivry-sur-Seine, another Parisian *banlieue*.

When Pertev Naili Boratav could not come to Turkey, she collected folklore materials in Anatolia and sent them to him in Paris (Birkalan 1995, 77). This type of folklore fieldwork, which can be seen as “innovative” today, was necessitated by the material conditions of the time:

We were separated for seven years. After seven years, when Pertev was in France, I would go and stay with him for a while from time to time and inform him about food and laundry. Then I would come back. While Pertev was in France, for seven years, I performed the duties he had assigned [to me]. I used to go down to the cotton fields in Manisa. All the people living in the mountains... Our villagers... Those living in the plateau. I slept in nomad tents; I lived with nomads in nomad tents and compiled fairy tales... For seven years... I also worked with Pertev. I used to write so fast that I would write whatever was said just like a machine. I would even write as I was looking at the face of the tale-teller. The invention of the recorder machine was a unique opportunity for us. I would press the button on the machine, and they would narrate. (Aydın 1998, 10)

These challenges necessitated a creative partnership, where Hayrünnisa Boratav’s collection of folklore materials from the field played an indispensable role in maintaining and expanding Pertev Naili Boratav’s research. She gathered folklore materials, documented local customs, and compiled field notes on material culture. Her contributions were evident in all archival collections and publications, where she was rightfully credited.¹⁰ One of her key contributions was providing access to the women’s world through fieldwork, as she interacted with different female communities in different locales. As well as collecting folktales, she collected several ethnographic and folklore material on foodways, ethnobotany, and rituals, among other genres (Birkalan 1994; Aydın 1998, 9-10). In 1953, Pertev Naili Boratav wrote:

I was going to send you a guide on what to look out for when compiling games—for you and for anyone else who might be helping you. It never happened. For now, you can look at the plays and play songs plan on pages 68–69 of my Folk Literature Lessons.¹¹

With these words, he was directing his wife methodologically as to where to find more information on collecting. There were other instances we know of where Hayrünnisa Boratav assisted her husband. Their correspondence from 1953 indicates some plans for collecting children’s toys and games; Hayrünnisa Boratav gave ideas for having their son Murat invite his friends for formula tales.¹²

Hayrünnisa Boratav was also deeply involved in the administrative and scholarly aspects of her husband's work. She was also a "correspondent," who kept Pertev Naili Boratav informed about the latest developments in folklore by sending him academic journals and books and assisting him with academic formalities. She was crucial in establishing and organizing the Boratav archives in Nanterre and Istanbul, meticulously annotating materials. While some might view this as "secretarial" work, it was, in truth, a testament to her role as the "memory" behind these valuable scholarly resources.

It is clear that Hayrünnisa Boratav took care of fieldwork issues very pro-actively. Before coming to the town, she established contacts with local people, administrators and teachers. After they left the field, the couple remained in touch with the local people. She kept up correspondence with them on her and her husband's behalf.¹³ I can also confirm this from my own experience. After I visited the family in 1994 in Paris, she answered my letters to them. Several documents and photographs in Nanterre and Istanbul archives bear detailed descriptions with Hayrünnisa Boratav's handwriting carefully giving the content information for each document. Thus, the collaboration between Hayrünnisa and Pertev Naili Boratav transcends the conventional "two-person, single career" model, where wives often sacrificed their careers to support their husbands. Instead, their partnership aligns more closely with a "two-person, two-careers," as Hayrünnisa Boratav never gave up her primary career as a teacher, nor did she abandon her duties as a mother and wife, as I posited at the beginning of this article. She balanced her own professional life with her contributions to her husband's work, making her an exceptional example of a wife-scholar.

Hayrünnisa Boratav started learning French after she moved to France and followed the École Pratique des Hautes Études seminars Boratav directed (Boratav 1967 and 1974). Her learning French shows her willingness to collaborate further with Pertev Naili Boratav in various capacities. For instance, she contributed to publishing translations of Turkish tales into French (Boratav 1977). She wrote a piece with important details about Pertev Naili Boratav's curriculum vitae for the Festschrift titled *Quand le crible était dans la paille: Hommage à Pertev Naili Boratav* [When the sieve was in the straw: Homage to Pertev Naili Boratav] (1978). It was a tribute to Pertev Naili Boratav on his seventieth birthday, presented by Rémy Dor and Michèle Nicolas. The publication of the book was celebrated with the participation of colleagues and friends in Turkey, France, and Europe in person (Aks. 13297. No. 228, 1978).

Pertev Naili Boratav collaborated not only with his wife but also, among others, with Louis Bazin, Paul Delarue (1889–1956), German sinologist and folklorist Wolfram Eberhard, and Turkish folklorist Oğuz Tansel.¹⁴ Bazin was instrumental in Boratav's move to France, as he worked as a senior research fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique while continuing his studies at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (National School for Modern Oriental Languages). They collaborated on several projects, for example, in publishing Turkish epics and folk songs (see bibliography). Paul Delarue was a main collaborator for Pertev Naili Boratav in the publication of Boratav's *Contes turcs* (1955), which was published in the international series that Delarue edited, not to mention other collaborative events,

including a project on children's games and toys.

For Eberhard, Hayrännisa Boratav once noted, "Pertev and Eberhard worked extremely well," referring to their harmonious collaborations. Eberhard translated *Halk Hikâyeleri ve Halk Hikâyeciliği* (Boratav 1946) to German as *Türkische Volkserzählungen und die Erzählerkunst* (1975). Boratav and Eberhard collaborated on *Typen türkischer Volksmärchen* (1953). In addition, Boratav's intellectual impact is traceable in Eberhard's *Minstrel Tales from Southeastern Turkey* (1955). Boratav's relationship with Oğuz Tansel developed when Pertev Naili Boratav taught at Konya Lisesi, leaving an unforgettable imprint on Tansel's folklore education and career. From time to time, when Boratav was able to visit Turkey, he relied on Tansel's assistance in the field and has done fieldwork together.¹⁵ Another collaboration is the surveys from 1964 in Konya, Izmir, Istanbul and Adana, where Hayrännisa Boratav tape-recorded 120 stories (known by the acronym HB 64, nos. 1–120), and Halet Çambel (1916–2014), a renowned professor of archeology and a good friend of Pertev Naili Boratav, collected 14 stories (HÇ II, 3, nos. 1–14) (Boratav 1968).

Conclusion: Collaborative Fieldwork as an end to Uncertainties?

In order to make sense of the collaboration between Hayrännisa and Pertev Naili Boratav, a brief revisit to the joint husband-wife fieldwork and writing (Mead 1986; Callan and Ardener 1984) seems necessary. As I introduced earlier, before the women's movement in the 1970s in the US and Europe, anthropologists' wives took fieldwork notes, discussed, copyedited, and proofread their husbands' text, which led them to interrupt their careers so that they could devote themselves to those of their husbands'. These "incorporated wives" not only managed domestic responsibilities but also played crucial roles in advancing their husbands' careers, as noted in the Anglo-American tradition (Callan and Ardener 1984).

This "invisible labor" became a topic of critique after the 1970s feminist academic discussions. The method and writing became important topics of the "writing culture" discussions (Behar and Gordon 1995; Gottlieb 1995; Abu-Lughod 1991). Recently, Daniela Salvucci reminded us that in anthropology, wife-co-workers, who were made either invisible or silent, have generally accepted a "writerly incorporation" in their husbands' books, started their own careers as anthropologists, led their own fieldwork research, and wrote their own books (Salvucci 2021, 197; Tedlock 1995, 271).¹⁶

In this light, how should we interpret the collaboration of Pertev Naili and Hayrännisa Boratav? In understanding their collaboration, it is essential to recognize that the 'two-person, single career' model does not adequately describe their partnership. Unlike the typical portrayal of anthropologists' wives as "hidden scholars," Hayrännisa Boratav's contributions were far more significant, independent, and is decidedly different from this model. She proactively participated in fieldwork and archival research while maintaining her own career and family responsibilities. Her fieldwork, which started as a response to the period when Pertev Naili Boratav could not be in the field in Turkey, became essential to their collaboration, which shows adaptability during periods of inaccessibility to the field.

I argue that we need to look at external and internal disciplinary issues. As for external factors, Hayrünnisa Boratav's life story, marked by resilience after losing her father before birth, played a significant role. Her stepfather supported her education, which laid the foundation for her later achievements. Her strong personality was the key to equal partnership in the family, as their son Korkut Boratav offered a more nuanced understanding of her personality:

From the outset, she seemed to dominate my father, but she was devoted to making my father's life run smoothly. As soon as she uttered, "Pertev will work" everything stopped at home. My father's working hours were sacred hours for her, but it was the most natural thing for her to say "Pertev, go make the tea" or "set up the breakfast" when his work was over. She always wanted my father to work, produce, and maintain his place as a respected scientist to advance further. In a sense, this attitude was to challenge the way she and my father were treated in Turkey. (Kansu 2004, 6)

Second, her life experience in the broader social and political context of the Kemalist gender regime in Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s also influenced her path. The Turkish Republic, with its foundation in 1923, as a nationalistic project, promoted modernized and westernized women, aiming to clearly mark itself off from the Ottomans. It granted women political rights, emphasized gender equality, and enabled women like Hayrünnisa Boratav to pursue careers. Modernization and emancipation of women were "family-centered" (Sancar 2012), whereby "modern families" were ensured by government policies. In this nationalist imagination, as Jenny White observed, the "citizen woman, who was urban and urbane, socially progressive, uncomplaining and dutiful at home, became the ideal image for Republican women (White 2003, 146).¹⁷ The case of Hayrünnisa Boratav illustrates that she used the "Kemalist gender regime" to her benefit and was able to put motherhood and active female citizens next to each other.

The Boratavs' marriage and collaboration were grounded in Western modernity, which Kemalist modernism and its gender regimes try to achieve for the women in Turkey. The liberties that the Kemalist gender regime bestowed upon the 'new Turkish woman' included the modernist vision of personhood as well as social and political equality for women. Hayrünnisa Boratav was a fitting example for this case. Both Hayrünnisa and Pertev Naili Boratav saw themselves as breadwinners and caregivers at different times and capacities. Furthermore, she was more than just a witness to the political accusations Pertev Naili Boratav faced in the 1930s. Hayrünnisa Boratav was also affected by these events, as the accusers also made her the target of their political claims, which she emphasized in several interviews.

These details, which seem external to disciplinary issues, can challenge the models discussed in anthropology as spouses being "hidden" beyond their husbands. Hayrünnisa Boratav shows that she was exceptional not only in the Turkish but also in the Anglo-American context. Going beyond the "incorporated" or "faculty" wives, she navigated both her career and her husband's scholarly endeavors, blurring the 'two-person, single career' model (Bauer 1998). Furthermore, unlike the "unremuner-

ated" examples in the US, Pertev Naili Boratav acknowledged her contributions in his writings. She was also recognized publicly, which I find an important difference. If we are to recall, in addition to collecting, she established and managed contacts and other regular activities, which a fieldworker would do.

Hayrännisa Boratav's achievements extend beyond the traditional role of an academic wife, highlighting the contributions of spouses in academic partnerships. In this case, both partners maintained their professional identities while contributing to shared scholarly goals. She mothered two sons, although, in her interviews, she emphasized her motherhood less than her academic achievements and collaborations with her husband. Instead, she saw herself as equal to her husband in terms of education and societal roles. Rather than assuming the role of a 'non-competitive' partner, she continued her path as a teacher but also turned what Papanek identified as 'competition' into "collaboration"—remaining an active agent in documenting folklore materials, acknowledged by her husband and others, not as a "vicarious" type. Although "the ambiguities of 'academic intimacy' can lead to certain contradictions in both academia and intimacy" (Salvucci 2021, 197), for the Boratavs, academic intimacy led to collaboration.

Their case highlights that husband–wife work relations can take diverse forms due to historical and political circumstances on the one hand and personal and psychological elements on the other. First, Hayrännisa Boratav not only adapted to the demands of her husband's occupation but also became a seasoned fieldworker, both closely and remotely trained by her husband, and took part in fieldwork activities with Pertev Naili Boratav. With the stances she took in her own and her husband's career, she also subverted the "social control mechanism which derails the occupational aspirations of the highly educated woman into a subsidiary role determined by her husband's career" (Papanek 1973, 852).

The fact that researchers have not sufficiently addressed contributions similar to those of Hayrännisa Boratav should not diminish their value and significance. In my analysis, I endeavor go beyond the existing discussions on this topic to explore issues that the 'two-person, single career' model has inadequately considered. Alison Jaggar, in "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology" (1989), argues that the Western tradition has often obscured the crucial role of emotion in constructing knowledge. This important assertion by Jaggar may provide a key to understanding the distinctiveness of the collaboration between Hayrännisa and Pertev Naili Boratav, and other couples who sustained dual careers in anthropology and folklore.

Building on Allison Jaggar's (1989) emphasis on emotions, I suggest that through the concept of emotional labor, we can understand the collaborative work of Hayrännisa and Pertev Naili Boratav and rethink the traditional "two-person, single career" model. While this model typically emphasizes a division of labor where the man takes the leading role and the woman is relegated to a supportive, often invisible position, the Boratavs' partnership went beyond this material division, incorporating a deep emotional and intellectual one. Hayrännisa Boratav's emotional connections with local communities during fieldwork, and Pertev Naili's trust in her played a crucial role in their academic endeavors. Pertev Naili Boratav's emotional support was not merely

a personal gesture but an integral part of their collective scholarly achievements.

In line with Jaggar's framework, Hayrünnisa Boratav established emotional connections with local communities during fieldwork, allowing her to access local knowledge. Her fieldwork was shaped by using her emotional intelligence and empathy to gain the trust of villagers and storytellers. This trust not only facilitated the data collection process but also enabled the community to express their narratives more openly. In this context, her fieldwork should be seen not merely as 'emotional support' but as an activity that laid the foundations of academic research.

In conclusion, I suggest that the collaboration between Hayrünnisa and Pertev Naili Boratav blurs the "two-person, single career" pattern. Instead, it exemplifies a "two-person, two-career" model, which challenges the earlier conceptualization as a creative response to uncertain times. Hayrünnisa Boratav's achievements extend beyond the traditional role of an academic wife, highlighting the contributions of spouses in academic partnerships.

Pertev Naili Boratav died on March 2, 1998, in Ivry-sur-Seine, Paris, where he is buried. Hayrünnisa Boratav moved to Ankara, Turkey, living the rest of her life in an elderly home. She died on March 21, 2004, in Ankara and was buried in Ankara-Gölbaşı Cemetery. She was, in my view, an exceptional woman of her time. Besides, considering her private life and professional responsibilities with her husband reveals that she was an indispensable part of her husband's work, providing valuable scholarly and intellectual support and taking responsibility for domestic and care responsibilities. With 64 years spent together with her husband, Hayrünnisa Boratav was more than a companion to Pertev Naili Boratav throughout her life. Despite the challenges they faced, Hayrünnisa Boratav remained a steadfast partner, supporting her husband's work while pursuing her career. She was recognized by her husband, her collaborators, and now, through this piece, by a folklore historian. Her life and work illustrate the potential for a more equitable model for academic collaboration, one that acknowledges the contributions of both partners in a marriage.

Notes

- 1 "Thought is just a lightning bolt in the middle of a long night. But it is this lightning that is everything."
- 2 Translations from foreign languages into English are by the author.
- 3 Interestingly, two names deserve more attention in this trial. One of them is Zeki Velidi Togan, for whom Pertev Naili Boratav wrote a petition letter with Nihal Atsız when he was at Istanbul University. Atsız became one of the antagonists during Pertev Naili Boratav's trial as an extreme Turkist ideologue.
- 4 Ülken held several teaching positions at high schools after graduating from Ankara University's Philosophy Department before becoming an associate professor at Istanbul University.

- 5 In some sources, her last name was given as Nedim, as was her father's name, and Bige was her mother's last name. Since her father passed away, she might have registered under her mother's name. The Surname Law of the Republic of Turkey was passed on 21 June 1934, requiring all citizens to use fixed, hereditary surnames. Earlier people were known by the names of their fathers as surnames, such as Hayrünnisa Nedim. Hayrünnisa must have taken the name her mother might have chosen as a surname.
- 6 Other lecturers were Behice Boran (1910–1987) and Niyazi Berkes (1908–1988). In 1939, Behice Boran received her doctorate in Sociology from Michigan University. She returned to Turkey as the first Turkish scholar with a US doctorate in social sciences. Niyazi Berkes, who graduated from the University of Chicago in 1939, returned to Turkey in the same year and joined the faculty at Ankara University. In 1952, he had to move to McGill University in Canada. Another scholar who was subjected to “communist surveillance” was Muzafer Şerif Başoğlu (1906–1988), who was briefly detained in 1944 at Ankara University. Upon receiving a scholarship from the US, he left Turkey in 1947. As a pioneer in social psychology, he is particularly known for his work on the “Robbers Cave” experiment in Oklahoma in the 1950s.
- 7 Wolfram Eberhard studied classical Chinese and social anthropology and worked at the Berlin Anthropology Museum under the direction of F. D. Lessing. When he moved to Turkey, he took a position at Ankara University, teaching in Turkish and publishing in Turkish and German. During these years, Boratav collaborated with him on several academic projects.
- 8 Chargé de recherche (CR) is a permanent position for research only, and it is equivalent to Maître de conférences (MCF), which is a permanent position for faculty (teachers and researchers).
- 9 History Foundation, Istanbul. Boratav Archive: Aks. 13138. No: 69 (19.06.1954). Piraeus: Aks. 13145. No 77 (1954). Murat Boratav, Montgeron: Aks. 13148. No:79 (1954). Murat Boratav: Aks. 13148. No:80 (1954). Pertev Naili Boratav, Montgeron: Aks. 13156. No: 87 (1954), Murat Boratav.
- 10 Pertev Naili Boratav's archive, which he began compiling in 1927, is one of the most important sources in the folklore research in Turkey. It includes material on folktales, folk songs, folk theater, ethnobotany, folk medicine and astronomy, songs, nursery rhymes, poems, stories, proverbs, and all other areas of folklore from many regions of Turkey. As such, it constitutes one of Turkey's most important oral culture sources in the last 100 years. The scholarly and personal material of Pertev Naili Boratav and his wife, Hayrünnisa Boratav, are currently kept in two archives. The first one is in Nanterre at the Eric Dampierre Library. The compilation, initiated by Marie-Dominique Mouton and Maria Couroucli, started in the late 1980s and was completed at the end of the 1990s. An agreement was signed in 1987 by Pertev Naili Boratav and Annie Lebeuf (Masson Detourbet) (1921-1995), who was director of the Laboratoire Ethnology and Comparative Sociology between 1980 and 1988. (I thank Frédéric Dubois for providing these details). Altan Gökalp, an anthropologist from Turkey, was then asked to take care of the archive. In the 1990s, the activities to house his material started at the Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı (History Foundation). It was a challenging process financially and in terms of human power. The material in Turkey has amassed a total amount of 50,000 pages, resulting from 70 years of labor in the field and at his desk. In addition to Boratav's research, the archive has brought together research material, including audio recordings and visual materials by Hayrünnisa Boratav and Pertev Naili Boratav's assistants at Ankara University. His archive in France is smaller in volume and is not the exact copy of the material in the Istanbul archive.

According to Pertev Naili Boratav, the archive in France includes “his unpublished materials, nearly eighty files he donated to Nanterre University” (Birkalan 1995, 99).

- 11 “Sana oyunları derlerken nelere dikkat etmek icap ettiğine dair—senin için ve başka bu işe yardım edecekler için—bir rehber yollayacaktım. Bir türlü olmadı. Şimdilik benim Halk Edebiyatı Dersleri’nin sahife 68-69’daki Oyun ve Oyun Türküleri Planı’na bakabilirsin.” (PNB/HB 07.03.1953—0048PNB/170.2.09.03.1952-13/1).
- 12 From Pertev Naili Boratav to Hayrünnisa Boratav, 0048PNB/170.03-30.09.1953-13/14; 0048PNB/170.320.10.1957. 13/17.
- 13 For example, a letter from Pertev Naili Boratav to Ersin Bedir Özer, 19. IV. 1970 asking about assistance in field research on “traditions and customs and folk literature” in Muğla (Unclassified) and Ersin Bedir Özer to Pertev Naili Boratav 29.04.1970 (Unclassified) confirming his assistance. Around the same year, another letter from Hüsnü Kıvrıkcık to Pertev Naili Boratav on 9 April 1971 talks about assistance in the field.
- 14 History Foundation, Aks. 13181. No. 112. Pertev Naili Boratav - Oğuz Tansel. 1967, Konya-Seydişehir; Oğuz Tansel to Pertev Naili Boratav. Ankara 16 October 1970 (Unclassified).
- 15 The correspondence accessible at the Boratav Archive in Istanbul dates between 2 May, 1967 and 18 November, 1970.
- 16 The term “faculty wives” was used in North America between the 1910s and 1960s to describe women whose social statuses were tied to their husbands’ academic positions. To be considered a successful faculty wife, a woman had to both marry a professor and actively support and enhance his career (Belisle and Mitchell 2018, 460; see Turk 2014; Prentice 2006).
- 17 In parallel with promoting the image of new Turkish women in the 1930s, several female students received state scholarships for studying abroad, contributing to the educated, modernized, and Westernized image of the new Turkish women. More importantly, Keriman Halis became the Miss Universe in 1932 and “showed the ‘beautiful’ face of the modern Turkish woman to the world,” Mustafa Kemal Atatürk declared.

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Uncertainties of Modernity and the Folklore Collectors in the Last Decade of the Nineteenth Century Estonia

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Abstract

The article focuses on the close and ambiguous relationship between folklore studies and modernity during the folklore collecting campaign of Jakob Hurt in 1888–1907. This period is significant as the activities having taken place at the time are highly representative of the modernization of Estonians. The article regards the letters of local collectors as an archive of vernacular ideas about modernity and inquires whether participating in the collecting campaign helped to overcome ambivalences related to modern identity. The main emphasis is on three domains of uncertainties (education, morality, attitudes of other local people) that collectors refer to in their letters to forge their links to modernity.

Keywords: collecting folklore; modernity; the nineteenth century; disciplinary history; political uncertainties

Introduction

In 1888, an event of extraordinary scale occurred in Estonia—more than a thousand of people of various backgrounds reacted to the call of a national leader, parson and linguist Jakob Hurt (1839–1907) to start writing down folklore. The result was about 114,000 pages of songs, tales, riddles and examples from other folklore genres. Though nowadays this collection is considered the symbolic heart of Estonian Folklore Archives and has enormous formative value for the Estonian identity, the context for building the collection was rather ambiguous. The campaign took place several decades before the Estonian Republic was founded (in 1918), at a time when Estonians were considered as the lowest strata in a society governed by the Russian Empire and the Baltic German nobility. The collecting campaign was organized by a man living in a diaspora—due to the opposition of Baltic Germans and as a reaction to the severe Russification reforms of the Empire, Hurt had to live and work in St. Petersburg.

The popularity of the campaign was only partially connected to the research goals. As can be seen from the letters accompanying the materials, many collectors were mainly motivated by another notion highlighted in the public texts surrounding the campaign—that of becoming a modern individual (Kikas 2025, 69). In this article I will focus on the letters sent to Hurt by three participants—Helene Maasen, Jaan Gutves and Jaan Saalverk—and inquire into the ways they used the framework of folklore collecting to contemplate about the uncertainties caused by modernity; for them the participation was a possibility to take an active stance towards modern changes.

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The link between the national awakening, modernization, and folklore studies has been the subject of many studies (Ó Giolláin 2000; Valk 2008; Anttonen 2005; Mikkola 2013). Pertti Anttonen has shown in his monograph *Tradition through Modernity* (2005) how the “collector’s gaze,” turning certain parts of culture into folklore, helped to conceptualize modernity (2005, 52). Anttonen brought out two rhetorical characteristics of modernity: comparison and change. He argued that on the one hand, modernity “is regarded as being fundamentally different from all previous times” and on the other, modernity itself constructs the differences that help to position it (2005, 28). Folklore’s role in this discourse is to be the entity against which modernity can define itself. However, the comparative moment of change creates a paradox – it makes us aware of something at the moment of its disappearance, that is: the modernist desire for change is almost always connected with the feeling of regret for what is left behind (2005, 48). These ideas of Anttonen are complementary to philosopher Bruno Latour who has written that modern people have a desire to document everything that characterizes non-modernity, as this act of documentation is a way to ascertain the presence of modernity and its difference from previous times. Furthermore, Latour underscored that the full-scale modernity is not even possible, as there cannot be total rupture between past and present – the present is always the coexistence of elements belonging to different timeframes (1993, 46–47, 69, 72). Both Anttonen and Latour referred to the documenting of the past as an important device for conceptualizing modernity, but at the same time they brought out that it is an unfinished and uncertain project – the comparative moment that defines modernity needs constant renewal.

I take this mutual relationship between folklore studies and modernity as a background to discuss the position of individuals amidst the changes in society. Folklorist Kati Mikkola who has studied the vernacular perceptions of modernity in Finland, has shown that the way individuals react to new ideas and technologies can be quite contradictory – the same person can fully grasp one aspect of modernity but at the same time turn down many other aspects (Mikkola 2009, 316). The presence of modernity in the lives of individuals can be rather uncertain and depend on the choices that one makes. In this article I regard folklore collecting as one possible choice that some people make to assert their connection to modernity, and I focus on the question whether the collecting campaign helped an individual to overcome the uncertainties connected to it or not.

Sources: Folklore Collectors’ Letters as Documents of Vernacular Literacy

More than a thousand people from all parishes¹ participated in Hurt’s campaign. Most of them were men; women amounted to just 4%. Their backgrounds were rather varied: 42% were (village or parish) schoolteachers, 34.2% peasants; besides these two groups there were also writers, students, servants, tailors and craftsmen (Jansen 2004, 27). These numbers still do not reflect the proportions of the materials sent by different groups – most of these people participated with only one collection. The most prolific collectors (who sent thousands of pages and stayed with the campaign for several years) did not belong to the most numerous groups: for example, among Hurt’s more

active coworkers were two tailors, Hans Anton Schults and Jaan Sandra (more about the background of the collectors can be found in Kikas 2014, 315–16).

Neither do the statistics above reflect the educational background of the participants – Jansen has stated that only 9% could be considered intellectuals (people with higher education, Jansen 2004, 27), but quite a high proportion (most of the peasants, village schoolteachers, craftsmen etc.) had only received minimal three-year schooling. The fact that quite a large share of the collections was created by people with very little writing experience enables the assessment of those materials as documents of vernacular literacy. Vernacular literacy refers to different ways of relating to written texts which are not directly connected to institutions that are dedicated to spreading dominant literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton 2003). Instead, vernacular literacy practices grow out from the everyday needs of communities using creatively different (textual, linguistic and material) resources available to them (Blommaert 2008, 7).²

Reasons for employing vernacular literacy to study folklore collectors do not end with their educational backgrounds. More important is the fact that collectors did not send Hurt only folklore (songs, tales, short forms, descriptions of different customs) but also writings in many other genres—letters, poems, pamphlets, life stories. Often those texts were not directly connected to collecting but rather reacted to ideas they had encountered in books and newspapers. From the disciplinary vantage point, these other genres are often deemed less valuable and a challenge to the archival authority (Mikkola 2013). However, analyzing these texts as the documents of vernacular literacy, it is possible to get a rare glimpse of the ideas that ordinary people of the time had about the position and power of folklore collecting campaign (Mikkola 2013, 155). Folklore collecting framework gave vernacular writers the opportunity to search for a social position from which to write (Sheridan, Street and Bloom 2000; Kikas 2014, 316–20). For many of them this was the only framework they ever encountered, but for others it was a preliminary stage before starting to write for public audiences.

This article focuses on one special genre folklore collectors used throughout the campaign: the letter. Letters were not a compulsory part of the campaign and there were a lot of collectors who never sent any—many of them only sent manuscripts embedding the collected songs and tales. Therefore, writing a letter to accompany one's collected materials was a conscious choice—one wrote it if he or she had something significant to say. Though the letters were sent personally to Hurt, they stood on the border of private and public communication—the ideas formulated in them were informed by the public debates and the collectors knew that Hurt sometimes quoted their letters in his public reports.

These letters were closely connected to another writing practice available to vernacular writers—they sent short texts about local matters to newspapers. Both of these contexts helped vernacular writers to position themselves as literate persons in the modern context (Stark 2013; Kikas 2020). However, while the texts sent to newspapers were rather short and generically restricted, writers could express themselves more freely on any topic when they wrote letters to Hurt. In those letters, collectors often asserted their wish to be part of the modern world. However, alongside this, they also revealed a broad range of uncertainties they faced regarding modernity, creating a

kind of archive of vernacular ideas about it. Before delving into the letters themselves, I give a brief overview of the social position of Estonians amid the modernization of the Russian Empire as well as the ambivalences in the life of the main organizer of this campaign—Jakob Hurt.

Estonia and Top-Down Modernization

To understand the importance of the large-scale folklore collecting campaign in the last decades of the nineteenth century, one needs to realize how recently Estonians³ gained the opportunity to define themselves as a nation and build up a public sphere in their own language. In the nineteenth century, the area presently known as the Estonian Republic was part of the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire; it was divided between the Province of Estonia and the northern part of the Province of Livonia. Though the Estonian-speakers made up the majority of the area (about 90% of the population), the local power was divided between Russian officials and Baltic German nobility,⁴ whereas Estonians formed the agrarian lower class. Official languages were Russian and German, thus if Estonians managed to obtain better education and advanced in life, they became Germanized, meaning they took up the German language and the ways of life of the Baltic Germans.

As Estonians constituted the lowest strata of the society, modernization reached them from the top-down—and as there were two different powers involved, they also received modernizing impulses from both sides. The modernization initiated by the Government of the Russian Empire targeted their social and economic position, while the cultural side of modernization was influenced by Baltic Germans (Raun 1974). The most important reforms initiated by the Russian Empire that affected the lives of Estonians positively were the abolition of servitude (1816 in the Estonia and 1819 in Livonia), the right to buy land (1849 in Livonia and 1856 in Estonia), the formation of village school network (fully formed by the 1850s in the Livonia and the 1870s in the Estonia). All these improved the economic freedom, social mobility and educational possibilities of Estonians and facilitated interest in their own national identity. The development of the Estonian-language public sphere, organizing nation-level events (song festivals, fundraising for the Estonian-language secondary school), establishing various societies etc., all occurred in the second half of the 1860s (Raun 1974; Vunder 2001).

Modernization influenced by the Baltic Germans targeted the cultural and national identity of Estonians. The Baltic Germans were not interested in helping Estonians build their national identity but being inspired by ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), some of them took interest in the language and folklore of the “last European savages” as Herder referred to them (Plath 2008, 41). This group of Germans called themselves Estophiles (Miljan 2004, 313) and they founded the *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft* (the Estonian Learned Society) in 1838 (Miljan 2004, 221). They interpreted the Estonian folklore and language as remains of the ancient epics and religious system. The movement was rather marginal in the context of Baltic German culture, as most of the Baltic Germans used Herderian ideas to explore their own Ger-

man roots (Jansen 2004, 272–73). The Estophiles wrote in German, and they did not have much hope that Estonians would have a future as a separate nation – for them it was inevitable that educated Estonians would be Germanized (Jansen 2004, 271). However, apart from this conviction, the Estophiles welcomed the first Estonians who managed to receive a university degree among themselves, and soon enough those Estonian intellectuals took collecting and interpreting folklore into their own hands, joining it with their national ambitions and totally rejecting the idea of Germanization.

The first milestone in this project was publication of the epic of *Kalevipoeg* (*Kalev's son*, published in sequels in 1857–1861)—it was created by a physician and a writer Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), who presented it as a reconstruction of an ancient epic. The next milestone was the foundation of the Society of Estonian Literati (hereafter, SEL) in 1872 which took as its mission to develop Estonian language writing culture (Miljan 2004, 440–41). To reach this goal, SEL focused on three activities: propagating new orthography (earlier orthography was based on German, a new one on Finnish which is closer to the Estonian language), creating and disseminating the Estonian language reading materials, and organizing a systematic folklore collection. Folklore was both a resource for developing and enriching the written language, and was considered the most appropriate groundwork for the Estonian literary culture (Mälk 1964).

The fact that Estonians received modernizing impulses from the Baltic Germans and Russians did not mean that the two powers were consciously co-working to empower the Estonians. Both assumed that educated Estonians will assimilate voluntarily with Germans or Russians (Jansen 2004, 43); they were probably too engaged with settling their own power relations to notice the national awakening of Estonians (Miljan 2004, 124–25). One part of these power games between the Russian state and the Baltic Germans were the Russification reforms in the 1880s—as the Russian Empire wanted to tie the Baltic provinces more tightly to the rest of the empire and reduce the power of the Baltic Germans, it excluded other languages besides Russian from official use and tightened censorship. It is noted that at least potentially, restricting the power of the Baltic Germans could provide Estonians who were able to study the Russian language with a possibility of submitting applications for jobs in governmental administration, but in the 1880s there were too few Estonians who knew Russian well enough to do it.

Apart from these potential advancements, Russification reforms meant restrictions on all national cultural activities (Miljan 2004, 422–23). From the second half of the 1880s, organizing big national events became scarcer, many newspapers and societies were shut down, and national leaders tried to find new ways to speak about the Estonian national identity to avoid problems with censorship. Russification also meant the (re)marginalization of the Estonian language—it was never dominant in Baltic provinces anyway but after the emancipation, it was used in some official settings, in early education, and in the 1870s there was an extensive public campaign for opening an Estonian-language secondary school.

One aspect of modernization that is especially important in the context of my study is literacy. Being literate and participating in the written public sphere was con-

sidered a characteristic of a modern person. Researchers have noted that the literacy rates of Estonians were rather high (in the context of the Russian Empire at least): according to the census of the Baltic provinces of 1881, 95% older than 14-year-old male peasants could read and 43% also write; whereas according to the census of the Russian Empire of 1897, 97% of Estonians older than 10 years could read and 78% write (Miljan 2004). Most of these people could only read or write in the Estonian language, which in the context of Russification would mean that their literacy was of no use while communicating in official spheres. If people being only literate in Estonian wanted to employ their writing skills to assert their connection to modernity, they needed other possibilities – and collecting folklore was a possibility to write open to everybody. (Kikas 2024)

Jakob Hurt—An Estonian Intellectual Amid Top-down Modernization

Jakob Hurt was a parson, linguist, and one of the leaders of the Estonian national movement. He belonged in the first generation of educated Estonians and was one of the fiercest opponents of Germanization. He reasoned that a healthy nation must include different professions—if educated people became Germanized then the Estonian nation would be unhealthy and incomplete (Jansen 2004, 43–48). One of his aims was to make the Estonian nation worthy of belonging among other educated nations (Hurt 1889b, 20–23).

Hurt's interest in folklore was tightly connected with this national program. This link is already seen from the first Estonian-language article about folklore “Mida Rahva Mälestustest Pidada” (What to think about the memories of folk) (Hurt 1889a, 9–23), originally published in 1871. There he stressed that collecting folklore is one of the features of a modern educated nation. He brought examples of other nations already engaged with collecting and encouraged Estonians to follow their lead:

What those men have done in Finland and Germany is done in every educated country in Europe. In every place in Europe there are men, who hold the memories of their folk in high esteem and who work to save them from oblivion. (Hurt 1889, 11)

Hurt also commented on different functions of collected folklore in a modern society – some of it could serve as sources of historical knowledge, some as educating or entertaining reading material. Again, he brought several examples of nations who have made use of folklore in such a manner. Hurt's stance towards folklore was in accordance with the modern discourse of comparison and change—the collector was somebody interested in building a modern society and the aim of the study of folklore for him was to show something that is being left behind and soon to be eradicated.

A year after publishing this article Hurt was elected the first president of the newly founded SEL. As a president he started to organize a network of folklore collecting—he was determined that for the result to be systematic and all-encompassing there must be at least one collector per parish (and this person should be fluent in local dialect). The collecting lasted until 1881, during this time he had about 150 co-workers

from different parts of Estonia (about 3/4 of the parishes were present) (Mälk 1963, 63, 85). These years (1872–1881) are considered Hurt’s first collecting phase, after which there was a seven-year pause before he launched the second campaign in 1888.

There were some peculiarities in Hurt’s life that affected his second folklore collecting campaign. First, there was the ambivalence of his professional identity. He worked as a parson and had scholarly interests in folklore. Many of his clerical colleagues considered folklore materials as mere superstitions — something in opposition to Christianity. Hurt resolved this opposition for himself with the help of the Fourth Commandment that calls for honoring one’s ancestors—he interpreted folklore collecting as a duty before the ancestors (Laar 1989, 7). However, this Christian reference did not spare him from the criticism of his clerical colleagues, as Hurt’s ideas about folklore were too radical for them, especially his conviction that for folklore research to be comprehensive researchers needed as much and as varied material as possible. For Hurt, documenting descriptions of superstitions and obscene songs next to educative proverbs and historical tales defined his understanding of collecting folklore materials (Hurt 1989a, 23–25). The criticism against Hurt was especially harsh after Hurt published a book of folksongs (Hurt 1886) where he included all the songs from one parish, including the obscene ones (the criticism of clerics has been analyzed by Põldmäe 1959). All through the decades, Hurt received public and private letters accusing him of undermining the position of the clerics and the Lutheran Church. This criticism did not make Hurt change his ideas about folklore collecting; however, it made him more cautious and during his later collecting phase, he did not mention the need to collect morally ambivalent materials in his public writings, but only in private letters to collectors (Kikas 2017 and 2023).

Second, starting from 1880, Hurt faced challenges related to his geographical location. Like many other educated Estonians of the time, he struggled to find employment in the Baltic provinces. The Local Lutheran Church was dominated by the Baltic Germans, who were unwilling to allow Estonian parsons work in the region (particularly those involved in the national cause). Thus, Hurt had to move outside the Baltic provinces, and from 1880 until his death in 1907, he lived and worked in St. Petersburg.

Third, his position as a national leader was insecure at times. In 1881 he ran for the presidency of SEL but lost this position to Carl Robert Jakobson (1841–1882). On the background of this defeat was the biggest strife of the time—Hurt and Jakobson represented two different conceptions of the future of the Estonians. Whereas Hurt favored a more conservative stance that argued that building a strong sense of cultural identity was enough, Jakobson fought for a more radical and political movement. After losing the elections, Hurt left SEL and withdrew from public activities for several years. His retirement also meant that the systematic folklore collecting paused for some time—SEL tried to continue the project, but as they could not find a comparably passionate organizer, the results were meager (Mälk 1963, 217–22).

In January of 1888 Hurt published a call “*Paar Palvid Eesti Ärksamatele Poegadele ja Tütardele*” (Some requests to the awakened sons and daughters of the nation) (Hurt 1989, 45–56) that appeared simultaneously in four newspapers. This was the start of

his second collecting phase. The campaign lasted until Hurt's death in 1907. Hurt's campaign was the most popular national event at the time of Russification—it has been shown that its allure was the fact that the campaign allowed participants to develop the national agenda in a concealed manner (Jansen 2004, 24). Besides being a conscious step against the insecurities created by the Russification reforms, the campaign also addressed several of Hurt's own problems. Living in St. Petersburg, Hurt did not have the possibility of doing fieldwork himself. Therefore, he created a public campaign, enabling him to continue working in the field of folklore from afar. To maintain this, he made alterations to the way the campaign was organized. While the earlier phase of the campaign was mostly promoted through SEL meetings and publications, and personal communication, the new phase relied more heavily on the newspapers. Furthermore, besides being physically away, Hurt had also been absent from public discussions after his retreat from SEL, so this phase was his return to the spotlight. Considering its outcome, it can be deemed successful, though some of the dividing lines of 1881 were still present, and several people and newspapers ignored Hurt's campaign because of this.

During the campaign, Hurt and the participants rarely met in person; most of the communication between them was carried out through occasional letters and reports published in newspapers. In the first years, the influx of materials was so intense that Hurt issued two reports every month. Later the pace slowed down, and in the last few years there was a report or two per year. In the main part of those, Hurt gave personal feedback to every coworker; in the end there was a section where he included more general writings addressed to everybody. Reports were not only for giving feedback about incoming materials, but they were also important rhetorical tools for keeping up the interest of those involved and encouraging new people to participate. Hurt pointed out that it is not only the folklore that is at stake—if Estonians manage to create a folklore collection that does not contain “silent parishes” or “blank spots” then they can prove to the educated world that they are worthy of belonging among them (Hurt 1889, 55–56). His rhetoric created a competitive environment where every participant wanted to prove that their place of origin deserved to be a part of the nation. Hurt's claim that every locality had equal importance to the whole, certainly made the rather abstract idea of a nation more relatable to his less educated coworkers. Hurt also often quoted collectors' letters in his reports. Besides giving him the opportunity to stress the importance of the campaign through the voice of the collectors themselves, it accentuated his argument that everybody involved works together for a single cause.

Uncertainties of Modernity in the Letters of Vernacular Writers

As already stated, my main sources are the letters sent by folklore collectors to Hurt; and I am especially interested in letters written by the so-called vernacular writers—those who do not (yet) have any public recognition. Those letters often used the same national rhetoric and metaphors that Hurt used to describe the importance of his campaign, but besides, they could be quite intimate and touched upon problems present in their lives. Some of those problems (the ones easiest to handle for Hurt) were related to the questions of what to collect and how to write it down. However, next to the is-

sues unambiguously connected with the campaign there are others which do not have anything to do with it at all: people ask for help in overcoming economic hardships, finding a better job, publishing their poems or learning a new language (Kikas 2024, 76–79). These sections of the letters reveal that besides providing a possibility to show commitment to the nation, participating was also a chance to get into contact with a person living in the capital and having contacts and resources to help others. These problems were often directly related to the changes brought about by modernization; therefore, folklore collecting campaign had an intimate connection with the broader processes taking place in society.

Here I would like to concentrate on, yet another type of problems found in the letters—those which have emerged when collectors compared themselves to people who were not interested in folklore. I argue that in these letters there were three domains of uncertainties that helped the collectors to assert their connection to the modern world:

- 1) *Uncertainties concerning low education*: Quite many participants believed that the campaigns were really meant for educated people and they felt the need to apologize for participating in them. They often wrote in their first letter that they participated only because they had read Hurt's reports and noticed that nobody from their area had sent anything so far.
- 2) *Uncertainties concerning immoral folklore*: Poorly educated collectors are very hesitant while writing down obscene folklore texts or superstitions. They often commented that those ideas came from old people, and they had no personal connection to them.
- 3) *Uncertainties concerning people around them*: Participants often described the opposition of their relatives or neighbors towards their collecting activities.

The following section offers three cases where those three domains of uncertainties listed appear in context. Helene Maasen, Jaan Gutves and Jaan Saalverk were too young to have read the text Hurt published in 1871 I referred to earlier. Maasen joined the campaign early enough to have read the call Hurt published in 1888, but Gutves and Saalverk joined later and were inspired by the reports. I only dove into the letters and materials they sent to Hurt, though they all collaborated with another folklorist running a collecting campaign at the same time—Matthias Johann Eisen.

Helene Maasen: As I read from the letter to Julie⁵

Helene Maasen (1869–1933) was one of the few female correspondents of Hurt. She was a daughter of a farm owner but had received relatively good education in the German language private school for girls. In the years 1888–1894 she sent Hurt 34 collections of folklore materials. Her peculiarity was to send small packages rather often—during her most lively participation period (1888–1891) she sent something ev-

ery month. Her collecting activities diminished gradually from 1891 onward because she started working for different newspapers, mostly as a translator; she also wrote poetry.

She often added longer letters to her collections where she stressed that participating in the collecting campaign was the passion of her life. Yet the letters also touched upon her uncertainties related to collecting. Of the three domains of uncertainties listed above, all three were present in Maasen's letters. The first one (uncertainty over education) was somewhat exceptional—she had got much better education than most of the participants, but from a German-language school, so in the first letter she confessed that she feels quite humble about her written Estonian. In later letters she did not mention it, possibly because she became more confident with practice.

However, the second uncertainty—the one about immoral content—appeared in several letters where Maasen directly asked for guidance on how to handle this issue. Hurt answered different worries expressed by Maasen in two ways: in the public report and private letter. Public reports were used if the question concerned technical aspects of collecting; however, the questions about morality never made their way into public texts. One cannot find any letters from Hurt to Maasen in the archives. However, it is possible to guess from the hints in Maasen's letters to Hurt and public reports, that Hurt sent Maasen several letters. It is quite notable that these letters were sent directly after Maasen had expressed worries about the immoral content of folklore in her letters to Hurt.

In Maasen's letters there were also hints as to how Hurt answered worries concerning the immoral content of folklore. The very first time Maasen mentioned concerns about morality were in a letter written on March 15, 1889. In this letter Maasen wrote that she was very reluctant to write down morally ambiguous material until she got an opportunity to read a letter that Hurt had sent to another female correspondent working in the vicinity.

You tell the above-mentioned J. Sepp that all is pure to the one that is pure and promise to cut everything ugly and wicked off the old stones so that a beautiful building stone is left. It could then be that when you remove the soft and rotten shell from the songs sent by me, a tiny edible core is still left!⁶

Here Maasen referred to Julie Sepp (1861–1941) who was the very first woman to join Hurt's campaign. In one of her letters, Sepp wrote that as a woman she felt uneasy writing down superstitions regarding childbirth and sending them to Hurt.⁷ The letter that Maasen read was quite possibly the answer to this confession. Though Maasen found consolation in the letter sent to Sepp, it is noteworthy that the uncertainties that made these two women ask Hurt's advice were different. Sepp positioned herself as a woman and hesitated about sending strictly women's lore to an educated man. Maasen was worried about general immorality; she never explicitly positioned herself in the letters to Hurt in terms of gender. But she occasionally referred to Hurt as "a father of all folklore collectors."⁸ Thus, instead of an overly gendered position she positioned herself as a younger family member. This difference can be explained by the

different age and status of these women: Maasen was 19 and unmarried while Sepp was a 27-year-old wife of a schoolteacher. Maasen's letter that contained the reference to Sepp was the first time Maasen mentioned the problems with immoral content—so, despite stating that the letter sent to Sepp encouraged her, this encouragement was not a final solution. The feeling of uncertainty remained, and she needed reassurance every now and then.

The third uncertainty—the one connected to the perceptions of people around her—emerged in her letters only fleetingly. There are some amusing remarks that local people spread rumors about her.⁹ But still there is one quite special example—in one letter she wrote to Hurt that she attended the funeral of an Estonian intellectual—Mihkel Veske (1843–1890) and heard somebody say of her: "*Die gehört ja schon selbst zu vanavara*" (She belongs fully to folklore). What makes this event special is the fact that the phrase is partly in German which refers that the dialogue had been in German as well, hinting that the people talking about her belonged in the ranks of the more educated. Maasen used two different strategies to overcome this last uncertainty. One of them was humor: she mocked people who do not see the importance of collecting.¹⁰ The other was making contact with like-minded people. This involved communicating with other people who already collect in the vicinity (like Sepp) but also encouraging new people to step in—some of the materials she sends to Hurt are written down by her schoolmate Emilie Palm, and in one of her last letters to Hurt she introduces a new collector—Jaan Karu—asking Hurt to encourage this shy youngster.¹¹ In 1901, Maasen got married to Jüri Varrik (1864–1929) who had also participated in Hurt's campaign.

Jaan Gutves: *Do not Tell my Shepherd...*

Jaan Gutves (1866–1937) was a farm owner's son but he himself led a rather insecure life, moving from place to place and doing odd jobs. At the time he was participating in Hurt's campaign, he was a gardener, but he also worked as a traveling book seller and bricklayer. His education ended with three years in the village school. Between 1888 and 1896, he sent Hurt 34 collections of folklore materials; the participation was most active in the first three years (1888–1891). In the letters Gutves sent to Hurt, he was often engaged in long national musings;¹² he also added poems dedicated to Hurt and collecting campaign and wrote so-called "awakening calls"—small texts where he encouraged other people to start collecting folklore (Kikas 2020). Expressing oneself through national metaphors was for Gutves a way to position himself as a modern person and the possibility to do it in the letters to Hurt was certainly one of the aspects that kept him at the campaign.

Throughout his long engagement with the campaign, Gutves was utterly uncertain about his abilities, and he was constantly on the verge of quitting. Referring to his poor education, he asked Hurt to encourage more educated people to take over the work in his parish. Referring to his insecure economic position, he wrote at the end of almost every letter that it will be his last, because he does not have enough time and money (for buying paper and using the postal system) to continue. Yet, still he did, as there was no one else to take over.

However, the main reason for including Gutves in this article lies in the problems evoked by people around him. In this case, the uncertainties of one collector molded into uncertainties that affected the entire campaign. At the time of his participation, Gutves worked as a gardener for the local parsonage. The parson of this area was Rudolf Kallas (1951–1913) who was close friend of Hurt, one of those who had stayed on Hurt's side during the strife in SEL. Kallas had also helped to build up the folklore collecting network of SEL, but his sentiments towards the value of folklore had changed by the end of the 1880s. In the letter accompanying his third collection (May 15, 1889) Gutves thanked Hurt for the greeting sent through Kallas,¹³ but already a month later (June 8, 1889) he asked Hurt not to mention his participation to Kallas anymore, because the parson found this activity a waste of time.¹⁴

It was not only Gutves to whom Kallas made this remark. In the second half of the same year, Kallas published a book of sermons, where he took a totally anti-modern stance towards life—he blamed all the new ways of life for contributing to the diminution of the power of the church (1889, 280). Folklore collecting got special attention in this respect—Kallas stated that writing down folklore ennobles old superstitions, and bemoaned that folklore had become a substitute for the Bible for many collectors (Kallas 1889, 2, 191). Probably just after the publication of the book, Kallas wrote Hurt a personal letter repeating the same ideas in more detail. He blamed Hurt who was living in St Petersburg, that he was not able to see how his campaign corrupted the souls of poorly educated participants. He wrote that Gutves used his working hours to go searching for folklore and was willing to do anything to get his name in the newspaper. Kallas was especially angry that Hurt uses the honorific “mister” while writing to this peasant, as this had made Gutves totally arrogant. Kallas suggested Hurt to reorganize his system—to use only students and other educated people as coworkers and to stop praising poorly educated people in public reports.¹⁵ In a way, this letter from Kallas summed up all the reproaches that Hurt received throughout his career. However, there was a new reproach that has not occurred before—the one referring to the souls of the collectors (ordinary people who can make wrong assumptions from the published folklore).

Hurt answered Kallas in two different ways—by sending a personal letter (the contents of which can only be guessed from the Kallas's reply) and adding a lengthy writing to his folklore reports (Hurt 1889a, 1889b). In the public text Hurt did not mention Kallas but only implied some “accusations brought up by old and dear friend” (Hurt 1889a, 74). In this writing Hurt underscored that every sane adult person is capable of handling immoral folklore so that it would not affect the soul. In the text Hurt used the same phrase that he had used in a letter to Sepp a year before: “all is pure to the one that is pure,” explaining that if collecting corrupts somebody's soul, then this person was already corrupted before (Hurt 1889a, 75). As Hurt did not have any intention of changing the system that was working, he had to prove that the presumptions of Kallas that the uneducated needed constant surveillance were wrong.

Gutves was not mentioned in the public texts of either Kallas or Hurt but he still felt that Hurt's text could be directed against him. In a letter written a month before Hurt published his argumentation, Gutves had compared Hurt with Moses: “Your

work is bigger than the work of Moses'."16 Straight after he had read Hurt's text, he sent a new letter stating that comparison between Hurt and Moses was not meant to imply that Hurt's aim is to put foundations to a new religion, but rather that while Moses is important for the creation of a religion, Hurt is important for archiving the memories.¹⁷

Did participating in the campaign resolve any uncertainties in Gutves's life? It is rather difficult to say, because compared to the other two cases, his participation ended rather abruptly after he received negative feedback from Hurt. Hurt remarked that his writings were a mixture of folklore and his own ideas (Hurt 1894). Later folklorists have noted that this trait was in his writings already earlier (Viidalepp 1937, 96). This abrupt discontinuation implies that for Gutves, participating in the folklore campaign was a possibility for getting over his uncertainties in relation to the literary world; Hurt's feedback indicated that he should look for other ways to achieve this.

Jaan Saalverk: *My Mother Keeps Telling...*¹⁸

Jaan Saalverk's (1874–1933) childhood was riddled by changes of residence caused by the death of his father and her mothers' next two husbands, but when he was 12, his mother inherited a farm. On the new farm, he was at first a farmhand to his mother and stepfather but in 1901 he became the owner of the farm. Saalverk's education consisted of three years of village school and one extra year in parish school (which he could not conclude because his newly widowed mother could not afford it). Despite poor education he was very active in local politics, and in the later part of his life (in the 1920s) he even ran for the Estonian parliament.

Between 1896 and 1905 he sent Jakob Hurt 19 collections of folklore materials. His most active collecting phase was between 1896 and 1898. In 1898 he married and was elected for the first time into the local parish council—after that, his participation in the collecting campaign became infrequent. In his letters to Jakob Hurt, Saalverk expressed joy and gratitude for being able to join. Though humble because of his poor education and worried about his faulty handwriting and grammar, Saalverk was excited to find the possibility to use his writing skills in a way that could be useful to others. He wrote that he had tried sending his stories and poems to newspapers with no success. In the latter part of his life, he became quite a regular coworker to several newspapers, sending them local news, short stories and poems; so, for Saalverk, folklore collecting was a first step in his writing career.

Of the three uncertainties discerned above, the most dominant for Saalverk was the one concerning the prejudices against folklore collecting by the people around him. To bring forth the difference between himself and other people, Saalverk overtly positioned himself as a modern person in his letters. For example, he brought out that he is one of the very few persons in his vicinity to read newspapers regularly and take interest in national matters; in contrast to his habit of spending his spare time on folklore, other people of his age spent their time drinking and fighting at the pubs. Saalverk also wrote that his folklore collecting activities led to an active misunderstanding by the people around him who spread rumors. They argued that the

collecting activity was a sign that Saalverk had gone insane because of reading too many newspapers, and that the true intention behind his wanderings was the hope of finding a spouse. Saalverk found these accusations ungrounded – he thought, these were just indications that people around him were backward.

However, there were other accusations that made him more hesitant – the ones that saw folklore as potentially corrupting to one's soul:

Some call you [Jakob Hurt – K.K] and all folklore collectors, including me, the truest servants of the devil. My mother keeps telling me: "Satan is unable to get you to the pub or some such places with other young folks, but lo how he drags you into his net again, whether you sit at home or roam around the village to write idle talk and silly songs, still you're a slave to him."¹⁹

Some people around him were more moderate, stating that writing down folklore was safe for educated people (like Hurt) but unsafe for the poorly educated ones (like Saalverk)²⁰—so in this case ordinary village people used the same argument as Kallas had. Being a religious person himself, Saalverk felt utterly ill at ease about these ideas and asked Hurt to give him advice and help him to convince his community of the value of his work. As Saalverk started collecting in 1896, he had not read the text where Hurt responded to the criticism of Kallas (published in 1889); furthermore—Saalverk's activities were conducted at the time when the campaign had slowed down, Hurt was engaged with other duties and the reports were published only yearly. So it happened that the letter Hurt promised to send him in the public report, reached Saalverk one and half years after he first asked for advice. In the meantime, he relentlessly repeated his worries and asked for the promised letter. It seems that though at last he received the letter, it did not resolve the problems he experienced with the people around him. In his last letter to Hurt, Saalverk was even more peremptory, speaking about his marital problems which, according to his mother, were a punishment for dealing with folklore, and pleading for Hurt to console him.²¹

Saalverk sent his last folklore collection in 1903 but this modern uncertainty concerning the possibility of connecting religious sentiments and national matters, expressed in his letters to Hurt, stayed with him until his death. In 1933 he committed suicide. His daughter Eha Leek wrote that in the last decades of his life Saalverk worried that it was a sin to be simultaneously involved in politics and conducting religious rituals (he was a local churchwarden, thus responsible for christenings and funerals).²² Though participating in the campaign helped Saalverk to resolve uncertainties connected to his writing activities, there were other uncertainties which he could not resolve.

Conclusion: Finding Modernity through Repeating Uncertainties

In the center of my article were the letters by three vernacular writers and I discussed the different ways they positioned themselves in relation to modernity. Vernacular writers in this context were people who were interested in public debates and discourse, but they did not have the possibility to participate in them directly. The folk-

lore collecting campaign was organized through the articles and reports published in newspapers, where it stood side by side with other contemporary public matters. This shared page-space gave people the impression that getting involved in the folklore collecting campaign was a public activity that enabled them to position themselves actively in terms of the changes going on in society. Read retrospectively, the personal letters of the collectors give a rare insight into vernacular ideas about modernization.

Vernacular folklore collectors occupied a kind of undefined middle position between the intellectuals and the folk. They were mediators (ideally) in two ways – thanks to their knowledge of the local dialect and people, they were able to gain access to the material that was hidden from strangers, whereas through their connection with Hurt's campaign, they also translated modern ideas and values into their own community. Though this middle position was inevitable for occupying the role of a folklore collector, it also affected how they created a discourse of modernity in their letters.

I highlighted three domains of uncertainties that I found especially significant for expressing one's relationship to modernization: the uncertainty concerning poor education, the uncertainty concerning the immoral content of folklore, and the uncertainty concerning relationships with the people who opposed collecting. I have argued that these uncertainties were rhetorical devices to bring forward the modern discourse on comparison (Anttonen 2005, 28), and as such they helped those writers discuss their positions amidst a changing society. The uncertainties about their intrusion into the world of educated people were connected to the idea that a modern individual participates in public written communication, but this opposition gave participants the opportunity to stress that understanding the value of modernity is not connected to education. The uncertainty over the immoral contents of the collection helped them to distance themselves from their informants who belonged to the older (premodern) world and accentuate the modernness of their own beliefs. The uncertainties evoked by other people gave them the opportunity to contemplate their own modern views and practices. Thus, all these uncertainties gave collectors the possibility to emphasize their modernity with respect to three different types of actors: local educated people, informants (often older people), as well as their peers and relatives. One special tool for bringing this comparative discourse on the foreground was humor – they wrote in an amused tone, slightly mockingly; hinting that the targets of their satire did not only question the value of folklore but other modern and national matters as well.

In the beginning of my article, I stated that if the presence of modernity is itself uncertain, then one should inquire if participating in folklore collecting campaign helps an individual to overcome these uncertainties or not. I think that this question can be answered affirmatively, but with modification to the question itself – the participation did not provide a permanent solution to these uncertainties but created a safer space for thinking about these inclement changes and one's role in them. Every collector analyzed had at least one recurring uncertainty in their letters: Maasen repeatedly apologized for the immoral folklore submitted, Gutves pleaded his poor education, and Saalverk asked for help convincing people around him that folklore collecting was valuable. They all received personal feedback from Hurt concerning those topics

but continued their repetition throughout their communications. This repetition of certain problems chimes well with the idea that the comparative moment that defined modernity was not a given, but in need of construction according to context (Anttonen 2005, 28)—these recurring uncertainties were at the core of the modernity for them—the discourse of comparison connected to these respective uncertainties was for each of them the defining moment of modernity. Writing about these problems recurrently gave them the possibility to reassert their connection to it.

Using the framework of folklore collecting to assert one's modernity is in accordance with the way Hurt positioned the campaign in his public writings. However, it is important to see that the vernacular writers did not just reflect Hurt's ideas but adopted them into their own context. Previously, I mentioned the idea that the modernization reached Estonians top-down—Hurt and other Estonian intellectuals took something that was meant to tie Estonians into the structure of the empire and used it to connect Estonians symbolically with other educated nations. The letters of the folklore collectors represent yet another link in this downward movement—they took Hurt's ideas and used them to bring modernity into the village and connect different localities within the totality of the Estonian nation. Though the letters analyzed here were not part of the public discourse, the ideas written in them certainly reflected concerns about modernization throughout society.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1 At that time the territory inhabited by Estonians was divided into 102 parishes. Although the center of the parish was a church, the parishes were historically based on the pre-Christianization administrative units. Because of this they reflected the borders between different dialects, traditions and costumes. Though from the 1860s parishes started to lose their importance as administrative units, they were still regarded culturally significant and the leaders of national awakening took pains to involve representatives of all the parishes into different events.
- 2 My take on the notion of vernacular literacy combines ideas of many authors, some of whom use different terms to refer to the similar phenomenon. Besides *vernacular literacy* (Street 2000; Barton and Hamilton 2003; Edlund, Edlund, Haugen 2014) there are *writing from below* (Kuismin and Driscoll 2013), *everyday literacy* (Barber 2007), *local literacy* (Barton and Hamilton 2003), *tin-trunk literacy* (Barber 2007), *grassroots literacy* (Fabian 2001; Blommaert 2008), *the literacy practices of ordinary people* (Sheridan, Street, Bloom 2000) and *ordinary writing* (Lyons 2014; Sinor 2002) (more references and discussion of them can be found in Kikas 2014, 311; Kikas 2024, 52–55).
- 3 I use “Estonian” as an ethnonym to refer to the Estonian speaking population in the area.

- 4 The Baltic Germans are ethnic German inhabitants of the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. They arrived the area in twelfth and thirteenth century as missionaries, merchants and crusaders (Miljan 2004, 121–26).
- 5 Discussion about Helene Maasen is partly based on Kikas 2017.
- 6 Helene Maasen to Jakob Hurt, March 13, 1889, EKLA, f 43, m 14: 20, p 2/3, Jakob Hurt's collection, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 7 Julie Sepp to Jakob Hurt, September 29, 1888, H III 9, 165/6, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 8 Helene Maasen to Jakob Hurt, October, 1890, H III 8, 795/7, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 9 Helene Maasen to Jakob Hurt, July 4, 1890, H III 8, 751/2, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 10 Helene Maasen to Jakob Hurt, October, 1890, H III 8, 796/7, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 11 Helene Maasen to Jakob Hurt, January 24, 1897, EKLA, f 45, m 19: 13, p 1/1, Jakob Hurt's collection, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 12 Jaan Gutves to Jakob Hurt, June, 1890, H III 11, 283/6, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 13 Jaan Gutves to Jakob Hurt, May 15, 1889, H IV 3, 998/9, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 14 Jaan Gutves to Jakob Hurt, June 8, 1889, H III 15, 473/4, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 15 Rudolf Kallas to Jakob Hurt, November, 1889, EKLA f 43, m 8:2, 45/94, Jakob Hurt's collection, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 16 Jaan Gutves to Jakob Hurt, November 7, 1889, EKLA f 43, m 4:9, p 1/2, Jakob Hurt's collection, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 17 Jaan Gutves to Jakob Hurt, December 9, 1889, EKLA f 43, m 4:9, p 4/5-4/6, Jakob Hurt's collection, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 18 Discussion about Jaan Saalverk is partly based on Kikas 2023.
- 19 Jaan Saalverk to Jakob Hurt, December 8, 1896, H III 29, 48/9, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 20 Jaan Saalverk to Jakob Hurt, December 8, 1896, H III 29, 49, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 21 Jaan Saalverk to Jakob Hurt, October 19, 1903, H III 30, 164, Jakob Hurt's folklore collection, Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.
- 22 Life story of Eha Leek, 1991, EKLA f 350, m 1:2, p 35–7, Collection of life writings, Estonian Cultural Archives, Estonian Literary Museum.

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“Following the Victors”? Uncertainties in Defining the Societal Influence of Ethnological Knowledge in Wartime Finland, 1941–1944

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Abstract

The article discusses methodological uncertainties regarding the role of Finnish ethnologists during the Continuation War (1941–1944) in the context of the history of knowledge and propaganda. The focus is on researchers’ relationship with the so-called Greater Finland ideology and their values and choices during the war. A collection of non-scientific articles based on ethnological knowledge reveals the societal influence ethnologists had at the time yet raises uncertainties about the motives and aims behind the writings. The articles are enthusiastic, practical, and prone to kinship ideology and criticism of Bolshevism. However, defining the nature of societal influence remains uncertain.

Keywords: Finland; ethnology; societal influence; propaganda; Greater Finland; Second World War; history of knowledge

Introduction

In the 1930s and during the Second World War, the idea of a Greater Finland was strong among many academics and politicians in Finland. The Greater Finland ideology meant that the country could and should expand east to gain strategic economic and military advantages and unite the Finno-Ugric people of Karelia with their kin, the Finns. In the early stages of the so-called Continuation War¹ between Finland and the Soviet Union (1941–1944), Finnish troops, in alliance with German soldiers, quickly occupied areas that Finland had lost in the Winter War of 1939–1940, as well as East Karelia. Greater Finland became a reality for some years. Researchers soon followed the troops, and a wealth of research was conducted in various fields, including ethnology, in the occupied areas during the war. The research was done not only to satisfy scientific but also political interests. Political decision-makers felt that ethnology, a discipline devoted to studying and building a history of the Finno-Ugric peoples and related notions of Finnishness, could be useful for justifying the Greater Finland ideology and claimed that the occupied territories were historically Finnish. It was also a field of study that interested the general public, especially the educated population and academic circles (e.g., Eskelinen 2004; Pimiä 2007, 13–15). This combination made ethnologists important players in the social debates surrounding the Greater Finland ideology.

Karelia is a large area to the east of Finland, part of which has belonged to Finland and part to Russia. The newly independent Finland and Soviet Russia argued over the territory of the so-called East Karelia for several years until the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920 left it to Soviet Russia, which was widely considered an injustice in Finland. East Karelia had long interested Finnish researchers, artists, and nationalists. Karelian, Finnish, and Ingrian oral poetry, which served as the source material for the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* (1835, 1849), were collected in the nineteenth century in Karelia, on both sides of Finland's eastern border (e.g., Piela 2023; Sihvo 2017; Wilson 1976). Finnish ethnology also has a long tradition of studying the Finno-Ugric peoples, such as the Karelians, who live in Russian territory. Finland's independence from Russia and the closing of the border made this line of research impossible in the interwar period, which prompted ethnologists to turn their attention to research in the Finnish region (e.g., Räsänen, R 1992. 113–15). With the Continuation War, the opportunity arose again to continue studying the kindred peoples to the east.

Ethnological research in Finland during the Continuation War focused mainly on East Karelia (e.g., Pimiä 2009, 2012). All research involving the occupied region of East Karelia was coordinated, controlled, and partly funded by the State Scientific East Karelia Committee, which had been established by the Ministry of Education. The agenda of the State Scientific East Karelia Committee was to direct research in East Karelia in a way that would support Finland's claims to the historical Finnishness of the area and, thus, the fact that it belonged to Finland. The committee's research funding was strategic and politically driven (Laine 1993, 104–12). However, little research has been done to the extent to which the committee dictated the message and tone of the popular research articles from the field. The point is not trivial since it pertains to what aspects of the research are communicated to people outside the research community, how it is done, and how the role and status of the researcher are used in societal debates. Furthermore, the wartime conditions blurred the line between societal influence, science communication, and exerting influence to promote a specific goal: propaganda.

The war brought many levels of uncertainty to the work of ethnologists: on a societal level, in terms of the aims of the discipline and careers of the researchers, and on a very personal level – working close to the front was often difficult and dangerous. One kind of uncertainty had to do with changes in the political agenda: attitudes towards the Soviet Union changed as the war progressed, from triumphalism to greater caution, reflected in the ethnologists' work, for example, changing censorship guidelines. In this article, however, I focus on the methodological uncertainties, which become evident when exploring their wartime societal influence. By methodological uncertainty, I refer to the uncertainties arising from the analysis of the often-fragmented material that remains for research from that period. Focusing on non-scientific articles with an ethnological perspective published in Finnish newspapers and magazines during the Continuation War of 1941–1944 as a material form of knowledge sharing, I look for and experiment with ways to interpret ethnologists' wartime societal influence. What kinds of societal values and choices are echoed in the articles, and what methodological uncertainties are inherent in their analysis? In my analysis, I focus

on how researchers used ethnological knowledge to influence readers and how the texts possibly bolstered readers’ confidence in the legitimacy of the knowledge being presented. The researchers’ choices reflect how they navigated an uncertain situation in which they had to reconcile a possible conflict of interest between the pressures of political guidance and their values. Looking at this material from the 2020s perspective—although historically and theoretically contextualized—leaves room for variation of alternative interpretations, however.

Circulating Ethnological Knowledge

In applying viewpoints from a history of knowledge research, I am not only interested in the reliability of the knowledge(s) produced but also in the circles in which such knowledge(s) appear(s) as legitimate knowledge (Burke 2000, 13–16; Burke 2016; Myllyntausta 2023, 157–77). Knowledge and its influences are always linked to the people who use it and the geographical and metaphorical places where it is used (Livingstone 2003, 3–5). I use the concepts of “circulation” and “circles of knowledge” (Livingstone 2003, 3–16; Myllyntausta, Mäkilä and Skurnik 2023, 36–45) to provide insights into the dissemination and relevance of ethnological knowledge in society at the time. As James A. Secord puts it, it is important “to recognize that question of ‘what’ is being said can be answered only through a simultaneous understanding of ‘how’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘for whom’” (Secord 2004, 663–64).

The circulation of knowledge is a dynamic process. The dynamic nature of the process also implies that information does not move unchanged but is instead always being adapted and weighed by recipients according to their knowledge base (Livingstone 2003, 3–5; Myllyntausta, Mäkilä and Skurnik 2023, 37). Analyzing the origins and producers of knowledge is thus important, as is understanding audiences and readerships (Secord 2004, 662). The circulation of knowledge concept is essentially concerned with arenas of public knowledge, with the places or domains where the circulation of knowledge occurs (Östling 2020, 120–23).

There are always several concurrent ways of knowing in a community (Burke 2000, 13–16; Gieryn 2018). Members of the same circle of knowledge share an understanding of the accepted methods and criteria for producing reliable knowledge. An actor may belong to numerous knowledge circles, some more closely than others. The concepts of circulation and circles of knowledge make it possible to explore the spread and use of knowledge: to whom knowledge was being disseminated is an indication of the motives of the disseminators. Regarding societal influence, uncertainty arises when the research material does not allow us to know how the knowledge was received, how it changed in the process, and what impact it ultimately had (Livingstone 2003, 3–5).

A researcher can access the circles of knowledge by, for example, examining material forms of knowledge, such as correspondence or newspaper articles, and their movements over time and space (Myllyntausta, Mäkilä and Skurnik 2023, 43–45; Secord 2004, 665). My material consists of articles from the collection of newspaper and magazine clippings on Finno-Ugric peoples held by the Finnish National Museum.

The museum's collection includes several folders of clippings on different Finno-Ugric peoples, such as Karelians, Ingrians, and Veps. The folder for East Karelia, the main focal area related to the Greater Finland discussion, includes clippings related to Karelians living in the Viena and Aunus regions of East Karelia.

Ethnologists in Finland produced a wide range of knowledge about East Karelia: they not only collected and shaped ethnological knowledge but also recorded their experiences and impressions (e.g., Helminen 2008 [1941], 91–94.). Ethnological knowledge was generated through the principal fieldwork methods of the day: interviews, observation, photographs, drawings, mapping, and the collecting of artifacts. During the war years, there were very few scientific publications in the field of ethnology. However, the role of the war in the paucity of publications is not as significant as one might think based on current perspectives: the pace of academic publication was much slower in the early twentieth century (e.g., Moosa 2018, 3–5). The ethnological knowledge gathered on East Karelia was communicated in non-scientific books and articles and later in scientific works, such as doctoral dissertations (e.g., Virtanen 1950). Non-ethnologists,² such as academics from related fields or military front-line correspondents, could also use ethnological knowledge in their writings.

One way of using and circulating knowledge is propaganda. Jowett and O'Donnell define *propaganda* as a “deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (2019, 6). To identify propaganda in the ethnologists' texts, I have adopted the categories of black, grey, and white propaganda from communication studies. Propaganda can be divided into three categories depending on the veracity of its message and whether the sender is known. White propaganda is the most difficult to distinguish because it has a feeling of openness, directness, and transparency. White propaganda comes from an identifiable source, and the information is accurate yet selective. Black propaganda is easily identifiable because it uses false means. Grey propaganda is a hybrid of the two and probably the most common type. The classification is useful for assessing the aims of texts and the authors motives (Jowett and O'Donnell 2019, 17–26; Cull, Culbert and Welch 2003, 41–43, 151–53, 425–26).

Historian Antti Laine, who has studied wartime research done in East Karelia, suggests that researchers in the humanities differ from those in the natural sciences in that they published more general interest articles and opinion pieces and that “the writings often had a propagandistic tone” (Laine 1993, 195). However, the possible propagandistic nature of ethnological texts has not been studied in detail. Many Finnish ethnologists of the time have been presented in the work *Pioneers – The History of Finnish Ethnology*, but many of the portraits remain quite limited and selective, and the war years are often passed over with very little mention (Räsänen, M 1992; Pimiä 2009, 259–61). Several scholars touched upon the relationship between researchers, research, and propaganda in general (e.g., Pimiä 2012; Garberding 2015; Wolfe 2019; Wilson 1976). This study contributes to an understanding of ethnologists' work and activities during the war years by critically focusing on the uncertainties in interpreting the researchers' actions and choices.

Carefully Deposited Clippings—But by Whom?

In the research material, that is, the collection of newspaper and magazine articles held by the National Museum of Finland, the articles have been cut out of newspapers and magazines and glued onto concept papers. Some information in the clippings, such as page numbers, may have been lost. The oldest clipping in the East Karelia folder is from 1912, and the most recent is from 2006. The articles are marked on a list that continues into the 1990s. The list includes a total of 31 newspaper and magazine articles from the years 1941 to 1944. The collection is unlikely a complete collection of articles written in the years 1941–1944 since it does not, for example, include any clippings from leftist newspapers and only one from 1944; having searched through digital journal archives from the period, however, it does seem to contain a representative sample of articles published in the field of ethnology during the period. It includes contributions from several authors and different publications, highlighting the polyphonic nature of the circulation of knowledge.

The exact history of and method used to collect the clippings are uncertain. We do not know for certain who collected the clippings and for what purposes, but they were most probably members of the National Museum’s staff. Many similar organizations collected newspaper and magazine clippings related to their activities as a form of media monitoring at the time (on similar collections, see, e.g., Zintchenko 2003, 20–25). The existence of the collection provides an interesting example of circles of knowledge. The group of magazines and newspapers from which the clippings have been collected is extensive but selective, focusing on household and craft topics—perhaps bought or subscribed to by the collector(s). As such, it tells us what kind of knowledge was considered legitimate in one of the ethnological circles of knowledge but leaves us uncertain about the original purpose of the collection.

The material includes work by 17 authors, namely articles from 15 different newspapers and magazines. The greatest number of articles, nine each, are from *Uusi Suomi* [New Finland], one of the largest Finnish-language newspapers, and *Suomen Kuvalehti* [Finland’s pictorial]. This popular magazine covers, for example, current affairs, social phenomena, and also science. Surprisingly, only one article in the collection is from the other major newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* [Helsinki newspaper]—probably the collector of the clippings had favored the other competing newspaper, *Uusi Suomi*, over *Helsingin Sanomat*. The collection includes only one article published in the major Swedish-speaking newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* [Capital’s paper] (Approximately 10% of Finns spoke Swedish as their mother tongue in the 1940s. Today, the percentage is around 5%) and three articles from a popular women’s monthly magazine *Kotiliesi* [Home hearth]. The other publications included in the collection are three other Finnish newspapers with widespread distribution and *Vapaa Karjala* [Free Karelia], a propagandistic newspaper distributed especially in the occupied territory, as well as magazines related to the home, women’s life, and crafts. The collector(s) of the clippings may have either consciously or unconsciously made the decision not to include any left-wing or workers’ publications, such as *Sosiaalidemokraatti* [Social Democrat], or else just excluded them because they were not as widely available. The fact that

most clippings are from specific newspapers indicates that the collection of clippings was a voluntary side activity rather than part of formal archival collection activities.

The magazine articles are generally long, spanning several pages. They often include photos taken by the author or, more commonly, by military information company photographers. The most popular topics in the articles are the general living conditions and means of livelihood in East Karelia as well as traditional Karelian buildings, such as the Karelian-style large, two-story, wooden farmhouses, which differed greatly from traditional houses in the rest of Finland. Women's handicrafts, like ornate pieces of clothing or hand towels with embroidery, also received much attention from the writers. Local cultural events, such as *praasniekat* (village festivals honoring saints or other important days in the religious calendar) and other local customs were also popular topics. The articles also mention the local Orthodox religion – often “othered” in the eyes of Lutherans (e.g., Pimiä 2012, 400; Kananen 2010, 63–66).

The subject choices for the articles were usually essentially positive and often forward-looking: times might be difficult, but a better future awaits. The articles make no mention of the dangers and difficulties encountered by the researchers near the front, such as mines, enemy partisans behind the battle lines, or less successful encounters with the local population (e.g., Helminen 2008 [1941], 118; Pimiä 2009, 165). For example, it was not always easy for the Finnish-speaking ethnologists to understand the local dialects of Karelian, even though the languages spoken in the region are related to Finnish. Locals may also have been suspicious of or even hostile towards Finns because not everyone saw the Finns as liberators, based on official Finnish portrayals to locals, but rather as conquerors (Pimiä 2009, 160–65). The Karelians may also have been offended by, for example, the researchers comparing the Finns and Karelians. Not everyone in the region was anti-communist or fully welcoming of the pro-Finnish angle (Hyytiä 2008, 139).

The choice of topics and general style of writing were, to some extent, affected by censorship (e.g., Vilkkuna 1962, 65–75), as well as by the general patriotic rhetoric of the wartime period. The military front-line correspondents had orders regarding topics and perspectives (Perko 1974, 75–79, 111–21). All articles by researchers and military front-line correspondents concerning East Karelia had to be checked before publication (Perko 1974, 52–53). The press could operate with considerable freedom in Finland even during the war (Pilke 2009, 89). However, it is uncertain how much researchers practiced self-censorship despite the freedom of the press. We also do not know what instructions or requirements the researchers received from the funding bodies or newspapers and magazines (e.g., Aunila 2020) when choosing their topics. At any rate, the material does not contain any negative comments regarding the Finnish political agenda.

“Straight from the Field” – Ways of Convincing the Reader

To analyze how researchers influence the reader (and thus society), we need to look at the means of creating credibility in the articles. The means of influence can give clues about the researchers' objectives. For any text to have an impact, the author must

convince readers of the truthfulness, reliability, and importance of what they are reading, that is, of the need to regard it as legitimate knowledge. How researchers assure readers of the legitimacy of the knowledge being presented is of interest to scholars studying the history of knowledge and propaganda alike (e.g., Cole 1998, 609–12). To make visible these means, I close read the articles (e.g., Pöysä 2015), focusing both on the content of the text and the modes of expression. I analyzed the themes and words used, possible connotations beyond the literal meanings, and, for example, the intended audience. I paid attention to the means the author used to appeal to the readers and to emphasize the legitimacy of the knowledge being presented. I also looked for ways of reinforcing the predispositions and attitudes of the audience, such as references to *heimohenki* (kinship ideology), as well as criticism of Bolshevism. By analyzing the choice of topics, the manner and tone of the writing, and the propagandistic elements, the intended impact and ways of directing the reader’s thoughts became visible.

Several means of doing so can be found in the texts: the credibility of knowledge was supported using personal experience, that is, by employing eyewitness testimony, scientific methods, or a voice that lent authority or expertise or else by citing reliable sources (Myllyntausta 2023, 177; Gieryn 2018, 41–43). In addition to such strategies, different circles of knowledge have their own beliefs, values, and norms that influence the reception of new information. The predispositions of the audience can be used to create an impression of credibility and a sense of resonance: messages tend to have a greater impact when they align with existing beliefs and opinions (Jowett and O’Donnell 2019, 275–77).

Eyewitness testimony creates a strong sense of reliability. Details add descriptive power to the text, and the descriptions of eyewitness impressions and moods appeal to the readers’ emotions (e.g., Pälsi 1941a–c; Hautala 1942). The extensive use of photographs creates the impression of a report “straight from the field”. One strong example of the power of eyewitness testimony can be found in an article by Helmi Helminen, an ethnologist who went to East Karelia for the first time in the autumn of 1941 and collected museum objects there. The article is based on and copied almost word for word from Helminen’s fieldwork diary (Helminen 2008 [1941], 91–94). She takes the reader on a tour of the Karelian village of Vuosniemi, near Repola, describing the houses, their structure and furnishings, and the special atmosphere of the deserted village (Helminen 1942, 4).

Another good example of the power of eyewitness testimony is the archaeologist and ethnologist Sakari Pälsi, who served as a front-line correspondent and cleverly used his observations to enhance the message. Pälsi had a way with words, and his articles combine skillful writing, ethnological insight, information on military objectives, and descriptive reporting from the field. In one of his articles (Pälsi 1941a), he describes his visit, together with some older men and young boys from the village, to an exceptionally well-preserved *tsasouna* (Orthodox village chapel) hidden in the shade of the big spruce trees of the local cemetery. The story of the Karelian Orthodox religion, which was almost destroyed by the Bolsheviks and which the Finns were helping to restore, is woven into the atmospheric report. Some of Pälsi’s writings and photographs from the Aunus region in East Karelia were re-published as a book

called *Voittajien jalanjäljissä* [Following the Victors]. The feeling of “being there” is quite strong in his narrative.

Expertise creates trust. The readers of the newspapers and magazines were not themselves experts in ethnology or East Karelia, so appealing to expertise was an effective way of influencing their ideas. Expertise can be expressed in many ways. The aforementioned “eyewitness testimony” created expertise. One way for academics to underscore their expertise was to use a title reinforcing their familiarity with the subject or field. The authors of eleven articles in the collection used an academic title of professor, doctor, or master, which immediately gave the reader the impression of a knowledgeable author. The title of military front-line correspondent appears in five of the articles. The front-line correspondents were also soldiers working for the military information companies. The title suggests authority, the status of a live reporter. Interestingly, Sakari Pälsi uses the title of doctor in four of his seven articles and military front-line correspondent in two; the final article lacks a title.

Expertise was also emphasized by using a highly specific technical or scientific vocabulary. This is the case in several articles, especially when writing about buildings or women’s handicrafts (e.g., Kartano 1942; Vilppula 1943; Vahter 1941, 1942a and 1942b). When describing a typical Karelian house, the authors used Karelian language terms for rooms and spaces, such as *sintso* (hallway) or *galdari* (ornamental balcony), to highlight the distinctive character of the houses and their knowledge of the subject. In some articles, the presentation of expertise went hand in hand with an appeal to reliable sources, such as other researchers, previous research, or other literature (e.g., Pälsi 1941b; Hautala 1944).

Expertise can also refer to the presentation of one’s research or researcher status. Several of the authors included in the collection of articles conducted research in East Karelia during the Continuation War. However, the articles make relatively few references to the researchers’ own research and its results. For example, Helmi Helminen describes the village where she worked but does not describe the research itself, such as the actual selection of museum objects (Helminen 1942a). The other article by Helminen in the collection, a lengthy text about East Karelian Christmas and New Year’s traditions (Helminen 1942b), does not mention that the information was gathered at least partly by Helminen herself. The only lengthier description of the writer’s research is offered by Jouko Hautala, whose reportage includes photos taken by him during his research expedition (Hautala 1944).

The most direct accounts of the ethnological research done in East Karelia are found in two articles, one published in the Swedish-speaking newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* on 18 October 1942 and another in a large newspaper named *Aamulehti* [Morning paper] on 20 October 1942. The articles were written by journalists working for the newspapers. The articles give the impression that a press conference had been organized by or at the National Museum, where ethnologists Helmi Helminen, Tyyni Vahter, and Hilikka Vilppula reported on their research trips to East Karelia during the summer. Helmi Helminen reported that she had visited 17 villages to study the traditional household and food economy and the objects used in the homes, as well as livestock farming, blacksmithing, weaving, hunting, and annual festivals, among

other things. Traveling together, Hilikka Vilppula visited the same villages as Helminen and studied the same buildings. Tyyni Vahter had visited Äänislinna, as the Soviet city of Petrozavodsk or Petroskoi had been renamed by Finns at the time, and several villages in Aunus to study traditional handicrafts. The Finnish-language and Swedish-language newspaper articles contain much of the same information but with different points of emphasis. Respective political agendas are evident in both, but kinship ideology is more prominent in the Finnish-language article. *Heimohenki* (kinship ideology) – the empathy, support, and protectiveness that Finns felt towards Finno-Ugric kindred peoples, for example, Karelians on the Russian side of the border—has its roots in European national romanticism. It is a concept closely related to Karelianism, the scientific and artistic interest in Karelia, which emphasized the role of Karelia as a region where “genuine, ancient Finnishness” could still be found (e.g., Sihvo 2017, 397–406; Roiko-Jokela 2010, 19–25).

Taking advantage of the audience’s predispositions is a common means of influencing readers. Writers use it to create resonance and cohesion, build a base of shared knowledge, and prepare the public to be receptive to other possible messages (Jowett and O’Donnell 2019, 276–77). Messages have greater impact when they are in line with existing opinions, beliefs, and dispositions; when it came to East Karelia, such messages included a belief in the kinship ideology and criticism of Bolshevism, widespread throughout Finland in the decades leading up to the Continuation War but not necessarily popular among all groups or those with more leftist political orientations. The authors frequently repeated the messages to influence readers of the articles.

When appealing to the readership’s existing dispositions, the sense of kinship ideology becomes visible in such formulations, as Finns should have a sense of “duty and joy” in helping their “kindred brothers and sisters” living in occupied territories, in helping them reach the same level of achievement as the Finns, for example in terms of education and standard of living. References to the kinship between Finns and Karelians, to their common history, and the Finnishness of the Karelians are also revealing:

There have been fierce battles, strong fortresses [built], to save Finnishness from the threatening devourer of the East. The Karelians have been the vanguard: unwittingly, unwillingly, they have gloriously remained in their delaying positions, sacrificing themselves linguistically, sometimes even nationally, but always preserving their deepest, most fervent Finnishness. (Pälsi 1941b, translated by the author)

Furthermore, the admiration for Karelians’ originality, perseverance, and ‘ancient wisdom’ highlights the kinship ideology behind the texts. These qualities, such as skill, industriousness, and generosity (mentioned below), represented the virtues of the “land of Kalevala.” They were considered to reflect the Finnishness of the inhabitants of East Karelia and to distinguish them from what was considered Russian.

You have to wonder how hands that have become rough with such heavy toil can produce such fine embroidery and weaving. But many have beautiful handicrafts, *käspaikka* (hand towel), and tablecloths made by the *moamo* (grandmother). ... Hospitality

is one of her first qualities; even the smallest thing she always offers to her guests with such generosity and captivating kindness. (Vahter 1942b)

The appeals to kinship appear frequently, but not always in the same context as criticism of Bolshevism. Criticism was more common in the successful early phase of the war, 1941–1942, but from 1943 onwards, as the outcome of the war became increasingly uncertain, it was even curbed by censorship orders (Vilkuna 1962, 142–43; Pimiä 2009, 256). In focusing on the writers' criticism of Bolshevism, I am referring primarily to their comments about how the situation became worse for Karelia and its people under Soviet rule. According to the authors, the Soviet period was marked by repressive measures against the Karelians, and by general inefficiency, untidiness, disarray, and a lack of style.

Only once in Aunus did I see a healthy-looking child. He was the grandchild of a collective farm manager. His home was the only clean home I ever saw in Aunus, and yet I visited dozens of them. ... We have no reason to doubt the skill and good will of our Aunus sisters to improve their lot now that they are free from the red nightmare. (Harmas 1941)

The previous examples provide an opportunity to identify researchers' societal values in their texts. I have argued that, to some extent, this is possible by concentrating on how the authors constructed their texts, how they appealed to the reader, and how they presented evidence to support their views. However, uncertainties arise when the research material is limited. The research material only includes one article by many authors, which increases uncertainty about their own voice: the articles may have been edited or condensed in newspapers and magazines. When the collection includes several articles by the same author, for example, seven by Sakari Pälsi, then the researcher's style and choices are more clearly visible.

“Following the Victors”? Signs of Propaganda

As mentioned above, the authors of the articles use different means and ways to convince their readers that their perspectives are true, relevant, and timely. They also use readers' existing beliefs and prejudices to strengthen their message. However, are the articles propaganda? While the answer is by no means clearcut, it is not far-fetched to assume that the ethnologists, funded by the state to write about East Karelia, were still—some more knowingly than others—serving as agents of propaganda for the state (Jowett and O'Donnell 2019, 267).

In the case of Greater Finland, the desired intent of the propagandist, the state, was to support the claim that Finland had a right to occupy the East Karelian areas, that is, to provide support for the Greater Finland ideology. Researchers sponsored by the State Scientific East Karelia Committee, including ethnologists, aimed to produce information to support this perspective. One way to support the Greater Finland efforts was to generate enthusiasm among people for the Greater Finland project and increase their support for the war in general. Presumably, as agents of the state, eth-

nologists were also expected to be at least sympathetic to the issue and to support it in their writings and other public activities. One example of the instructions given to researchers and amateurs is the East Karelian Folk Poetry Collection Guide, published by the Finnish Literature Society in 1943:

Now that the road to the lands of Viena and Aunus has been reopened, it is of paramount importance for national research to begin to save the treasures of the common fatherland. ... Information on the customs followed by the population of East Karelia in different life stages is quite incomplete. Therefore, collectors are asked to describe in detail, and accurately, folk customs related to, for example, childbirth, baptism, child-care, courtship, marriage customs or death ... furniture, vessels, measurements, cattle husbandry... (*Itä-Karjalan kansanrunouden keruuopas*. [East Karelian Folk Poetry Collection Guide] 1943, 62–63)

The aim—to gather evidence to support the Greater Finland ideology—of the State Scientific East Karelia Committee, which organized researchers’ travels to and from East Karelia, was hardly unknown to the researchers. For example, at least, terms like “national research”³ or “common fatherland” found in the collection guide show clear ownership of the objectives. For ethnologists, the fact that one of the key figures of the time, ethnologist Kustaa Vilkuna, served as secretary of the committee undoubtedly meant that both official and unofficial channels were used for giving orders. This increases the uncertainty about how best to interpret their motives, making it, despite the surviving archive materials, quite difficult for current researchers to fully understand the nature of the instructions received by ethnologists.

The division of propaganda into white, grey, and black propaganda, depending only on the veracity of the message or whether the sender is known or not, helps us better understand the nature of the articles and the possible intent of the authors (Jowett and O’Donnell 2019, 17–23). If we count as white propaganda all articles in which the author, that is, the sender of the message, is known and providing accurate information, albeit selected or colored in a way that can be seen as favorable to the Greater Finland ideology, then most of the articles in the research material can be considered examples of white propaganda. In the material collection, such a selection of topics or coloring is represented by, for example, various similarities with Finns or Finnish culture (e.g., Pälsi 1941b, 1941c), the Karelians’ status as representing the “vanguard of Finnishness” (e.g., Pälsi 1941b; Laiho 1942), or the Karelians’ desire to shake off the influences of the Soviet era (e.g., Haavio 1941; Pälsi 1941b; Vahter 1942b).

White propaganda creates a positive attitude towards the desired cause. Ethnologists wrote about their subjects in the desired, positive tone, and the range of topics they chose was limited. One has to wonder whether readers considered such texts propagandistic in the modern sense of the term at that time. Some expressions, such as *ryssä* (Russki), are considered offensive by today’s standards and were demeaning even in their time. However, they were still part of a common language during the war years (Pimiä 2009, 86). In addition, some articles were also relatively neutral about possible propaganda objectives, aside from their general subject matter, East Karelia

(e.g., Helminen 1942b; Vilppula 1943). The topics studied in East Karelia were standard research topics in ethnology at the time, even when the country was not at war. Hence, they do not reveal any specific propagandistic thematic choices on the part of the writers.

The research material includes no examples of clearly false, black propaganda. However, it is possible to detect shades of grey in the material, suggesting a conscious act of propaganda. For example, as mentioned before, the ethnologist Sakari Pälsi, who was quite sympathetic to the Greater Finland idea even before the war (Relas 2017, 41–42, 66–67), wrote articles under the titles of both doctor and front-line correspondent, which obscures the origin and intent of the information: researcher or military man? (e.g., Pälsi 1941b and 1941c.) By choosing the title, the readers are told who is viewing the information and through what type of lens, influencing how they interpret the information. The title chosen by the author gives the text the desired weight. Another example of grey tones can be found in Jouko Hautala's (1942) reportage from Limosaari: it comes from an identifiable source, but the author draws rather bold and scientifically questionable conclusions based on tenuous evidence about the language and origins of the previous inhabitants of a deserted island. The article exhibiting the darkest shade of grey is entitled *Vapautuvaa Venäjää* [Freed Russia], signed only with the initials A.M. (*Suomen Kuvalehti* n.o. 28 1941). It is a summary of the arguments for a Greater Finland. It covers the whole spectrum of arguments, from the natural conditions and bedrock that East Karelia shares with Finland, or, in other words, the "unnatural borders" of the region, to the Finnishness of the inhabitants.

Defining propaganda is difficult, as the different emphases of the different scholars in the field show (Jowett and O'Donnell 2019, 2–6). The fact that the meaning of the term propaganda has changed over time adds to the uncertainty. The word "propaganda" now has an exclusively negative connotation; in the early twentieth century, it was often used to refer to ordinary forms of communication, such as the advertising of events. Definitions of white, grey, and black propaganda help to capture the characteristics of texts that make use of propaganda as it is understood today.

Conclusion: Answers and Question Marks

This paper focused on the methodological uncertainties of studying ethnologists' societal influence in times of war: the ways in which such an influence may or may not be read in their non-scientific publications and the ways in which propagandists' voices may or may not be interpreted based on the content of the publications. Ethnological knowledge circulated in Finnish newspapers and magazines during the Continuation War of 1941–1944. Analysis of the writings shows that to better understand the role of ethnologists and the uncertainties involved in the process of interpretation, providing an answer to the question "what was said?" is not enough. Questions of when, where, how, and for whom need to be addressed as well (Secord 2004, 663–64).

The articles in the collection analyzed here focus mainly on the early years of the war when enthusiasm for the nascent Greater Finland idea was at its peak. One lingering uncertainty stems from this point of emphasis: we do not know whether the

person(s) collecting the clippings just chose not to include articles from the later years of the war or if they did not have access to more articles at that time. Furthermore, the collection of clippings was clearly compiled from a limited sample of publications, which was lacking, most notably, leftist publications. As such, the collection itself offers but one interpretation of the societal influence of ethnologists—and also that of the National Museum, where the Finno-Ugric collections of previous decades had been gathered and displayed.

The collection also served to verify the museum’s social and political positioning. Many of the authors were working or otherwise connected to the museum, and East Karelia played a major role in the museum’s collection work and exhibition activities during that period. During the Continuation War, some of the National Museum’s artifacts were evacuated to safety, and exhibitions were closed. The museum had the space and the interest to organize temporary exhibitions on topical subjects. For example, in the winter of 1941–1942, a historical-ethnological Karelia exhibition was organized, which, according to Tuukka Talvio, “reflected the mood of the offensive phase of the Continuation War.” A new ethnological exhibition was opened in the autumn of 1943. It had three rooms reserved for the display of East Karelian material. (Tallio 2016, 220–25). Thus, the National Museum can be considered to have played an important role in strengthening the perception of Finnishness of the occupied territories.

Contrary to what some scholars have claimed, the greatest contribution of ethnological research during the war years was not only the collection of museum objects and other materials. (see Laine 1993, 191–92). Rather, the newspaper and magazine material offer a glimpse of the broader role of researchers at the time: Ethnologists were influential not only in the collection of ethnological knowledge but also in planning its use and circulation to new recipients. In addition to writing articles for numerous newspapers and magazines, they were involved in the State Scientific East Karelia Committee, which oversaw all research on East Karelia, as well as in the operations of military information companies. They held press conferences on their expeditions and actively organized and promoted exhibitions showcasing the occupied territories’ culture.

Some scholars have suggested that the interest in Karelia and kinship ideology was strongest among the more highly educated population. However, the range of newspapers and magazines and the diverse publications and genres show that the publications targeted different circles of knowledge and layers of society. The magazine articles were intended for and read by those in academic circles as well as by decision-makers, housewives, soldiers, Finnish speakers, Swedish speakers, Finns, and Karelians alike – who were allowed to subscribe to Finnish magazines but not newspapers (Hyytiä 2008, 135). In light of the vast range of material, it is quite possible that the articles and their authors sought to create a broader support base and sympathy for East Karelia – and possibly also for the Greater Finland ideology.

The most difficult question—missing from Secord’s list—is dealing most clearly with uncertainty regarding the project: “why?” Why did the ethnologists write the articles and choose their topics, perspectives, or audiences? What underlying values, views, and ideologies are evident in the articles? Some of the reasons for publish-

ing popular articles were probably quite commonplace – use one’s expertise, advance one’s career, perhaps earn extra income—but deeper reasons are difficult to pin down. In a situation where researchers’ choices are influenced by wartime realities and uncertainties, censorship regulations, the policies of the publication (e.g., Aunila 2020), and the possible expectations and wishes of the research funder, the answers offered by the research material are limited.

The overall picture painted by the ethnological articles is enthusiastic and practical regarding Finland’s mission in East Karelia, one prone to celebrating kinship ideology and criticizing Bolshevism. The themes of the articles are typical of ethnology, but only material that fit the grand narrative of the time was selected for the collection. As a whole, no significant conclusions can be drawn from the articles’ topics concerning their possible overall intent. The collection reveals more about the tone of the articles and the way the ethnologists chose to write about the topics.

The most uncertain part of labeling a text propaganda is showing intentionality. Even though some propagandistic elements are present in the research material, the articles do not provide a solid basis for analyzing how ethnologists perceive their roles, values, and intentions. Nor can all the authors of the articles be considered a single coherent group; they included researchers from different backgrounds and with different values and ideologies. Eastern Finno-Ugric peoples had been the focus of Finnish ethnological research for a long time (e.g., Niiranen 1992, 21–40; Räsänen, R 1992, 103–25), and it is easy to understand the opposition towards and criticism of the Soviet Union and Bolshevism during wartime, even without specific aims at influencing opinions.

Ethnology was useful in shaping moods, but the extent to which and how explicitly a certain political agenda, such as the Greater Finland ideology, was supported and actively promoted by ethnologists depended on the researcher. It is likely that the researchers were familiar with the objectives of the committee funding the research. However, the many different tones and emphases of the articles in the collection suggest that the researchers decided on the strength of the social or political message. Nevertheless, such was the influence of the coordinating body, the general atmosphere, and the prevailing censorship rules that it was almost impossible to express negative views, even if one might have had them.

Notes

- 1 During the Second World War, Finland was involved in three wars: the Winter War, from 30 November 1939 to 13 March 1940, against the Soviet Union; the Continuation War, from 25 June 1941 to 19 September 1944, against the Soviet Union as a co-belligerent with Nazi Germany; and the Lapland War, from 15 September 1944 to 27 April 1945 against Germany.
- 2 Ethnologists focused their research on the material aspect of folk culture, but it was not uncommon for researchers, especially during wartime, to also collect information on oral folklore, which was the domain of folklore studies. Similarly, scholars of folklore may have written on ethnological topics. Since this article focuses on ethnological knowledge, its source material also includes articles by scholars from other disciplines. However, even the researchers from related disciplines, not to mention those from more distant ones, may have had different skills and approaches to dealing with and using ethnological knowledge. These possible, difficult-to-identify differences in interpretation and objectives add to the methodological uncertainty.
- 3 In the context of the early twentieth century, the national disciplines refer to the humanistic fields of research related to the promotion of Finnish nationalistic perspectives. Although no formal definition existed at the time, they included the study of the Finnish language and literature, folklore studies, ethnology, and archaeology (see, e.g., Markkola, Snellman, and Östman 2014, 10–15).

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Uncertainties in the Early 1990s for Estonian Folkloristics and the Estonian Folklore Archives

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Abstract

In Estonia, the late 1980s, until the regaining of independence in 1991, was a time of constant changes and uncertainties on the political level, although it was characterized by a strong national spirit. The transition from the Soviet regime to the pursuit of European and Western values and patterns brought its own turmoil, but also new opportunities for Estonian scholars, including folklorists. This article focuses on the adaptation journey of Estonian folkloristics and the then Folklore Department (the Estonian Folklore Archives) of the State Literary Museum through the upheavals on the political, institutional, financial, and technical levels. The significant political change had a strong impact on the directions of research in Estonian folkloristics and the status of the archives. On the background, however, was another politically uncertain era of the 1940s, which shaped some of the discussions and actions addressed in the article.

Keywords: cultural politics; disciplinary history; folklore archives; folkloristics; institutional funding

Introduction

Folklore archives have their own place and importance in the broader field of folkloristics. They can be a guardian of passing or extinct knowledge, an interpreter of currents and undercurrents in the surrounding living culture, and a sage of future situations, a keeper of traditions with a vision for the future. Any folklore archive in the world also represents the history of not just local folkloristics, as the archives may also preserve original collections or copies of collections from other nations or regions, e.g. as is the case in the Baltics. Collecting, preserving and archiving, giving a meaning to folkloristic knowledge for the wider society, and making folklore materials available to society for re-use has also been seen as a kind of metaphor of the ever-circulating folklore itself (Västrik 2002, 5). However, in the broader social and academic spheres, traditional archives and institutions of memory are rarely understood or recognized for their work in qualitative data preservation and its contextualization (O'Carroll 2018, 13). Thus, occasionally, within the discipline itself and beyond, questions are raised about the meaning, possibilities, and expectations of folkloristics, folklore archives, and their future perspectives (Sarv et al. 2023; O'Carroll 2018). This

requires also contemporary folkloristics to address its history to gain clarity about the background of the current moment and the possible solutions (e.g. Bula 2017, 10).

This article focuses on the history of Estonian folkloristics and the Estonian Folklore Archives between the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period characterized by political, financial, and disciplinary uncertainties and challenges. In addition, it offers a retrospective on the public discussion regarding solutions for the advancement of Estonian folkloristics and the change of status of the Estonian Folklore Archives during 1990–1991. On the political level, Estonia underwent a major transformation after the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1940, and a reorientation towards the West in the early 1990s, the financial structures of the state were dismantled and rebuilt, and a new disciplinary and educational discourse within folkloristics was under debate. In short, while changes were occurring on many levels and the future remained uncertain, Estonian folklorists tried to maintain a steady and clear course by discussing the optimal balance for the betterment of the discipline.

The Political-Scientific Background

In the early years of the Estonian Republic in 1919–1920, the University of Tartu was established as an Estonian-language university where folkloristics and ethnology were taught separately. According to folklorist Tiit Jaago, the study of ethnography (ethnology) was based on history and at first was closely related to physical anthropology and even historical geography, before it was distinguished from them in the process of organizing departments at the University of Tartu. Folkloristics, on the other hand, was considered part of philology¹, and despite its connection with literary studies, a separate Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore was established with relative ease in 1919. On paper, the Department of Ethnography also existed in 1919, but it took until 1923 before courses began, as the position of professor remained vacant until that year. The newly established Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore was the first institution to teach and research folklore academically in Estonia, offering courses in folk poetry, beliefs and traditions, and following in the footsteps of earlier Estonian folkloristics (Jaago 2003).

Eesti Rahva Muuseum (the Estonian National Museum, hereinafter ENM) was founded in 1909 based on the folklore collections of the pastor and folklorist Jakob Hurt.² *Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv* (the Estonian Folklore Archives, hereinafter EFA) were first established as one of the subdivisions of the ENM. The first head of EFA was Oskar Loorits, who was the first Estonian folklorist to receive a Ph.D. in folklore studies from the University of Tartu in 1926. Loorits devoted himself to the establishment of EFA and the return of Jakob Hurt's collections from Helsinki, where they had been in the care of the Finnish folklorist Kaarle Krohn. The main tasks of EFA were to organize the already collected material, make copies for use, serve the public and researchers from Estonia and abroad, collect further folklore material, and conduct and disseminate research (e.g. Loorits 1932).

During the interwar period, scientific research³ had a high status in the Estonian society and served the newly independent country by supporting a national self-image,

but state priorities and a proper funding had yet to be established. The Soviet occupation abruptly reformed the Estonian research system that had been slowly built over the preceding 20 years. Nevertheless, even in the Soviet Union, scientific researchers served the country and generally enjoyed a favorable reputation (Vainik 2012, 39–40). Scientific research did not stop, but did experience inevitable interruptions.

After the beginning of the Soviet occupation in 1940, a political and cultural reorganization took place at all levels and in all occupied places, including memory institutions. The ENM with all its autonomous departments was divided into two. On September 11, 1940, the departments responsible for managing intangible heritage, located in Aia (now Vanemuise) Street in Tartu, were reorganized into *Riiklik Kirjandusmuuseum* (the State Literary Museum, hereinafter LM, considering the name since 1953)⁴ following the existing model established by the Soviet Union, as were local expectations connected with this separation. The rest of the museum was renamed the State Ethnographic Museum, remaining at its former location in Raadi Manor on the outskirts of Tartu. On November 1, 1940, the new LM began its work, and the former EFA was renamed as *Riikliku Kirjandusmuuseumi rahvaluule osakond* (the Folklore Department of the State Literary Museum, hereinafter FD), at first continuing work as usual.

During the political turmoil of the Second World War, when the country was occupied and restructured several times, the normal practice of folklore collecting and research slowed down considerably and experienced several inevitable breaks. On October 9, 1942, the LM was dissolved by the German occupying forces and the archive was reorganized and named *Tartu Ülikooli Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv* (the Estonian Folklore Archives of the University of Tartu), although it remained in the same physical location. Due to the war, the items and records of the archive were evacuated first in 1943 to different places all over Estonia and re-evacuated back to Aia Street in 1944–1945. Under reinstated Soviet occupation, the State Literary Museum was officially reopened on November 6, 1945, although the work was ongoing since early fall. Once again it was renamed, and the archives became the Folklore Department of the State Literary Museum. After the war, the situation of Estonian folkloristics was challenging – well-known folklorists such as Professor Walter Anderson moved to Germany, Oskar Loorits was exiled to Sweden, other folklorists working for the archives such as Rudolf Põldmäe, Herbert Tampere and the literary scholar August Annist, were imprisoned, which hindered their folkloristic research for several years.

The new ideological rules concerning research and collecting work established with the Soviet order prescribed the documentation of folklore primarily as a carrier of the ideas of the working class. Attention was paid to workers' folklore, revolutionary and war songs, and earlier bourgeois principles of collecting and research, as well as religion and folk belief were criticized (Haberman 1949, 18; Viidalepp 1969, 169–84). At first glance, it is easy to think that the Soviet humanities would favor anything ethnic, but as Liina Saarlo has showed, the support of national identities was more likely a tool to facilitate the move from bourgeois society to socialism, which had the effect of a highly ideologized and idealized, unified Soviet nation (Saarlo 2023, 119–20). Also, as Eve Annuk has contemplated, there is a paradox in the way the Soviet era con-

tributed to the preservation of national identity, since under the guise of the slogan “socialist in content, national in form,” both popular and professional culture were successfully advanced (Annuk 2003, 14).

On July 1, 1946, the LM was incorporated into the system of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR. Furthermore, in 1947, *Keele ja Kirjanduse Instituut* (the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences, hereinafter ILL) was established with its original seat in Tartu, and under this institute, a *rahvaluule sektor* (“Folklore Sector,” hereinafter FS) was created for folklorists, whose task was to conduct research. The FD in the State Literary Museum was given the task of serving researchers from other institutions, including the FS and the University of Tartu, by providing organized archival material for research. It would be wrong to say that the folklorists at the FD did not do any research during the following almost 50 years – they did in fact, but the research consisted mainly of large-scale academic text publications.

However, in 1952 the ILL was moved to Tallinn, the capital of the Estonian SSR, in order to consolidate the Academy of Sciences in one place, facilitate the work of its sectors, and provide firm ideological control over of such a scientific institution (Ahven 2007, 104–7). Understandably, this move made cooperation between the FD and the FS difficult; the staff of latter had to travel to Tartu to access archival materials. To alleviate this spatial challenge, the FS started to conduct their own fieldwork expeditions, resulting in a separate folklore collection. There were plans to merge the two institutions in the following decades, most actively in 1951–1952, but also in the late 1960s, with the emphasis on the comparatively lower salary level and general financial situation in the LM, which might have improved with the merger. None of these plans ever materialized. The developments during the war and the years of the Stalinist era influenced the disciplinary instability at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. After these instances of political and institutional restructuring occurred, the question of how best to move forward in an era where everything pointed towards possible statehood and further change, remained unanswered.

Estonian Research Policy in the Early 1990s

Science policy in the Soviet Union meant that science, and especially ideologically and politically correct science policy, was the main weapon for “building communism,” with Marxism-Leninism officially considered as the starting point. As a novelty, the state science policy had to prioritize basic research, strengthen its experimental base, pool resources for the development of priority directions, rapidly apply new scientific solutions to the development of technologies, and so on (Laas 2008), all in service of the Soviet order and communism. Although the Soviet research system had expanded exponentially from the 1960s onwards, it had reached its limits by the mid-1980s. The humanities and social sciences were able to gain a little more attention in the atmosphere of Perestroika and Glasnost in the late 1980s. Research policy took a different turn with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the financing of Estonian research abruptly stopped and the whole research system faced a dire situation (Tammiksaar 2018a and 2018b).

On August 20, 1991, the Republic of Estonia regained its independence. The Baltic States had some advantages compared to other former Soviet republics—communism had lasted only two generations, the Baltic nations had retained a historical memory of their independence during the interwar period (Raun 2001, 21), and a strong cultural identity. Estonia also quickly joined various European and world organizations in the reintroduction of their own currency (*kroon*) in the summer of 1992. In the early years of independence, the government pursued an aggressive free-market policy, and the reestablished Bank of Estonia kept a tight rein on the money supply to tame inflation. However, this did not protect the country from a sharp economic downturn in the first half of the 1990s. The economic reforms generally earned Estonia a positive reputation abroad but left a hard mark on the population – income gaps, social divisions, generational differences, etc. increased (Raun 2001, 30–32).

Ethnomusicologist Ingrid Rüütel⁵ has also observed that much of the post-independence stress was caused by hopes that never materialized or that had led to disappointment:

The rapid disintegration of economic structures led to the impoverishment, unemployment, and loss of social protection of many people. However, it follows from the principle of the pyramid of social needs that if lower-level needs (food, shelter, physical security) are not satisfied, then a person cannot fulfill higher-level needs, such as cultural and social self-fulfillment. (Rüütel 2010, 619–20)⁶

The independence of the state also brought reform to science policy, which was characterized by the speed of its development, initial autonomy from political governance (the idea that science should serve society emerged slightly later), and at the same time a somewhat disorganized reorientation towards the West (Vainik 2012, 40–45), which, however, remained a desired goal to be achieved on all levels.

The Estonian Research Council, established by the government on July 31, 1990, as part of the general wave of science policy reforms that took place at the time, played a coordinating and guiding role in science and higher education in Estonia. The Council advised the government on national science and technology policy issues (Köörna 2008, 23–24). In 1993, it was renamed the Research and Development Council. Three separate funds were established to finance the research and development system: the Estonian Research Foundation for research funding, the Innovation Foundation for development funding, and the Informatics Foundation for the development of state information systems.

The Estonian Research Foundation introduced a new funding system of research grants in addition to state funding, also called basic funding. As elsewhere in the Western academic world, the distribution of personal research grants to research projects that had successfully passed an open competition was now implemented in Estonia. In 1994, a new code for the distribution of research funds was established. Basic funding was divided into infrastructure funding, covered by the budgets of ministries or local governments, and targeted funding of research institutions. The latter, together with personal research grants, was decided by the Council of the Science Foundation,

which was formed by a panel of top researchers in Estonia and operated under the Estonian Research Foundation (Kaarli, Laasberg 1998, 2–5). As pointed out by historian Toivo Raun:

In terms of research, the natural sciences in Estonia were in a more favorable position than the humanities and social sciences since the former had been less subject to ideological controls and less isolated from international scholarship during the Soviet period, but in the post-communist era all fields faced the same problem of reduced funding. (Raun 2001, 37)

In parallel, the reform process of the Estonian Academy of Sciences took place in 1991–1994. The leading emotional sentiment here was to re-establish the system of the Academy of Sciences dating from before the Soviet occupation, and the local universities wanted to follow the combined system of research and lecturing as it was done in the West (Tammiksaar 2018b). Thus, the question of the Academy's fate and place in Estonian research policy was one of the central topics of the discussion. One of the main political goals was to integrate research institutions into universities, apparently to eliminate duplication of tasks. This goal was not always met with enthusiasm. There were fears that the funding given to the sciences would be pooled with that of the universities. The leading role of the latter would have endangered the existence of the research institutions of the former academy. The institutions of the humanities and social sciences took advantage of the situation by submitting a request to expand the research into the so-called national topics and to create new institutions (the Estonian Language Research Center, the Estonian Center of Folkloristics, the Estonian Institute of Literary History and Literary Theory, etc.). With the new Science Act of 1995, the Academy of Sciences ceased to exist as a system of research institutions (Köörna 2008, 25–29; Kaarli, Laasberg 1998, 3–4). That year, most of the institutes under the Academy of Sciences became independent entities and the Estonian Academy of Sciences was reorganized into a body of respected scholars. By and large, the Estonian research system was reorganized into a Western style.

The Discussion on the State of the Estonian Folkloristics 1990–1991

Having clarified what reforms and plans were being prepared in the background of political and research policy and its funding management, the focus can now be placed on the disciplinary debate within Estonian folkloristics, which culminated in a public discussion. As mentioned above, humanities research in Estonia was able to gain somewhat more attention at the end of the 1980s. However, humanities' scholars, legal scholars, and economists had the task of eradicating Soviet ideological norms in their fields, especially in universities that were more concerned with teaching compared to the field of natural and exact sciences, where academics could more easily devote themselves to the production of research (Tammiksaar 2018b).

In addition to the national research policy and several funding reforms, another heated debate was the future of Estonian identity and language, as the political plans of European integration were also seen as a threat to language and culture (Raun 2001,

36). Ingrid Rüütel summarized some of the contemporary feelings as follows:

We opposed ourselves to the Soviet culture imposed by force, and in addition to turning to our national culture, embracing Western culture was also a kind of attempt and protest against Soviet culture, but now the threat of cultural globalization is becoming more and more real. If, entering Europe and the world independently, we still want to preserve our national and cultural identity, as it exists in any European nation, we must be aware of this danger. (Rüütel 2010, 591–92)

In the context of ongoing transformation, the desire to distance oneself from all things Soviet and to follow the strong pull to the West, the disciplines of folklore and ethnology were particularly important in Estonian society. Ingrid Rüütel (2010, 615) has also pointed out that while the national awakening of the Estonians in the nineteenth century gave rise to the tradition of song festivals—a tradition still strong in the twenty-first century—regaining independence was accompanied by a widespread rise of the folklore revival movement (see e.g. Shmidchens 1996) several decades earlier, but especially during the 1980s and the 1990s. This created a demand for adequate advice, and one of those sources was the FD (Sarv et al. 2023, 16).

To articulate problems and find workable solutions in an unstable political, scientific, and financial situation, a series of debates were initiated by the journal *Keel ja Kirjandus* (Language and literature), which lasted for a whole year in 1990–1991. It is worth noting that in the past, Estonian folklorists had not been afraid to bring their problems to public attention (e.g., Goršič 2015; 2018a), so this kind of public debate was not surprising. Most of the discussion was published during the last year of Soviet occupation, at the time of the most active political turbulence and general uncertainty about the future, with the final article (Rüütel 1991) published during the month of regained independence: August 1991.

Ingrid Rüütel (ILL) was the first to start the discussion on the possibilities and problems of the situation Estonian folkloristics faced at that moment. In her introductory remarks, she raised several points followed by a series of replies. First, she underscored the necessity to have collecting, archiving, research, and dissemination of information under one structural roof, referring to the common notion that it was a mistake to create a separate folklore sector at the ILL, thus uniting all stages of work under one roof would eliminate problems of duplication and dispersion. In summary, she suggested that folklorists should create an Estonian Folklore Center with a common archive, library, and technological center, which would function both under *Kirjandusmuuseum* (the Literary Museum) and the ILL with its own specified working groups with the perspective of creating a common database of Estonian folklore. In a sense, this would mean restoring the former Estonian Folklore Archives with its all-encompassing folkloristic research stages (1990).

Her views were followed by a response from folklorist Ülo Tedre (FS), who first pointed out the internal structural reforms taking place in the ILL itself and then focused on the more general discussion. He emphasized several practical but problematic points of the historically separated working groups between different institutions

and the need to re-establish the Estonian Folklore Archives and unite all folklorists under it, since most of the folklorists of the FS were working in the building of the LM in Tartu anyway, while also thinking about problems that needed to be solved, including funding distribution, living quarters, family relocation, etc. Tedre underlined an important aspect for a functioning folklore archive—archives are living, and what made them alive was the accessibility of the materials to all users (1990).

Mare Kõiva (ILL, FS), while acknowledging the recurring idea of reunification of folklorists, reminded of the broad the definition of folklore in place of the Soviet understanding of folklore as an aesthetic art of words, and how the latter played into the ongoing problems. She emphasized the need to develop modern methods of fieldwork, to investigate fresh topics, like “poplore,” the need for suitable and updated equipment to document these new topics, and that creating copies of old manuscripts would reduce the likelihood of disintegration, etc. She also pointed out the need for folklorists to broaden horizons and conduct interdisciplinary research with ethnologists and anthropologists. In conclusion, she suggested that it was the technical side of folklore methods that ultimately decided the future of the archive and that the greatest hope in the contemporary situation lied in collaboration, both within the discipline and through the creation of a joint institution in 1990.

Literary scholars joined the discussion—the director of the LM at the time, Peeter Olesk, discussed the connections between folklore and literature research, and suggested the need to pay attention to contemporary folklore and the Estonian diaspora. His article primarily listed various urgent problems in Estonian folkloristics and called for a broader perspective in the analyses of the discipline. He opposed the proposals to create a new common center and suggested rather to restore the EFA (1990).

As if to bring some balance in the authorship of the articles, Mall Hiimäe (FD), focused on the issues present within archival work itself. First, she noted that for the FD, a common center would imply a stronger inclination towards research and dissemination, but that archival work could not be pushed aside. With the help of several practical examples, she urged the participants to remain realistic—the stated demands of the FD to quickly organize archival material to serve the needs of research were an illusion, especially when the demand on the FD for public lectures, consultations, interviews with the media, etc. had increased considerably (1990).

Folklorist Kristi Salve (ILL, FS) pointed out other considerations. She asked whether it was necessary for folklorists to work under institutions where the institutional name in no way reflected folklore research and asked what the benefit of working under several common institutions would be. She believed solutions would only be temporary, and it would be better to wait longer for further options to surface. Her preferred solution was to restore an autonomous Estonian Folklore Archives, as they existed prior to Soviet regime. She also suggested that the ILL would soon cease to exist, and the Academy of Sciences would only support a small circle of academics. Salve also emphasized the importance of conducting additional folkloristic research outside the obvious institutions in Tallinn and Tartu, and that it would be beneficial for the discipline if research were also conducted at the University of Tartu and some other universities—this would help to bind students to the discipline (Salve 1990).

Arvo Krikmann (ILL, FS) in his end-of-year article decided to summarize previous contributions to this discussion. He admitted that the main points lied in attempts to undo the “mistake” of creating two separate folkloristic sectors in Tallinn and Tartu, and that the solutions were twofold: either to create a new unit subject to both the ILL and the SLM, or to restore the EFA either within the LM or autonomously. He also admitted that the earlier eagerness to unite all folklorists had lost its momentum by the end of the year, and he also saw himself allied with Salve’s ideas. He thought that taking the archive out of the LM’s could be rather problematic regarding both the structure of the LM and the assets, also since the LM had found new hope in becoming a research institution in the legal sense. Other discussion points he summarized were the questions of the continuation of a younger generation of folklorists, and the bottomless workload of folklorists. Krikmann predicted that a future archivist would need to be able to navigate the technological world and subsequent advancements. Last but not least, Krikmann (1990) doubted that the great wave of folklore enthusiasm in the society would last, since the doors to the West were open and non-folklorists who were confusing the scene (with whom the professionals were fighting through endless public debates) would not disappear from the picture, and like others, he saw the need for Estonian folklorists to step out actively into the international arena.

Another ethnomusicologist, Vaike Sarv (ILL, FS), pointed out in her short article that there were also positives to the forceful restructuring of Estonian folkloristics, namely that otherwise the study of folk music could not flourish in its present abundance; and that folklore as a field of study was extremely broad (Sarv 1991). Ethnologist Ants Viires joined in the latter part of this discussion, mainly to point out his sadness about the situation, since he felt the main problems lied on the organizational side. He also regretted that almost none of the authors had included ethnological issues during the fundamental debate on the disciplinary future. He also pointed out that folklorists had to pay more active attention to contemporary folklore in order not to be “left behind” in the progression of international folkloristics and to maintain a living connection with society. According to Viires, fieldwork carried out over the decades had also helped keep folklore alive in the society, especially in remote regions, which was the plus and minus of humanities research in general (Viires 1991).

Theater and literary critic Ants Järv published his thoughts at the request of the editorial board of the magazine *Keel ja Kirjandus*, agreeing with Arvo Krikmann on many points. He also acknowledged that the discussion of the problems was open and comprehensive. He advocated for the restoration of the EFA and hoped it would continue to function in cooperation with the University of Tartu in the education of students as it had during the interwar period, and suggested that the restructuring already underway within the institutions would help to speed up the process (Järv 1991). Folklorist Ruth Mirov (ILL, FS) showed in her short article that in comparison to everything else that was going on in society at the time, and how the urge to make money also influenced decisions about what to print and disseminate, thus leaving quality texts aside, Estonian folkloristics was in fact in a good position. While she was not in favor of paying attention to contemporary issues, she stressed the need to continue the dissemination of research, pointing out the responsibility of the higher-ups to find solutions to this question (Mirov 1991).

Ingrid Rüütel (1991) brought this chain of discussions to an end by stating that everyone was right and had made noble points: the problems were complex, and the main question was what would be best for the advancement of Estonian folkloristics. In terms of research, she noted: 1) the need for a balance between “old” and “new” topics in folklore research, and this also applied to (university) textbooks—the modern approach to research needed modernized textbooks for the new generation of researchers; 2) the dangers of geographical location, since archives could easily be destroyed and the nation readily influenced by external forces; 3) the cooperation between folklorists in different institutions worked well in everyday work, but would need a legal oversight. She also noted that, apart from Mall Hiimäe, the staff of the FD had been rather quiet, probably because the FD was going through a difficult time since it did not have a stable appointed head, and that the Department of Folklore at the University of Tartu had also not participated in the discussion. The main topic of this public discussion was therefore about organizational issues, including the possible restoration of the Estonian Folklore Archives (Olesk 1990; Salve 1990; Tedre 1990; Järv 1991).

It was also clear that Estonian folklore research needed to be reoriented in several directions: Estonian society had changed, the definition of folklore was shifting to accommodate new ideas, and the folklore itself showed signs of moving to the digital realm. To record all this fluctuation in the same multifaceted way required modern technical equipment in the field and in archival work of folklorists, despite difficulty acquiring this equipment. What was also emphasized, but not always in the foreground, was the need for a healthier synthesis with neighboring disciplines—e.g., ethnology, literature, and anthropology. The question of the new generation of students was also raised in several contributions, namely the urgent need for a younger generation of scholars and better cooperation between the institutes and the University of Tartu to integrate future researchers into collecting and research at an early stage. Finally, the issue of funding came up in almost every article, as well as the fact that folklorists in both organizations felt they were outside the decision-making circle as far as the LM and ILL boards were concerned (Rüütel 1991, 451).

This series of open discussions ended with a short public statement in the newspaper *Sirp* (Sickle) about half a year later, authored by Hiimäe, Anu Korb (at that point the head of the FD), Krikmann, Kõiva, Rüütel and Tedre, with the following message to the public: the majority of folklorists at the LM and the ILL proposed to establish an Estonian Center for Folkloristics within the present system of the Academy of Sciences as an independent state-funded research institution, based on the folklore departments under the ILL and the LM, and as the legal continuation of the Estonian Folklore Archives. The Center would unite the various folklore collections with a common technical base and would be physically located at the LM, with a branch in Tallinn at the ILL. The Center’s task would be to collect, archive, research, disseminate and popularize the folklore of the Estonian and other major Finno-Ugric nations. The Center would also work in partnership with many other relevant institutions and centers and promote collaboration with international folklorists (Hiimäe et al. 1992).

In summary, the long discussion about the state of folklore research and folkloristic

institutions was organized during the general and broader restructuring of Estonian scientific fields. It is obvious that in addition to the many changes occurring within the Estonian scientific landscape, the discipline of Estonian folkloristics mobilized itself at a critical moment and publicly debated how best to proceed. It was important that Estonian folklorists made their voices heard, so creating a public debate in the form of discussion articles was an appropriate way to demonstrate to the public that the field was active and offered solutions. As the director of *Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum* (the Estonian Literary Museum, the name change will be referred to below), Krista Aru, has pointed out, the reforms of the Academy of Sciences forced the staff of the museum in general to reflect and reassess their goals, needs, strengths, opportunities, and possibilities for their institutional future (Aru 1996, 233). Change did occur over time, but not necessarily in the ways that were imagined or suggested.

Coping with Uncertainties: Internal Changes at the Estonian Folklore Archives

The definition of folklore in Estonian folkloristics broadened considerably in the early 1990s, but this change had already begun in the previous decade (Jaago 1999). The expansion reopened several collecting and research trends that were previously closed or were completely new to Estonian folkloristics at that point in time.

The constantly changing political situation and the wave of a strong independence movement towards the end of the 1980s allowed Estonian folklorists to record and study political folklore, soldiers' folklore, students' and children's folklore. The influence, cooperation and joint events with the Finnish colleagues played an important role. This accelerated the observation of folklore movements in society, the growth of urban folklore and, in the 1990s, the novelty of collecting folklore in the media and online environment. In addition, politically sensitive material could not be archived before the 1990s (Hiemäe 2002).

The restless atmosphere of the 1980s also brought many opportunities to consciously observe, record, and research belief folklore, the subject of which had been suppressed under the Soviet regime. However, collecting and researching folk belief was not as black and white as it appeared on the surface, and several outlets were found whenever possible (e.g. Goršič 2018b). Since the 1990s, there have been more opportunities to organize research expeditions to collect the folklore of diaspora Estonians not only in the territory of the Russian Federation, but also in the Western world, where Estonians had fled or settled during World War II and its aftermath.

The staff of the Folklore Department, together with the board of the Literary Museum, also made several changes in the way the archive would continue to function. Perhaps most importantly, the date of January 1, 1995, marked the reestablishment of the Estonian Folklore Archives by name. A year earlier, in 1994, the tradition of the President of the Republic of Estonia's Folklore Collector's Award, which began in 1935, was revived. Every year, close to the anniversary of the Estonian Republic, the Estonian Folklore Archives announced the President's Folklore Collector's Award to members of the public who had been collecting folklore for a long time and/or had

made outstanding contributions to the annual thematic folklore collecting competitions. In this way, the link between the archive and the public was strengthened, the necessity of the folklore archive demonstrated, and its vitality proved. The collected material was also made public in accordance with the contractual conditions established between the archive and the donors. But it also underlined the importance of individual contributors to the folklore material—no team of folklorists could record folklore in such abundance as collaboration with the public could. Also, any publications at that time were based on the results of recent collecting campaigns, which meant that the public had quicker access to collected folklore materials, and both research activities and publications were more topically defined (Hiimäe 2002, 292).

There were also changes in the technical side of fieldwork and archiving – photocopiers arrived at the Literary Museum, computers replaced typewriters, which revolutionized both archiving⁸ and research, and new lighter and more portable recording devices were used in collecting. Even though the big summer expeditions to various places in Estonia continued for some time, as they had in the Soviet decades, active collecting through more specific, thematic surveys became more prominent and the expeditions were not so all-encompassing. The 1990s also brought more consistency for a simple detail such as the manuscript binding—3cm of empty binding space on the page margin became a more strictly observed rule—important in the following wave of digitization because it helps to significantly accelerate the technical handling of bound pages. The number of permanent employees in the archive in the Soviet era was usually around 4–8, and additional employees were hired if there were funds available; in the 1990s, the number of permanent employees was slightly higher, and young students gradually joined both the fieldwork and staff (Goršič 2025; Korb 1996, 250).

With the disciplinary and structural changes discussed previously, archival research emerged alongside collecting and was more influenced by personal preferences of researchers, who were also more motivated to obtain academic degrees (Sarv et al. 2023, 16–17), especially as the process became easier than under Soviet conditions. The financial requirements of funding programs also played a role in determining the direction of research. However, this also meant that there was always limited, sustainable funding for necessary archival work (Sarv et al. 2023, 17).

To summarize, the 1980s and 1990s changed the picture of collecting and research trends in Estonian folklore in general and in the Estonian Folklore Archives in particular. Especially with the advent of online media, methods for collecting folklore and the wealth of topics multiplied. The EFA was once again taking action towards collecting, archiving, researching, and disseminating knowledge, as once envisioned by Oskar Loorits (Loorits 1932) and seconded by other folklorists in later decades (e.g. Rüütel 1990, 321).

The Institutional Transformations of the Literary Museum

Regaining independence coupled with the state's orientation towards Europe opened opportunities for the Literary Museum to access EU funding. There were external funding opportunities available as well. For example, in 1992, with the help of the George Soros Foundation, new technical equipment was purchased for the Folklore Department for the preservation of old sound recordings. However, these new opportunities also brought new challenges. With the structural reform of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, and with a main direction towards research, the now Estonian Literary Museum as an institution was faced with project-based financing from 1995 onwards. This was a sudden change of direction for the entire institution and led to several years of financial struggle and hardship (Aru 2009).

In general, funding sources seemed abundant—there was state funding in the form of several foundations, such as the Estonian Research Foundation and the Estonian Cultural Endowment, and there was also the Foundation of Estonian National Culture, which came in handy when seeking support for collecting, researching, and publishing folklore. But since the funding structure was so rigidly project-based, the funding possibilities did not meet the long-term stability requirements for a memory institution to maintain consistent function and constant care of the invaluable holdings.

There were some positives to this, however. In addition to EFA, other departments of the Literary Museum also retained their original names. EFA continued as sub-department of the Literary Museum, which was named the Estonian Literary Museum in 1995. It is worth mentioning that the name of the institution created long-lasting disputes from the beginning – as early as in the 1940s, resurfacing even today. After the Soviet-style reorganization, museum staff highlighted the problematic nature of the name, noting in memos that the institution was not a museum⁹, and there were even no specific halls for exhibiting objects. There were efforts to make the building live up to its name, but it never really became a museum in the usual sense of the word, although it was open to the public for various activities such as public conferences, excursions, educational programs, etc.

This was not the end of the changes to the institution, which honored its history but also created instability. On August 8, 1997, the official status of the Estonian Literary Museum was changed from a sub-institution of the Academy of Sciences to a research and development institution that functioned under the Ministry of Education. Since 1998, researchers at the Estonian Folklore Archives have been mainly funded as a research group (Sarv et al. 2023, 16). In addition, as of January 1, 2000, the teams of folklorists working under *Eesti Keele Instituut* (the Institute of Estonian Language, former ILL, which underwent its own internal reorganization in 1993), many of whom were physically located in the building of the Literary Museum anyway, were officially integrated into the Estonian Literary Museum, and the collections integrated into the EFA. They now formed two departments, namely *Folkloristika osakond* (the Department of Folkloristics) and *Etnomusikoloogia osakond* (the Department of Ethnomusicology, the latter was dissolved in 2014 due to lack of funding). Thus, it can be

said that the cycle of restructuring initiated in the 1940s reached a certain conclusion at the turn of the twenty-first century, resulting in the stability of the discipline, but at the same time dependency on successful funding projects to continue both research and archival work.

Conclusions on Past and Present Uncertainties

It is understandable that the changes within the Estonian Folklore Archives cannot be treated in isolation from the changes in Estonian folkloristics in general, and that other folkloristic institutions in Estonia should not be left out of this period of uncertainty. Delving into the intricacies of each institution may end up blurring the picture, and further necessary discussion is left for future works to broaden the scope of the political, economic, and disciplinary changes of this turbulent era of the early 1990s.

The Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum are now only a few years away from their centenary. The transformations that occurred in the 1990s brought opportunities for the archive's researchers to develop the discipline, themselves, and the archive, to (re)connect with the rest of the world, and of course brought a handful of new problems in the form of competitive funding and evolving digital humanities. The logical outcome in this fluctuating situation was the return of the archive to its original name and function as both an archive and a research department. As uncertain as the last twenty years of the twentieth century were disciplinarily, economically, and politically, the period of uncertainty was overcome by the best decisions available at the time, whatever the feelings of those involved in the decisions and outcomes. It is much easier, in the process of political restructuring, to wipe out a field that has much to offer the mind and the soul, but no tangible monetary gain, than to agree to keep humanities research going. It is therefore gratifying to note that, in comparison with other countries in the world, Estonian folkloristics, and its institutions—the Estonian Literary Museum with the Estonian Folklore Archives and the Department of Folkloristics, and the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu—survived as a strong pillar of folkloristics for the country and for the rest of the world.

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List of Abbreviations

EFA, the Estonian Folklore Archives
ENM, the Estonian National Museum
FD, the Folklore Department of the State Literary Museum,
FS, the Folklore Sector of the Institute of Language and Literature
LM, the Literary Museum (short reference to full name, see footnote 4)

Notes

- 1 This division persisted until 2008, when a first joint MA programme of ethnology and folkloristics was established at the Institute of Cultural Research and Fine Arts, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tartu.
- 2 For further information on Estonian ethnology, see Jääts 2019.
- 3 In Estonian language, the word science (*teadus*) linguistically covers also the humanities research (*humanitaarteadused*).
- 4 During the years 1953–1990, the institutional name was the Literary Museum of the name of Fr. R. Kreutzwald of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR. For the sake of clarity, I refer to it throughout the article as Literary Museum, with the abbreviation LM.
- 5 In addition to her research work, Ingrid Rüütel has always been active in Estonian society. She has been married to Arnold Rüütel (1928–1924), who was in high political positions already in the Soviet era, and later became the President of Estonia (2001–2006).
- 6 Original quotes in Estonian translated by the author.
- 7 Definition used to denote contemporary folklore for a short period in the 1980s and 1990s.
- 8 The registration of incoming material has been digital since 1992, and all the other stages of archiving gradually moved towards digitization.
- 9 Today, this is a slogan for many of the staff of the Literary Museum, saying: “This is not a museum, but a memory institution!”

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The Irish Folklore Commission and the Irish Civil War: Uncertainties in Silence (1923–1935)

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Abstract

The Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) was formed twelve years after the end of the Irish Civil War. Members involved in the creation of the IFC fell on both sides of the 1921–1922 Treaty Debate. Did the uncertainties of a civil war influence Irish ethnographic collections? The collecting of folklore maintained the expectations of vernacular culture demarcated in the nineteenth century. The garnering of traditional material ran parallel to Ireland's cultural revival and language revival. The IFC assisted in the oral recordings carried out in the 1950s by the Bureau of Military History Collection (BMH), but further collaboration with a sense of similar aims did not occur at the time. Now, in the age of the digitized archive, it is timely to reassess such repositories and the relationships between them.

Keywords: Irish folklore and history; cultural revival; civil war; nationalism

Introduction¹

Across Europe, throughout the nineteenth century, nations engaged in cultural revolutions that shaped nationalism and independence. The role of tradition archives in Europe advanced in tandem with the growth and development of self-governance in several European countries. Despite the imbrication of cultural and political concerns, the friction and divide between them were evident in war and conflict. Ireland was one such nation of vying groups and organizations that often-made decisions with competing visions of working towards a cultural revolution or political independence (Leerssen 2015). The collation of culturally significant material by those interested relied heavily on the perception of the vernacular traditions as unadulterated from a time when Ireland was self-sufficient prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169 (Crooks 2022).

Ireland saw continuous conflict from the 1916 Rising to the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) until the end of the Irish Civil War in 1923. Cultural developments were severely disrupted. The two dominant political parties in independent Ireland derive from their position during the Irish Civil War. *Fianna Fáil* (Soldiers of Destiny) are descended from those against the Treaty negotiated with Britain at the end of 1921, and *Cumann na nGaedheal* (Society of the Irish) were the Pro-Treaty side and were in power in Ireland from 1923–1932. *Cumann na nGaedheal* were to merge with like-

mindful organizations and become Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish). Attention was given to the importance of Irish language and culture in the early days of the newly formed state regardless of which side one took on the Treaty debate.

The Irish Folklore Commission

The impact of tradition archives through the advancement of digitization and a focus on the digital humanities merit examination to recognize aspects that the original players may not have intended. Today, online materials can be searched, examined, and disseminated in ways unimaginable in the first half of the twentieth century. One example of such an archive is the Irish Folklore Commission (hereafter IFC), now the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin. It was formed in 1935 and was disbanded in 1970. The foundation of this Commission occurred twelve years after the end of the Irish Civil War (1922–1923). The formation of the IFC followed the creation of the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1926 and the Irish Folklore Institute in 1930 (Ó Catháin 2005). Due to the public lives of many of the members involved in the creation of the IFC, it is possible to surmise that there were supporters on both sides of the 1922–1923 Treaty Debate.

Full-time and part-time collectors carried out folklore and ethnographic fieldwork with the IFC. They worked at a local and regional level in the name of the national. The collection comprises varied documentary formats that make up a “tradition archive,” including audio, visual, manuscript, and rare printed materials, documenting all aspects of human endeavor and traditional knowledge, from material culture to oral literature, language, and artistic expression (Briody 2007). This work occurred within rural communities, primarily Irish-speaking, while cities and towns increased in population during this time.

The tumultuous history in Ireland from the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence, and until the end of the Civil War in 1923 temporarily halted the more cultural pursuits of the Celtic Revival and language revival that began in the nineteenth century. The return of such activities began in earnest in the 1920s after the formation of the new State. The Civil War, unsurprisingly, proved to be highly divisive amongst the leading figures in Irish culture and politics. The members of the IFC played several roles throughout this time in Irish history. Ultimately, the leading figure who led the Irish Civil War and was adamantly opposed to the Treaty was the President of the Executive Council in 1932, Éamon de Valera (1882–1975), who would approve the IFC despite many of its members’ strong commitment to the Treaty. Much academic and scholarly focus has been given to Éamon de Valera’s image of the ideal Ireland (Ó Cruaí 1983; 2022; Fanning, 2009). The radio address that is often quoted in order to demonstrate de Valera’s vision of Ireland was “On Language & the Irish Nation” to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) where a conservative outlook with a lack of expression of progress or modernity is expressed (de Valera 1943). It is not difficult to see how collecting folklore greatly supports the prospect of de Valera’s Ireland continuing to exist.

The sense of an overall collective may often be given to an organization or a com-

mittee. The combined assembly does not consider that each committee is formed by and made up of individuals. These individuals may have their agenda or sense of purpose for the organization in which they work. The membership of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935 will illustrate how cultural objectives overcame any differences between the various players relating to the Civil War. That said, the uncertainties of the silences of previous military and political activity must have had an impact. The similarities that all possess are that they are dedicated, passionate, male, mostly academic, and including representation of the Roman Catholic clergy.

The tactics embraced by scholars in capturing and promoting Irish culture in the 1920s and 1930s indicate that they were working in a time of national struggle rather than seeking a new identity. They drew on older portrayals of what it meant to be Irish. Below is a succinct note on each of the founding members of the Irish Folklore Commission and their contributions to Irish society and scholarship, along with the impact their involvement may have had on the organization. Committee work may often be viewed in the collective, and the individual impact or contribution to the body as a whole is not considered.² That said, there is frequently one individual whose name is identified with a cultural institution, and in Ireland, that name is Séamus Ó Duilearga (1899–1980). The development of folklore studies and folkloristics in Ireland cannot be thoroughly examined without the inclusion of Ó Duilearga's contributions to the field. His life's work parallels the professionalization of folklore collecting on the island.

Two leading figures appealed to the Fianna Fáil government for the formation of a state-supported initiative on the collecting of folklore in Ireland: Séamus Ó Duilearga and Michael Tierney (1894–1975). Ó Duilearga was to become the Director of the Irish Folklore Commission and spearheaded folklore and folklore studies in Ireland (Mac Cárthaigh 2009). He was very supportive of the Treaty in 1922. He was a contributor to *Saorstát Éireann: Irish Free State Official Handbook* (Hobson, 1932), which was a project of the first *Cumann na nGaedheal* government and edited by civil servant Bulmer Hobson (1883–1969) and published in 1932 (Brown 2017). Hobson was originally from Belfast and a former member of the Volunteers and IRB before his contributions to the *Saorstát Éireann: Irish Free State* (Maume 2013). Ó Duilearga was the main contact point with the Department of Finance and with de Valera's office. Although Ó Duilearga was never involved politically with any aspect of the conflicts with Britain or amongst his fellow Irishmen, he had close working connections with the UCD Professor, Eoin Mac Neill (1867–1945), who was a leading figure supporting of the Treaty (Maume, Edwards, 2013). It appears Ó Duilearga must have placed all of that aside to work with the Fianna Fáil government that took office in 1932 and was responsible for having the IFC fully up and running by 1935.

Professor Michael Tierney was the professor of Greek at University College Dublin and Eoin Mac Neill's son-in-law (McCartney 2009).³ He was also a member of the Irish Senate. While still an undergraduate, Tierney joined the Irish Volunteers, a nationalist paramilitary organization, at their inaugural meeting in the Rotunda in Dublin in November 1913. He was also a leading intellectual in the Blueshirt movement in Ireland, a proto-fascist organization in Ireland that merged with *Cumann na nGaedheal* when they became Fine Gael. When the contradictory mobilization orders were given at Eas-

ter 1916, Tierney was on holiday. He did believe that Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order was the correct decision on the Rising. A supporter of the Treaty in December 1921, he became deeply involved in post-Treaty politics, being honorary secretary of *Cumann na nGaedheal* 1923–1933 (McCartney 2009). He was the only member of the IFC who an active member of the Dáil in 1932 was, and he retained his pro-Treaty stance throughout his career. Tierney's commitment to the IFC is demonstrated by the fact that he was the prime mover behind the transfer of University College Dublin from the city center to the suburban campus on Belfield, where the IFC would eventually be housed.

As further members of the initial committee of the IFC were appointed, the dedication to the Irish language came to the fore, and in particular, language activities in Ulster that were now partitioned mainly from the rest of the Irish State. Again, the language revival was a core aspect of the cultural revival, to be found regardless of positions on the Irish Treaty. All committee members were voluntary, apart from Ó Duilearga, who received a salary from University College Dublin. The following descriptions give a sense of the men involved in this initiative and the various agendas they brought to the table in collecting Irish culture.

Munsterman, Professor Éamonn Ó Donnchadha (1876–1953), was from County Cork and published books to help teachers teach through Irish (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú, n.d. a).⁴ He was active in *Conradh na Gaeilge* and an Irish Lecturer at University College Cork. He strongly sympathized with Sinn Féin during the War of Independence and continued this support as he was against the Treaty in 1923. He acted as a judge in Republican courts. Such courts were erected to create a space to carry out justice outside the courts of the Crown (Casey 1970). He composed the song *An Buachaillín Bán*, [The White Boy] which is still found and sung among the folk today. That said, he does not appear to have contributed to folklore scholarship. Might he have been sidelined due to his political position politically?

Seán Mac Giollarnáth (1880–1970) was a District Judge and one of the best collectors of folklore in the west of Ireland, particularly Conamara (Morley 2009a).⁵ The recent publication of *Conamara Chronicles* (Mac Giollarnáth, Mac Con Iomaire, Robinson, eds., 2022) is a translation of *Annála Beaga ó Iorras Aithneach* [Chronicles from Iorras Aithneach] (Mac Giollarnáth 1941). It is a testament to Mac Giollarnáth's lasting impact on folklore studies in Ireland. This publication is one of the best folklore collections published in the twentieth century. Originally from the Ballinasloe district in County Galway, he was meticulous in his transcriptions of his fieldwork. He spent some time living and working in London. While there, he became a member of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (Conradh na Gaeilge 2024)⁶ and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) before returning to Ireland in 1908.⁷ He was a member of the Irish Volunteers but was away in Galway at the time of the Easter Rising in 1916, and he, too, was appointed as a judge to the Republican courts in order to carry out justice against the Crown court. He was active with the Folklore of Ireland Society. He published a number of articles in its journal, *Béaloidias*, *The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society*, but after 1935, there was a dramatic decline in Mac Giollarnáth's activities with the IFC in Dublin.

Liam Price (1891–1967) was also a District Judge and an expert in placename lore (O’Brien, Lunney 2009).⁸ In his approach, he was more of a historian than a folklorist and, perhaps, more of an antiquarian. Again, many publications from this period were produced by him. He happened to be in Dublin at the time of the Easter Rising, and afterward, he spent a year in France, where his interest in Irish politics began to grow, and he supported Sinn Féin. He, too, practiced in the Republican Courts before the signing of the Treaty, which he supported. He was among the first district justices appointed after establishing the Irish Free State. His contribution to scholarship does not appear in the realm of folklore studies. He seems to have taken a more historical approach. Ó Duilearga does not seem to have worked with Price, and it is the IFC’s archivist, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, who maintained a professional relationship with Price. This relationship is evident, for example, in the collecting work of photographed houses and landscapes flooded by the Blessington reservoir in the 1930s in County Wicklow (Corlett and Weaver, 2002).

The following figures may not have been vocal about their political position, and many may have held a neutral stance. If not politically, they were involved culturally and dedicated to developing the newly founded State. Father Lorcán Ó Muireadhaigh (1883–1941), a Roman Catholic diocesan priest, was actively engaged with collecting folklore, music, and song in his case in the context of County Louth. In particular, he gave great attention to the Irish language in Louth, which was not in a Gaeltacht area but where Irish as a daily vernacular was fast disappearing (Quinn 2013). Ó Muireadhaigh, as a founding member of the County Louth Archaeological Society, demonstrated the impact of local history and archaeology on folklore studies and collecting vernacular culture within particular areas at a regional level. After the Irish Civil War, the partition of Ulster had cut Louth off from its cultural hinterland. Ó Muireadhaigh believed this would accelerate the decline of Irish in the parts of Ulster that were not included in the partitioned counties. In 1924, Ó Muireadhaigh founded the magazine *An tUltach* (the Ulster-person) to preserve and promote Ulster Irish. In 1925, he was on a committee of fifteen elected at a convention to revive *Conradh na Gaeilge* after a severe decline in its membership and activities during the Civil War. His membership in the IFC in 1935 would have supported his efforts in promoting the importance of Irish in Ulster.

Peadar Mac Fhionnlaoich (1856–1942), penname Cú Uladh, was from the Donegal Gaeltacht and engaged with *Conradh na Gaeilge* from the earliest days at the end of the nineteenth century. He especially encouraged young people and published stories and plays in Irish (Morley 2009b).⁹ He was another strong advocate for the promotion of Irish in Ulster and would have encouraged the collecting of folk traditions in County Donegal in the early days of the IFC.

Séamus Ó Casaide (1854–1942) helped establish *Cumann na bPíobairí* (Society of the Pipers) and *Conradh na Gaeilge*’s library (Morley 2009c).¹⁰ It is the words of those who knew Ó Casaide that we find the dedication he had for the preservation and commitment to the language:

In the first half of this century there was no Gael more diligent or more learned than Séamus Ó Casaide. He spent his life collecting and disseminating information on subjects related, in one way or another, to the history, language and literature of the Gaelic. (Ní Mhuiríosa, 1982)

The generosity required in ethnographic fieldwork is often fuelled by the aspirations of the collector. Ó Casaide may have been better known for his knowledge found in publications and archives, but again, his support for educating the general public may be seen in this quote:

I have never encountered anyone who had a more accurate knowledge of Irish language manuscripts and publications, of history local and the common history of the country, or Irish literature. And a more eager scholar could not be found to help a writer or to present his precise knowledge to whoever needs it. (Ó Liatháin 1943)¹¹

As this ambitious initiative began in Ireland in the 1930s, it would have been crucial to harness not only the knowledge within Irish society but also to work with people who shared the vision of the value and the importance of the material to be collected. The decisions on what cultural substance was to be sought after was often realized by those who connected the wisdom found in the vernacular with the information found in the literary traditions.

Énri Ó Muirgheasa (1874–1945) was a secondary school teacher and one of the founders of the Louth Historical and Archaeological Society, and he was a founder member of *An Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann* (The Folklore of Ireland Society) in 1926 (Ó Ciardha 2009).¹² He was from Co Monaghan and was well-known and published under the name Henry Morris. He was greatly influenced at an early age by the newly formed *Conradh na Gaeilge*. He founded its first Co. Monaghan branch in Lisdonnan, Donaghmoyne when Ó Muirgheasa became aware of the decline of fluent Irish speakers in his local community in Co Monaghan. He contacted the folklorist Seosamh Laoide, who was amazed to hear long hero tales from local storytellers. His publications are still critical for folklorists and song scholars. His contributions to *An Claidheamh Soluis* [The Sword of Light]¹³ often paralleled material found in the tradition and the engagement with nation-building through contemporary printed newspapers, but with information that was looked upon as if it had been the culture of the Gaels for centuries (Ó Ciardha 2009). The uncertainty of the future may have impacted the continuous return to what was viewed as “tradition.”

It is often difficult to distinguish the promotion of Irish from the collecting of folk traditions; this is a prime example. Again, the continuation in the promotion of what was perceived as Irish culture continues as it did before the Civil War with little regard for positions in relation to the Treaty. It is also worth noting that Ó Muirgheasa’s connections with Father Lorcán Ó Muireadhaigh demonstrate the continued collaborations in local activity contributing to the national narrative and objectives of the Irish State.

Professor Éamonn Ó Tuathail (1982/3–1956) was active as a folklorist in the field and collected vast amounts of oral poetry, songs, language, placenames, and associated lore. *Rainn agus Amhráin* [Rhymes and Songs], his first book, is still a classic (Breathnach 2019). *Scéalta Mhuintir Luinigh* [Stories from Muintir Luinigh] (1933) was recently translated and republished (Ó Tuathail, 2015. [1933]). He was a Professor of Irish at Trinity College Dublin and was very active in *Conradh na Gaeilge*. In 1925, he was also a member of the *Conradh na Gaeilge* committee appointed to reform and enliven the movement after the disruption of the Civil War and his work on the IFC followed in a similar vein. Ó Tuathail's contributions towards the teaching of Irish in the first decade of the twentieth century were still remembered and documented in the 1930s:

In 1907 a weekly Irish class taught by Éamonn Ó Tuathail was inaugurated under the auspices of the Gaelic League in the Aghnafarcon district. The work continued up to 1909 and it was a huge success. The older people who could speak Irish took a keen interest in the classes, and their grown-up sons and daughters assiduously threw themselves into the study of Irish. Unfortunately, the classes after 1909 lapsed, and with the lapse disappeared for ever the hope of securing the preservation of another Gaedhealtacht. The following is a list of some of the grand old speakers now gone to their reward.¹⁴

Fionán Mac Coluim (1875–1966) was a collector of folklore. Although born in Antrim, he lived in Kerry and became “a Kerryman” in the southwest Kerry area, which became a focal point for Irish heritage and culture (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú, n.d. b). He encouraged many to develop an interest in folklore and especially songs. He was very active as a teacher in *Conradh na Gaeilge*. He was known for a number of publications and was a musician, singer, and dancer. He, too, became a member of the IRB during his time living and working in London. Allegedly, Scotland Yard reported his “dangerous activities” to the India Office, and he was encouraged to discontinue such activity.¹⁵ He contributed greatly to the language movement in Co. Kerry as a result of his public commitment to all things Irish, and in 1920, the special British police force referred to as the Black and Tans burnt his home and destroyed his entire library and all of his manuscripts.

Monsignor Eric Mac Fhinn (1895–1987) was known in Conamara as Fr. Fair. He was a Professor of Education at University College Galway (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú, n.d. c).¹⁶ He published *Ar Aghaidh* [Onwards]¹⁷ singlehandedly for decades. This work was a journal which contained a great deal of folklore not found elsewhere. He was passionate about Irish and dedicated much of his life to supporting Ireland to becoming an Irish-speaking country. In the 1940s, he was to become the Chairman of the IFC.

Professor Daniel Binchy (1899–1989) was the leading expert in early Irish and legal texts. He was involved early on when the perception of folk culture was that there were direct connections to the early Irish if not the pre-Christian period, which was later to be termed the “Nativist” school of thought (Johnston 2003, Kennedy and Edwards 2012).¹⁸

Professor Osborn J Bergin (1873–1950) remains one of the most renowned academ-

ics in Irish scholarship, and his work on Bardic poetry is essential to modern scholarship (Murphy, Lunney 2019).¹⁹ His connections with German academics facilitated engagement with German scholars in folklore studies. Binchy and Bergin may not be easily remembered for their contributions to the IFC. However, it demonstrates the academic direction the IFC aspired to in its membership and the scholarly weight such an organization could gain.

The Department of Finance representative was León Ó Broin (1902–1990), a member of Sinn Féin who had spent time in prison for his war-time activities in 1920 (White 2009).²⁰ He wrote several plays, history books, and other publications, including nine books in Irish. By the time of the Civil War, he had become a supporter of the Treaty and joined the Free State Army as a commissioned officer. After the Civil War, he was a civil servant in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and in the Department of Finance.

The civil servant Lughaidh Maguidhir (dates unknown), appointed by the government, was an IFC member from the Department of Education. Further information has yet to come to light regarding this particular member of the IFC. Finally, very little is known of Fr. John G. O'Neill, but we can see he was a member of the clergy, and the Dr. Pádraig Breathnach (dates unknown) listed in the documentation on IFC membership may or may not be the person found within the Ainm website database (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú, n.d. d).

The only non-Irish founding member of the IFC was the Director of the National Museum of Ireland, and this was Adolf Mahr (1887–1951) in 1935. He was not in Ireland during the period of unrest in the 1920s, and his time in Ireland was limited as he returned to his homeland in Germany to support the Nazi party at the end of the 1930s. The underlying connection between the IFC and the Museum is evident from the outset. This connection may have led to a perception that material culture was better suited to the National Museum of Ireland and was not a priority of the IFC (McGuinness and Maume 2009, Briody 2010).²¹ The emphasis on the oral tradition and, in particular, material in Irish always left material culture in second place. This emphasis on the native language of Ireland is found throughout the IFC membership.

As the material of the IFC is becoming more available online through the *Dúchas* website many of the members of the IFC also feature in entries submitted to the repository and other collections that are becoming available online. One example is material from Fionán Mac Coluim, which may also be found in the Doegen Collection from the Royal Irish Academy (Doegen 2009). As further repositories and archival materials become more available online and in digital formats, it will not only be vernacular and folkloric collections that allow researchers to engage with a perspective that would have been difficult, if not possible, before access through one's laptop screen. A deeper, perhaps fuller, analysis will be possible as unlikely material can now be examined side by side and almost from a bird's eye view. The material collected by the IFC was clearly set in perceptions of culture that were formed in the nineteenth century. The skills involved in collecting that material could assist other bodies engaged in collecting work. For example, interviewers drew on or emulated the skills of folklore collectors in gathering material relating to Ireland's time of conflict.

The Bureau of Military History

Following the conflict and strife in Ireland, the return to cultural aims and objectives resumed. Uncertainties of the future State were not taken on confidently, and there would be a new approach or emphasis on society. The continued sense of the Irish State as nurturing the perceived homogenous nature of Irish culture, particularly Irish vernacular culture, contributed to the cohesive approach of the IFC.

The Bureau of Military History Collection 1913–1921 is a collection of witness statements, photographs, and voice recordings that were collected by the Irish State between 1947 and 1957, in order to gather primary source material for the revolutionary period in Ireland from 1913 to 1921. The BMH was established in 1947 by Oscar Traynor TD (1886–1963), Minister for Defence. Minister Traynor was a former Captain in the Irish Volunteers. Groups that were included in the BMH were the Irish Volunteers and, subsequently, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), *Cumann na mBan*, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), *Sinn Féin*, and the Irish Citizen Army. The BMH is a collection of 1,773 witness statements, 334 sets of contemporary documents, 42 sets of photographs, and 12 voice recordings.

In 1935, the approach to collecting folk culture may have appeared to be unrelated to Ireland's period of conflict. It was as if that past was now hidden, although it perhaps existed in individual relationships and collaborations. Cooperation of all political allegiances or parties was facilitated or perhaps even encouraged by the IFC and its emphasis on material in Irish, above all other aspects of culture. This commitment to perceptions of traditional culture extended far beyond the board and the staff of the IFC, including their informants and contributors. Although many members of the IFC did not align with anti-treaty views during the Civil War, there was agreement on the perceptions of Irish culture and tradition, prior to the Anglo-Norman period on both sides.

That was not the case with the BMH, as many within Irish society who opposed the Treaty would not have contributed to the BMH. Those who did not support the BMH did, however, support the IFC's efforts. As the Irish Civil War was not fought along religious lines, the cultural links were not broken and were easily taken up again as Ireland moved on during the Free State period. The display of strength found in this unity of identity was clearly demonstrated in Ireland. Apart from the political aspirations, there was something tangible about a perceived common identity and associated goals (Morrison 2017).

Viewing ethnographic material in a far more holistic endeavor today allows for a much more inclusive and insightful approach to historical material brought together during the creation of folklore archives. The BMH demonstrates the personal stories and narratives of what happened during the Easter Rising and the War of Independence (McGarry 2011). The examination of the digital product and its relation to its original creators and creation appears to have been capturing data in silos. This digital product can now be examined and explored through a socio-political, ethnographic stance illustrating the folk imagination as captured by the IFC. The combined digitized product also illustrates evocative memories of a war-torn country that are brought to-

gether in a way that has never been fully envisioned. As we examine ethnographic, semi-structured interviews side by side, we can gain a fuller picture of life in Ireland during the first quarter of the twentieth century. In order to illustrate this, the following excerpt taken from the BMH gives an emotional connection to a calendar custom that may not be found in the IFC:

The hearthunger [sic] of wanting to see my wife and children was with me from the moment of my capture. I had decided to take the risk of being with them for Halloween, 1922, but the fates had decided against me. Now that I was on my feet and my home being quite near the prison, it was constantly in my thoughts.²²

Most of the material in the BMH is written transcriptions, but the Bureau's voice recordings that do exist were produced with the cooperation of the IFC from 1950 to 1951.

The Bureau's twelve voice recordings were produced with the co-operation of the Irish Folklore Commission during the period 1950 to 1951. Witnesses selected for recording, according to the Bureau's criteria, were deemed "top level of importance" and unique in some outstanding way from the point of view of historians.²³

This approach would not have been the norm for a collector from the IFC as there would not have been an attempt to seek material from those with a perceived "higher" contribution to that of the historian. As witnessed in this age of the digital humanities, the digitization of previous archival collections is being brought together so that further critical engagement is required to allow the nuances of history to be identified and commented on. The workings and processes behind such collections should be examined to ascertain more clearly how the uncertainties of civil war did or did not influence Irish ethnographic collections. We may now be able to glean further understandings of these organizations that could not have been recognized by the participants at the time. That said, we must acknowledge the very different aims and objectives of the ethnographic semi-structured interviews and queries. There were differences in intent as there was a much more rigid identifiable sense of what comprised folklore material and what to collect from vernacular culture than the approach of BMH.

The purpose or purposes of collected ethnographic material were clearly identified as to what it was to reflect or represent. Further ethnographic material through inquiry and interviews, now held in the BMH, was sought to determine who qualified to receive a pension due to their involvement in military activities between 1916 and 1921. These interviews have contributed greatly to augmenting the national perspective with the vernacular material and details of the lived lives in the individual informant's narrative. The substance that is core to the broader approach to folklore collecting is demonstrated through the interviews conducted for the BMH. The impact of material often sought through ethnographic fieldwork may reveal information that is not found in most historical records, and it is information that would not be

gathered or collected through other record-keeping means. Often, a glimpse into the uncertainties of daily life during times of war comes to light in the BMH records. This possibility was not taken into account when Ireland developed its ethnographic repository of vernacular life and culture in the IFC. The cultural, as opposed to political, focus on folklore material does not acknowledge the political worldviews expressed by individual, narrative accounts. The IFC's focus was on what it understood to be folklore based on the working definitions of the time. Contemporary definitions of folklore would include the unregulated trivialities of daily life (customary behavior) and narrative accounts (legends/personal experience narratives). Such accounts form the basis of many ethnographic studies.

The BMH collectors were not trained ethnographers, as such training would not have been common at the time, nor did they claim to be so trained. The recording team was made up of Bureau staff that included army officers and civil servants, as well as a number of interviewing officers who travelled throughout Ireland during the Bureau's lifetime to interview survivors of the period. Interviewing officers filled out an opinion sheet on each person being interviewed.

The IFC assisted in the technology of making audio recordings but did not engage with the training or sharing of skills and ideas. Now that the two repositories are currently being digitized and uploaded online, researchers can examine the digital product and relate it to its original creators and creation. The material can be viewed from a socio-political, ethnographic stance. Future folklorists will expose the fault lines in the foundational sense of how vernacular culture was produced, circulated, and transmitted, just as future folklorists will doubtless find fault lines in the ethnographic process today and, perhaps, even with digitization itself.

Final Thoughts

In 1935, with the inception of the IFC, there was a chance to engage with the uncertainties and challenges of New Ireland. However, community members aligned with previous aims and objectives around cultural heritage despite years of war. Tensions were still felt after the Irish Civil War between members of the IFC though, which were quite nuanced and primarily evident through oral narratives of those who knew these men in subsequent years. The examination of such individuals shed light on the understanding that those members of the IFC who did engage with those who engaged in the War of Independence but were on the side of the Treaty in 1923, and those who were against agreeing to the Treaty proposed by Britain in 1921 as well as those that remained neutral throughout. By the 1930s, Séamus Ó Duilearga and Michael Tierney, who were adamantly opposed to engaging with the Civil War, were able to work with Éamon de Valera and work towards what is now one of the largest repositories of vernacular culture found in the world. The drive towards cultural aspirations was so evident members from all sides were able to work past the uncertainties that may have continued after the Civil War. If one views vernacular culture as superfluous to life, its power and impact in Ireland in the twentieth century demonstrates the power of collecting cultural identity and to what lengths may be taken to ensure this happens.

Notes

- 1 This article was inspired by a realization of the fact that two leading figures in the development of folkloristics in Ireland, put their political allegiances aside and worked with the opposition for the sake of 'salvaging the culture of Ireland for the nation.' Gratitude must be given to the many readers, reviewers and editors that have contributed to this piece of work.
- 2 Before this material was fleshed out with the supports of the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (DIB) and Ainm; the draft comments here have been collected through oral testimony over the past number of years in academia.
- 3 Tierney's engagement with the IFC is not singled out in his entry of DIB. but his interest in creating a folklore department in University College Dublin is included (McCartney 2009).
- 4 Ó Donnchadha is recognized in the Irish online biography site Ainm but not in the DIB; his contributions to the IFC are not recognized on his Ainm entry (Breathnach n.d., a).
- 5 Mac Giollarnáth's DIB entry gives the title of 'folklorist' in the first line and documents his contributions to the field (Morley 2009a).
- 6 *Conradh na Gaeilge* is translated into the Gaelic League but often remains *Conradh na Gaeilge* in English. It has been the leading organization for promoting Irish since its foundation in 1893 and is still very active in Irish social and cultural promotion to this day.
- 7 The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was a secretive, revolutionary body that followed on from the Fenian movement of the 1850s and 1860s. The IRB was committed to the using force to establish an independent Irish Republic.
- 8 Liam Price's DIB entry recognizes his membership in the IFC in his entry (O'Brien, Lunney 2009).
- 9 Peadar Mac Fhionnlaoich's DIB entry does not refer to his contributions to folklore studies in Ireland, but he was known as a collector of local traditions in Co Donegal, and the author of this article has collected accounts from members of his community that recall him coming to the house in order to collect folklore when they were children. There was one account where a woman recalls her mother reading stories in the Legion of Mary, *Maria Legionis*, in order to have material to give to Mac Fhionnlaoich (Morley 2009b).
- 10 Séamus Ó Casaide's contributions to folklore are not recognized for his DIB entry, but, again, as so many fellow members of the IFC, his work as a language activist contributed greatly to publications on piping traditions in Ireland (Morley 2009c).
- 11 When he died on 8 April 1943, Donnchadh Ó Liatháin had this to say about him.
- 12 Ó Muirgheasa's contributions to folklore studies continue to have an impact on folklore studies in Ireland today, and this is reflected in his DIB account (Ó Ciardha 2009).
- 13 *An Claidheamh Soluis* was an Irish nationalist newspaper published in the early 20th century by *Conradh na Gaeilge*.
- 14 National Folklore Collection, Schools' Collection Manuscript vol 799, page 226. This appears to be from the teacher, Seamus Breathnach, in St Peter's School, Phibsborough, Co Dublin, 15.10.1936. As he has this dated before the Schools' Scheme start date of 1937, he may have included it due to the pertinent information he believed it contained.
- 15 This knowledge is said to have been transmitted orally, but the former scholar and founder of the Irish Folk Music section of University College Dublin, Breandán Breathnach (1912–1985), is said to have held to written documentation. It is included in Mac Coluim's Ainm entry (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú n.d. b).
- 16 Mac Fhinn's activities in folklore are recognized in his entry of Ainm, but he is not identified as a 'folklorist' (Breathnach, Ní Mhurchú n.d c).
- 17 *Ar Aghaidh* was the publication in Irish that was in circulation in Co Galway from 1931–1970.

- 18 Binchy's contributions towards the development of folklore studies are not included in his DIB entry (Kennedy and Edwards 2012).
- 19 Bergin's DIB entry does not reference his membership to the IFC or his contributions in this regard (Murphy, 2019).
- 20 Ó Broin's role as a civil servant overseeing of the IFC is included in his DIB entry (White 2009).
- 21 Mahr's contributions to introducing folklife and craft traditions in the National Museum of Ireland are recognized in his Dictionary of Irish Biography entry. This article examines the initiative between the pre-cursor of the IFC, the Irish Folklore Institute, and the National Museum of Ireland, which is engaging with the Department of Education in order to systematically gather information on Holy Wells through the National Schools. The IFC Schools' Collection would occur between 1937 and 1938. Mahr left Ireland in 1940 to return to Germany in order to support the German war effort. At the end of World War II, he sent a letter to De Valera requesting his position back in the National Museum. He was denied this request (McGuinness, Maume 2009).
- 22 Witness: Joseph O'Connor, 2 I/C IV, Boland's Mills area, Dublin, 1916; OC 3 Battalion, Dublin, 1917 – 1922. Bureau of Military History collection, WS Ref #: 544, <https://bmh.militaryarchives.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0544.pdf#page=31>, Accessed on September 29, 2024.
- 23 An introduction to the online archive of BMH recordings: <https://bmh.militaryarchives.ie/voice-recordings/>. Excerpts of the twelve recordings are found online.

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Responses

The Legacy of Folklore Collections: Navigating Historical Uncertainties and Contemporary Relevance

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‘History’ is an ancient word, unambiguous and relatively low in real or potential ideological weight. /.../ ‘Folklore’, however, is a word bulging with ideological weight /.../ Scholars have constantly questioned its definitions and indeed the very usefulness of the concept itself. (Ó Giolláin 2000, 2).

Folklore and folklore studies are words with many connotations. Folklore has been extensively documented and utilized for various agendas. It has been framed as a representation of national or local culture but also as an expression of the creativity of particular social classes or groups. Traditions and archived folklore texts can justify legal consequences, such as the preservation of cultural sites. The political and ideological uses of folklore have varied significantly over time and across regions. During the 19th century’s nation-building processes, tales and songs were celebrated as symbols of national identity. In contrast, during the Soviet era, folklore of the same people could be studied and valorized as an expression of the creative spirit of workers across the diverse Soviet states. The various ways of instrumental-

izing folklore and folkloristics have created uncertainty about the subject matter.

Modern folklore research emphasizes reflexivity—recognizing the constructed nature of research objects and questioning the narratives created by earlier scholars. Historians and folklorists grapple with the impossibility of fully reconstructing the past, as Leopold von Ranke’s aspiration to present the past as it truly was — *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* — is unattainable. Reflexive approaches highlight the limitations of what can be asserted about history and culture, adding different layers of doubt.

However, with so much uncertainty about the goals, subject matter, and methods of folklore studies, the folklore collections—tangible sets of objects that describe the intangible culture—continue to exist as material proof of the work carried out in the past. The early 20th century saw the founding of ‘tradition archives’ in Europe. Institutionalizing folklore studies marked a broader trend across the continent, where documenting traditions became a prominent cultural and scholarly endeavor. Folklore collections “demonstrated the weight of the discipline” (Bendix 1997, 156). After the performative turn in folkloristics, the institutional landscape has shifted; the number of “tradition archives” is not growing but rather diminishing.

However, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pages and minutes of recordings belonging to folklore collections continue to be stored in various archives for traditional culture. The development of folklore studies might reveal a variety of doubts about theories, methods, or goals. However, the authors of the articles in this volume have concentrated on discussions related to some of the most

important folklore collections in several peripheries of Europe: Estonia, Finland, Ireland, and Turkey. These are countries with strong traditions in folklore studies while being historically “marginalized in relation to the dominant political, economic and cultural powers of Europe” (Ó Giolláin 2000, 31). The history of folkloristics and ethnology in these countries has been thoroughly documented and analyzed. The texts in this volume read against the grain, showing alternatives to the dominant narratives about the motives and methods of documenting folk life and managing the collected materials.

Understanding the content and context of folklore collections is essential for their modern relevance. As Kelly Fitzgerald states: “The impact of tradition archives through the advancement of digitization and a focus on the digital humanities merit examination to recognize aspects that the original players may not have intended” (Fitzgerald, p. 89). Digital accessibility allows a fresh view of the collections and collectors, as Fitzgerald has shown in her article about the views held by the Irish Folklore Collection’s founding members. Once digital, folklore texts can be used as data for research purposes on a scale the collectors could not have imagined, spiking interest among wide audiences. For example, Jamshid J. Tehrani’s study of the evolution of two types of folk tales (Tehrani 2013) was one of the papers that gained the most public attention from the open access mega journal *PLOS One* in the year when it was published. It was widely discussed because of its innovative interdisciplinary approaches, also in scientific journals like *National Geographic* and *Nature* (Dohm 2014). However, the critics also highlighted the limitations of its dataset

(Lajoye et al. 2013). While the number of readers or amount of media coverage are not indicators of the value of research results, this kind of attention is unusual for a folklore-related article. Such examples demonstrate the potential and challenges of digitized archives for large-scale analysis. Access to folkloristic text corpora allows exciting results that are discussed in an interdisciplinary fashion. However, creating a well-balanced corpus of texts is complicated because of the situatedness of folklore texts that have been denoted, archived, digitized, or published.

There are inherent biases in documentation processes that create doubts about the usability of the materials. Sanna Kähkönen’s article highlights the difficulties a researcher encounters when dealing with historically fragmented data, showing that “uncertainty arises when the research material does not allow us to know how the knowledge was received, how it changed in the process, and what impact it ultimately had” (Kähkönen, p. 53). The lack of self-reflection of the researcher is typical for the fieldwork that was conducted before the Writing Culture debates: we do not know about the doubts of the collectors in their communication with interlocutors, from whom we only might know their names, ages, and occupations (Birkalan-Gedik, p. 12). From the general goals of researchers or collecting campaigns, we can deduce more about why specific texts are incorporated in the collections. For this, Kähkönen’s analysis of the ethnographic descriptions of Carelia in the media during the Continuation War in Finland is enlightening. While ethnologists and folklorists were important actors in the social debates, the research communication was easily blurred with propaganda. Awareness of the political

agency of researchers might lead to uncertainty about the credibility of ethnographic knowledge production at times of crisis, but also in general.

The articles in this volume show how uncertainties rise when society is going through transformation periods. The transformation can be gradual. For instance, Katre Kikas explores 19th-century Estonian modernization, while Hande Birkalan-Gedik analyzes how nationalism disrupted the lives and career options of the Turkish folklorists in the 1930s. More acute conflict situations create the background of the other articles: the Continuation War in Finland, the Irish Civil War, and the regaining of independence of Estonia. The complex social situation creates doubts about the goals of documenting and studying folklore and the possibility of pursuing careers in times of change. Even in times of upheaval, collectors persisted. For example, the Irish Folklore Collection members, with their opposing views about the political course of Ireland, agreed on “capturing and promoting Irish culture” (Fitzgerald, p. 90). It is important to see the uncertainties present in creating folklore collections to understand the content of these texts’ corpora today.

The usability of folklore collections—created with so many agendas in mind—has been one of the significant uncertainties of archive-based folkloristics. As Risto Järv has emphasized, the general goal of the collectors (despite the miscellaneous circumstances) was to document folk culture. This goal can be seen as the uniting element of the history of archival collections (Järv 2005, 37). Therefore, this number of *Culture Analysis* is also a collection of articles about people who were certain in their mission to document and

study culture. Despite societal upheavals, folklore collectors persevered, driven by a shared goal of documenting and preserving cultural expressions. The historical situatedness of folklore collections continues to pose challenges for contemporary researchers. Nevertheless, understanding the contexts of these collections’ creation enhances their relevance and usability, aligning with broader interdisciplinary insights.

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Uncertainty in Folklore and Ethnology in the Age that Trusted in the Future

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This special issue of *Cultural Analysis* traces various encounters with specific uncertainties in the history of Folklore and Ethnology, whether those of folklore collectors operating in Estonia towards the end of the nineteenth century, who had to confront their neighbors or the uncertainties that Irish cultural activists negotiated in response to the Irish civil war and the way these shaped the work of the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1920s–1930s. Other uncertainties seem more existential, such as those endured by Finnish ethnologists in the occupied territories of East Karelia in the 1940s, or political threats that impacted family ties, such as the collaboration of the Boratav couple who had to operate creatively around these. Finally, the uncertainties of post-Soviet Estonia in the 1980s–1990s began with regime change and the restructuring of departments and archives in manners that have become ubiquitous in our current academic climate.

Together, these articles demonstrate how Folklorists and Ethnologists have had to negotiate different anxieties on different levels of experience regarding changes imposed by various “external” factors. These may seem at first “external” compared to those “internal” uncertainties that shaped any modern negotiation with cultural change: folklore and tradi-

tion are, in fact, two concepts that were articulated in modern times in the face of change (this is particularly noticeable in Kikas’s contribution).

However, given the uncertainties that modernity has brought about and the particular uncertainties that have been engaged in this special issue, perhaps the premise can be reversed. It seems that the experience of cultural stability has to be accounted for rather than cultural change. Furthermore, one is tempted to take these historical episodes to the present and contemplate the transformation in the perception of stability and uncertainty. In this regard, revisiting these modern episodes sheds light on how various forms of uncertainty were experienced in modernity and how such experiences reflect current negotiations with uncertainty. One immediate difference comes to my mind on the emic level—modern imagination bracketed experiences of uncertainty as if they deviated from the expected path. When one perceived progress as an active force (Koselleck 2002), it was still possible to imagine that there were “bumps on the road” to the future and that one had to find ways around them. In this way, folklore and ethnology were crucial stabilizers. Accordingly, the role of folklorists and ethnologists—their very vocation as modern intellectuals—to document *national* traditions and analyze them seemed to be much more precise and purposeful to them (even if not to their peers) in the grand advance towards modernity they were part of. After all, the twentieth century, with all its horrifying turmoil, brutality, and uncertainty, was—in Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s (2011) terms—“the century that trusted in the future” (17).

Still in the twentieth century, a few decades after the Irish Civil War that Kelly Fitzgerald relates to in her contribution, the situation in Ireland became known as “The Troubles” (1960s-1990s). Compare this plural form to the singular use in Donna Haraway’s account of the present, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Haraway relates to the present age, whose very name is still unclear—Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene. It is worth quoting from the opening paragraph of her inspiring book:

Trouble is an interesting word. [...] We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times [...] Mixed-up times are overflowing with both pain and joy—with vastly unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing of ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence. The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished con-

figurations of places, times, matters, meanings. (Haraway 2016, 1)

It is such an inspirational paragraph that makes me wonder how “making kin,” in Haraway’s terms, has changed for folklorists and ethnologists from those discussed in this issue to the present. I recall the words of D., an activist I met near the Israeli parliament as part of the group of protestors who set up a tent there on November 7, 2023, calling to end the war in Gaza and disband Netanyahu’s government; D. has lived most of his life through the uncertainties of modernity and he is making kin with people who join the tent temporarily or others who—just like him—are on a hunger strike for many days now: “Every morning I wake up and I feel I am in a surreal world; nothing makes sense anymore. It is as if I live in a Salvador Dalí painting.” This is perhaps another sound description of what Haraway might mean by overflowing disturbing times. Consider that the surrealist movement paralleled the engagement of folklorists and ethnologists with everyday culture (Highmore 2002). However, D. related to a world where surrealism is not a mode of critique based on an engagement with the everyday through processes of destabilization and defamiliarization, but a world and an every day that have become unknown. Just as Berardi relied on futurism to comparatively define the present, D. uses another *avant-garde* model.

From the vantage point of present uncertainties, modernity’s uncertainties appear here in the background of a general sense of orientation, which was lost to us. To paraphrase a common contemporary American slogan—wars have become great again in brutality that re-

minds one of the twentieth century, that century that trusted in the future. However, we are only looking back at it with complete disbelief. The world is recovering from a pandemic that reminded everyone of the Spanish Flu or nineteenth-century Cholera. Yet, this time around, in a post-human age, it changed our perception of cultural analysis—e.g., the special issue of *Cultural Analysis* on microbes included Bernhard Tschofen's response to the topic: "at the time this journal [CA] was founded, now a quarter of a century or even ten years ago, it would hardly have been expected in a journal dedicated to the study of culture" (2024, 142). Every day, we hear populist politicians pushing for 'alternative facts' at the expense of science, coping with the murky present and bleak climatic future with the racism and oil capitalism of the past (Kitta 2018). Those in the twentieth century had their concerns regarding the change in human cultures, but with the emergence of algorithmic culture, the definitions and boundaries of human creativity are unclear; if Herder differentiated between *Naturpoesie* and *Kunstpoesie* in ways that formed the basis of folklore studies, artificial intelligence brings us to the domain of *künstliche-Poesie* (Bense 2023) and as such AI is "based on the principle of *deception* from the start" (Bajohr 2023). These symptoms point to a much more radical uncertainty in the present than in the previous century.

The articles of this special issue show how operating in the field or archives and coping with problematic ideologies, institutional restructuring, and conflicting political agendas bring about tremendous uncertainties and various coping mechanisms. Despite that, folklorists and ethnologists a generation

ago could trust in the future. The idea of folklore was constructed in relation to this certainty—that folk culture is all that would be left behind once humanity would make it to the future. Folklore and Ethnology constructed their subject matters in relational terms. Implicit in these projects was the idea that one ought to care for human expressions and traditions. Making kin in this troubled present builds on this legacy and continues these scholarly traditions. Although we acknowledge that culture keeps transforming and our temporal orientation is lost, we care.

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