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INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF FOLK NARRATIVE RESEARCH

special issue

INDIGENEITY,
ECOLOGY,
NARRATIVE &

FEB 2021, ISSUE NO. 8
"News, Notes & Narratives"

*"Lyang aarey kayusaa
Dok kyop kaa kayu do Mong myer ka baam nu muhun aalong
Lukkgaat paa mongmyer lom surong
Lukding kaa kaat hunna kayu surong*

*This land of ours
Let's protect it ourself, its not the time to be in deep slumber
We need to wake up today
Let's stand together today"*

– Lyrics by Samten Lepcha (Composed and Performed by Sofiyum)

Cover Photo: A 'dammed' view of the sacred Teesta River in Sikkim.
Image: Takzen Lepcha.

ISFNR Newsletter is published by the International Society for Folk Narrative Research

Editors:

Margaret Lyngdoh (ninilyngdoh@gmail.com)

Reep Pandi Lepcha, Guest Editor (ashidona@gmail.com)

Talilula, Guest Editor (lulalongchar@gmail.com)

Technical Editor: *Henry Robert Goldsmith*

Design and Layout: *Kaina Ayemi, Akangchila Longchar, and Margus Nõmm*

ISSN 2733-2748

Editorial Office:

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore

Ülikooli 16–208

University of Tartu

51003 Tartu

Estonia

Official website: <http://www.isfnr.org>

This Newsletter is supported by the ISFNR and the
Estonian Research Council Funding PUTJD746 and PRG670

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Dear member of the ISFNR,

We are indeed living in peculiar times. Spread across the globe, as ISFNR members are, everyone is faced with the same threat. A virus that is an invisible fantastic figure for most of humanity has come to govern ways of life, and perhaps also ways of thinking. Its impact on the life of the ISFNR has been felt, as you all know: the Congress scheduled to be held in Zagreb, Croatia in June 2020 had to be postponed to September 2021. We are hoping that we will be able to meet then, but the organizing committee is evaluating the possibilities. The situation may drive us to think of moving to an online conference. You will definitely receive an email in this regard in the near future.

In 2020 the lockdown started in several countries around the third week of March and it was not clear until the beginning of May whether this was just a matter of weeks or of longer duration. Had our conference been scheduled for later, we could have moved it to an online platform this year itself, but the organizing committee and the ISFNR did not have enough time to make that shift. We were technically not prepared to move much online and thus decided to postpone the General Assembly and the elections to the Executive Committee to 2021. However, in the coming months, we will make decisions so that all academic and endeavours of our Society are not only back on track, but we are able to connect in newer ways. In our efforts to find newer ways of continuing to discuss folk narrative, the BNN Committee of the Society has started a series of online lectures and I hope that you have been able to access them. The Executive Committee members have also been working on the registration of the ISFNR and an email in this regard has been sent to all members.

As of now, I invite you to enjoy this issue of the ISFNR Newsletter. It is very special, thanks to our editorial team, as it reflects special contributions on the anxiety of our times in graphics a narrative written and visualised by Talilula, and illustrated by artist Moa Lemtur from Northeast India; and on the contemporary relevance of the longstanding folk narrative traditions of the Oromo people of Ethiopia in a research article by Dr. Assefa Tefera Dibaba.

Wishing you safe passage through this difficult time.

Sadhana Naithani

*Professor, Centre of German Studies,
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 110067, India.
isfnrpresident@gmail.com*



EDITORS' FOREWORD

It was on the 12th of May 2020, soon after we published the first call for contributions for this issue of the Newsletter for the International Society for Folk Narrative Research Newsletter, that we received our first submission. Marlene Mifsud-Chircop, a member of the ISFNR from Malta sent a detailed and well-researched article: "Who Killed Padre Grimani: An 18th Century Murder in a Ballad". In the beginning of November, while the editing process was going on, after several unanswered emails from us, we received the news that Marlene had passed away on the 26th of August. It is such a tragedy and a great loss to the community of ISFNR, but we also recognize the privilege of publishing her final article, and we remember her through this written legacy.

Guest editing this Special issue on "Indigeneity, Ecology, and Narrative" together with me are Talilula from Nagaland, and Reep Pandi Lepcha from Sikkim. As indigenous women and researchers together, we present contributions that foreground the issues and concerns of indigenous communities and to folk narrative research, that have been doubly underscored through this pandemic.

The articles in this Issue reflect the primary trajectory of ecological concerns and their associations with folklore and narrative. These contributions focus on its academic study in the context of a world that is shaken by its own inability to uphold a sustainable relationship with the environment. The pandemic and its consequences have resulted in special folklore that we have made an effort to address in this Newsletter.

Of late, there has been a remarkable surge in the assertion of rights by indigenous peoples and this has materialised through various expressions of activism. Therefore, the first section on the topic of indigenous activism highlights the various forms it can manifest itself in. The problems associated with the indigenous tussle about who owns community heritage is realised fully in the contribution by Ruby Hemrom. She questions the complex issues associated with authorship in folklore and its connections with publishing as a conscious part of indigenous activism. In Sikkim, Northeast India, the trauma experienced by the indigenous Mutanchi (Lepcha) community of Sikkim in light of the damming of the sacred River Teesta has been written by Reep Pandi Lepcha. The article explores the struggles of an indigenous activist and the efforts involved in preserving the intangible heritage of narratives closely linked with the natural resources that are currently under threat.

The coronavirus or the novel Covid-19 has made us evaluate and reevaluate everything that we believe. In this issue, we have included a visual narrative set in the hills of Nagaland, from Northeast India where experiences of the pandemic are interwoven with supernatural encounters, as seen through the lens of an indigenous Ao Naga woman travelling from the urban metro city back to her roots in Nagaland. Her story is the story of many, and will hopefully find resonance with the readers here. This narrative has been fictionalized and scripted by Talilula and illustrated by Moa Lemtur.

The main article for this issue is by Assefa Tefera Dibaba from Ethiopia and concerns the pollution of a lake that is the primary source of drinking for the nearby residents. The disturbance between the human connection and the natural habitat has disastrous consequences. Another special feature of this issue is an interview with Mark Bender who enlightens us on the oral epics, myths and other oral traditions of the Nuosu people, an ethnic community of Southwestern China. Other articles in this issue concern multiple perspectives, narratives, and special concerns that folklorists focus on and research on.

We are grateful to all of you who have contributed to the Newsletter and we hope you enjoy reading it!

Editors
Margaret Lyngdoh
Reep Pandi Lepcha
Talilula





Image: Imti Longchar

We live in a far-from-perfect world and as a result, ideals such as equal rights and equal opportunities continue to elude us. However, this in no way deters the human instinct to question, challenge, and overcome the norms that have guided societies for decades. This is done in the hope of a new direction and for the purpose of accommodating the interests of all. If on one hand there is no perfect world, there is no perfect solution either but activism plays a major role in providing means for exploring some solutions. It becomes a system of checks and-balances and breaks the shackles of a tunnelled vision. It builds on new possibilities, thereby expanding the panorama for transitions to occur in due course of time. The awareness built through rigours of activism is never limited to the self, although it begins from exploring it thoroughly. No one is spared in the moment it takes flight. No one is above it either. Activism, therefore, is a potent tool for self-expression for the indigenous people. Marginalisation to a great extent is overcome with how one can vocalize through the platforms provided by activism, a medium for resistance. It contributes by letting the indigenous speak unapologetically where they would have otherwise remained silenced. In the sphere of the marginalised, activism takes many shapes and facilitates various goals, whether they are oriented towards preservation of culture and heritage or simply serve as a catalyst for larger objectives. Having said that, regardless of its panacea-like tendencies, it would be delusional to think that it is the solution for everything, it does, however, administer a good degree of 'hope' and that can work wonders in overcoming long journeys.

ORALITY, FOLKLORE AND AUTHORSHIP— A PUBLISHING QUANDARY

By **Ruby Hembrom**, Founder/Director of *adivaani*, India.

“In the beginning, there was no visible land, everything was under water. Thakur Jiv, the Supreme Being was present, as were the bongas¹—and many aquatic animals.”²



These are the opening lines of the Santal³ creation story—the origin narrative of my people. Discovering this in a book that my theologian and pastor father had authored from his doctoral thesis, stumped me! (Hembrom: 2013) Until then the only creation story I was aware of was of the Biblical Adam and Eve—but I was also a descendant of the geese, from whose eggs the first Santals were born. I felt cheated of my identity, by not knowing this account. How did the Biblical creation tradition become the only narrative for a Santal? The realization that this telling, retelling, and sharing of our traditional stories were not common any longer among the people of my community, hit me hard. It was more so for families who had converted to a different religion, or lived in cities or inhabited environments where the oral art form of storytelling was not practised anymore. This filled me with a sense of loss—a mourning for a knowledge system I did not inhabit or inherit organically.

But I was not going to resign myself to this reality. I was going to cross over and engage with my culture, negotiate those spaces, inhabit those narratives and live the ideas, philosophies, histories, and expressions of my people.

My entry into publishing and cultural documentation was already a crossing over—born out of a threshold I had reached in my lived experience of marginalization and discrimination, when I realized yet again that Adivasis⁴ were excluded from national discourses or public forums, and even when ‘Indianness’ was discussed and projected. The publishing course I was at in 2012 didn’t include Adivasi publishers and writers. The normalisation of Adivasi invisibility and erasure bothered me. Were we not important enough to be included as usual or were we non-existent in the publishing panorama? Non-Existent we were not; despite a shorter writing tradition, we still write—we write in our native languages or adopted regional languages, and; and mostly self-publish, yet it wasn’t adequate to be part of this course. That did it for me—I wanted the Adivasi voice to be counted, someone had to do something—

who would? I said, I would, without knowing how to, and that was it. There it was, not a 'Eureka, Aha' moment, but a tipping point.

The adivaani⁵ idea was born out of the audacity to say 'Enough is Enough'.

adivaani, meaning the first voices, was designed to become a platform for indigenous expression and assertion. It is an archiving, chronicling and publishing outfit of and by indigenous peoples of India (Adivasi and Tribal), publishing in English. I didn't know a thing about the process of bookmaking, all I knew was we had to publish in English, whether we knew or spoke the language or not, as that is what gets you noticed and acknowledged in India.

My work became a project of representation and claiming space for our peoples. But it was also a personal journey inwards, into questions of identity and belonging. I tried to make sense of the vacuum I was working in. Our knowledge systems and all they embody are kept alive through singers, storytellers, and families who in their oration and singing, preserve and re-create the community's idea of itself. The oral tradition is a distillation of the shared community and corporal experience that gives language meaning. As indigenous peoples, we are living documents ourselves, so as a publisher I was and am confronted by the dilemma of transmitting, translating, and reproducing what is organic and breathing into a new form—like a book, that in many ways is limiting.

How do we, after all, project and market insight, trauma, experience, memory, and traditions? How was I to begin collating material, building and curating manuscripts for publication? I knew that it was in ploughing through our traditions—storytelling, and orality, that would help me shape what would become printed material—an attempt to capture indigenous lifeways in a tangible form. We started off by looking for stories in our immediate surroundings and those easily accessible, the authors willing to give us their works unreservedly, and stories we could write, re-write, or assemble ourselves. It was only natural that we sought out stories in Santali and of Santal origin first, something easily obtainable.

When the Santal creation story fashioned itself in front of me, from my father's out of print book that I hadn't read until I began tilling for material to publish, the void in my identity propelled an urgent impulse to ensure that these stories live a lifespan right into infinity—in other forms, supplementing our oral retelling traditions, that still continue.

I wanted to retell the mythical Santal Creation stories in an illustrated format, which would initiate young readers to engage with their roots. This was a never before done form—that is the stage of writing and producing books we are at. The Adivasi literacy rate of 59% against the national total of 73% as per the 2011 census⁶ exposes the paradox of how many of us could ever read what we put out, and the gravity of that is not lost on me. Every approach, format and production in our publishing was going to be new. But who would do that? There was no ready manuscript. We didn't have the means to commission an author, so I filled in those shoes too—a situational need of the hour. That's when I took creative liberty to recast the long and engaging narration of the story for a three-part series on the Santal Creation Stories.

When the illustrator and I began to piece the manuscript together we realised we had no references handy in terms of pictorial depictions. The few paintings available of Thakur Jiv, the Supreme Being were of him in white flowing robes: a clichéd Bollywood rendition of a cinematic ghost.

So here we were stuck with an empty slate to craft our own images, with our own grounding and interpretation. Having that kind of freedom is both a blessing and a responsibility. We had long brainstorming sessions on how we should define the characters that were familiar to Santals in their own ways, and what we put forth was, after careful deliberation, sensitively thought out. Our manuscripts for two books were ready: the texts in place, the illustrations done, and the titles agreed upon: We come from the geese and Earth rests on a tortoise. As we designed the covers, we stumbled onto a demanding question: what about 'authorship'? In that moment we were confronted by an epistemological and ethical problem. Whose name to put as an author on this book? We weren't questioning the origin of the creation stories here; who really began the retelling and transmission did not matter, just that they existed and meant something in an all encompassing way mattered.

The basis of this problem was if I could put my name on a version of traditional stories I shaped—stories that our forebears passed on as inheritance, as wisdom, as identity onto us? Stories that run through our blood, stories we embody individually and as a community. The illustrator suggested that I put my name, as I had adapted and simplified the text to make it comprehensible for youngsters—a user-friendly way around the English language, as my aim was not just to reorient our children to stories of our origin but also to teach them this language that most of our public education system leaves us bereft of.

The idea of putting my name on the cover, as an author, made me deeply uncomfortable. This wasn't an original story that I had ideated. This was a shared story, this was a belief system, this is what our knowledge specialists called Karam Gurus to perform and recite in the form of the Karam-Binti —(roughly translates to prayer, plea or supplication of the karam—which is both a plant and also ordinarily used to imply festival or ceremony). The Karam Binti is one of the most pivotal institutions of the Santals, connected with the recitation of '... the history of the world from the creation and through the ages.'⁷ How could I? How dare I claim authorship of something that belongs to every Santal, and to probably none at the same time? But how were we to credit the version of the text I created and the handiwork of the illustrator? Some solution, both publishing and epistemological, had to be found. With some back and forth deliberation and reflection it dawned upon me that as a Santal, I was the inheritor, bearer and custodian of the stories—invaluable and inalienable to my identity, to my being. It was with that sense of ownership, reverence and responsibility, that I embraced the authorship of the books, albeit in the most dutiful way. On the books' covers, we just put the titles and series name: 'Santal Creation Stories'. It was only inside, on the title page, and the back cover, that I put my name to attribute the text to me—announcing that I was the author of this version of the traditional stories. The copyright page had the source from which I moulded these stories. The acceptance of authorship was an act of reconciliation with my heritage in the most intimate of ways.

"Writing is often seen as the next stage of orality, but for us, it is a symbol of the continuity of our knowledge systems."

If I had not adapted the stories, I would not put my name on them at all.

My retelling of the creation narrative, in my style, without having to seek permission from the elders, made of me a tradition bearer, a storyteller stringing together words on paper.

That's what orality does to you; it makes you the carrier and caretaker of your traditions and cultures, a guardian of your traditional knowledge. I reassembled the creation stories from a retelling in another book, which was record-

ed from another narration from, very possibly, a Karam Guru. That's how orality has changed hands and forms; it looks like a lineal transition, but instead is cyclic—moving from the recitation, to being fixed in a book, to being illustrated in another format to being re-framed into a performance. There is no fixed sequence to these multi-form renditions. They style themselves dependent on the storyteller, both individual and communitarian. Writing is often seen as the next stage of orality, but for us, it is a symbol of the continuity of our knowledge systems. It is a parallel existence, at least for now.

The Karam binti, today exists both in the oral form as well as several written forms. That they exist simultaneously and are equally referred to and authoritative today among the Santals, is an acknowledgement of the life forms of orality.

adivaani became the medium of this continuity, a link to our ancestors and our descendants through deep roots into this earth that sustains us.

It was only in 2015, that we opened up adivaani to non-Adivasis writing about Adivasi issues, through an imprint called 'One of Us', realising there were some friends, activists, scholars who had worked closely with Adivasi pioneers who themselves had not left behind written accounts, or they were witness to important landmarks in Adivasi history that has gone unrecorded and those needed documenting. This led to an inundation of manuscripts into my email inbox. One of them was a collection of folktales, of a people that had not been recorded before, and the author made a case of 'years of dedicated research in the chronicling and translation' of the stories. I clearly wanted to publish this rare compilation. The academic was not from the peoples the stories emerged from and declared his great love for these people. The first thing that struck me was his name splashed on the cover page. I looked inside and noticed a sweet dedication to the storytellers. The discomfort of authorship was unsettling. Whose name should actually go on the cover?

Given that the author would've worked very hard to produce this collection, however, the people are the heirs and keepers of the stories. They shared their bequest of stories with him, and he documented and translated them into English and was re-telling them in a printed book form. No one is denying him that. I asked him if he'd consider putting the storytellers—however many there were, as the co-authors and he as collector, compiler or editor of the book. I never heard back from him. The book has now been published elsewhere, with his name as author on the cover. And many will not see this as a problem but instead, question my perspective.

How would a non-member of a given community claim authorship of narratives that constitute a collective inheritance? What is the place of storytellers in a publication that effectively erases their rights to their own stories? Oftentimes, the source community isn't even aware of why they're asked to retell their stories, why the other is recording them, and what will become of them. They give; they handover, they empty themselves—to the outsider, without knowing they can refuse, as they find themselves unequally positioned against the historically powerful outsider, the exploiter, the oppressor, the displacers; who in this case are after their knowledges, staking a claim on their ancestral wisdom. They don't negotiate terms of engagement, and authorship isn't even a consideration, because these are not concerns of their ways of storytelling. Their concerns if any are about the pleasures of telling and retelling, the immersive experience of remembering and passing them on—the repetition, recollection, relapse, recognition and recovery.

Collection and documentation as ways of archiving or academic discourse is not how Adivasis approach storytelling—this is a scholastic necessity, one that allows professional growth and credibility, and is not undertaken altruistically. Writing, on the other hand, means having the knowledge and tools to do so but also understanding the significance and the power of the act—chronicling for posterity. We lacked that skill until recently, and there too only very few of us engage in that process of documenting, given that many of us are first generation learners and many still do not have the opportunity at formal schooling. This also meant we didn't have the ability to challenge what was going down as fixed in text—history, because we don't have access to those materials, and then how would one negotiate textual worlds being unlettered?

The outsider not putting their names as authors does not annul credit for undertaking the mammoth task of recording and translating folktales of other people. That is understood; that is implied—but recognition need not be seized like this. That one feels entitled to put one's name on the cover page, as the author of a collection of the folklore of someone else, is an appropriation of the agency. It's cultural looting.

This is a copyright concern too, not in the publishing sense alone, in terms of scope and duration of protection, which for literary works is the lifetime of the author plus sixty years, which is not being contested, but who is named author and how is. Would the community then have rights over the printed stories reverted to them after the lifetime and sixty years after the 'named' author's death? Would they still be able to retell, recite, sing and perform these, after the outsider has taken them and fixed them in print

and who marks territoriality by becoming an author? Will the community be sued for living their traditional stories? In an indigenous/Adivasi context, who holds the patent to traditional stories, folklore, of a people who come from orality? Was it the singers and storytellers who selflessly retold our charter of being human or life ways, or was it the person registering the narration for perpetuity and wider readership, who was able to market the literary product, with their names as authors displayed?.

Can memory be copyrighted? The magnitude of it dawned on me. These stories have survived millennia through the strength of oral traditions and its inherent quality in the ability to sustain through the power of collective memory, and renew themselves by incorporating new elements. This is a new kind of oral authorship, dependent on retention and various outside influences. Then, 'remembering it', becomes and fulfils the purpose both for writing as well as the oral act of telling our stories. Our retelling in either form depends then on how and what we remem-

In an indigenous/Adivasi context, who holds the patent to traditional stories, folklore, of a people who come from orality?

ber. If we the community, live with and accept this reality of creation and re-creation of narration as an organic process of life, then no one else should see this a problem. This is how various versions of even our creation stories exist. That no such claim or objection to multi-narratives exists is the splendour of stories and storytelling. And in that remembering 'authorship' is never a bone of contention. Our concerns arise from the responsibility of being beneficiaries of a legacy of storytelling that embodies our lifewayslife ways and life itself.

We can't and are not preventing anyone from collecting, translating and publishing source community folklore, all we're advocating for is due credit and acknowledgement to the storytellers. We're asking not to be stripped off our agency as the wellspring of the stories, the knowers, the preservers of our chronicles.

As for us, we're accountable to orality, our collective memory, the features of our identity and ourselves. Whether we're authors of the grand narrative of our peoples or not is immaterial—our commitment is to the stories of our peoples having a life and afterlife.

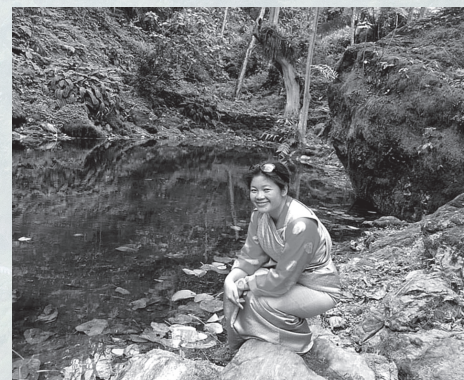
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6. "The ascription of the term Adivasi as being indigenous (what the Indian Government assigns as Scheduled Tribe from the administrative perspective of lack of literacy, economic backwardness, lack of political participation and their inability to deal with the external societies) emerged more as a political self-reference than as an anthropological definition of such groups. It relates more to the common experience of subjugation faced by tribal groups from the colonial and post-independence state of India. The term signifies their demand for recognition of their identity to and rights over ancestral lands, forests, customary practices and self-governance amidst the exploitative relationship by the larger dominants."
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AWOKEN WOMEN — ECOLOGICAL WARRIORS OF SIKKIM

By **Reep Pandi Lepcha**, Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, India

Sleepy kyongs (villages) away from the bustling capital town of Sikkim have seen many indigenous leaders emerge to speak out in the wake of mega hydropower projects slated for its rivers. Mayalmit is one of them, she hails from a village named Heegyathang. It is one of the well-known places in North District of Sikkim, Dzongu which is a Mutanchi (Lepcha) Reserve area under the protection of a unique Article 371F of the Constitution of India. Of late, mushrooming home-stays, which have become one of the primary ways of generating income for the villagers has lent its fame to Heegyathang. It is interesting to note how this village has established a strong history of anti-dam activism.



It was in the year 2007, when Mayalmit along with many indigenous people marched to the heart of the capital town of Sikkim, Gangtok to protest the construction of large-scale dams that threatened to uproot the cultural and ecological heritage of the Mutanchis. The commercialisation of the sacred river was something that was beyond comprehension for the indigenous people. Educated youths, like Mayalmit, were at the helm of this peaceful march organised by The Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) and aimed at raising awareness among the populace of Sikkim. The protest was followed by a relay hunger strike of 915 days led by Dawa and Tenzing Lepcha, the latter belonging to the same village as Mayalmit. The protesters were following Gandhian principles of peaceful resistance to spread a clear message; they wanted all unchecked developmental activities to be halted as it threatened to displace the indigenous people. These developmental activities were trying to lay claim to indigenous land, its natural resources, and Mayalmit was one among many exemplary individuals that didn't want to relinquish indigenous rights before the greed of corporates.

The dams were proposed to be built upon some of the major tributaries that feed Teesta (Runghyu). The rivers that flow through Sikkim predominantly figure in Mutanchi folktales. The race of the two rivers Runghyu and Rangeet are well known in the region of Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling. The confluence of the two rivers is also a place where newly married couples visit to take an oath and the rivers bear witness to their wish of a long-lasting love akin to that

These developmental activities were trying to lay claim to indigenous land, its natural resources, and Mayalmit was one among many exemplary individuals that didn't want to relinquish indigenous rights before the greed of corporates.

of Runghyu and Rangeet. According to ritual practices instilled through indigenous beliefs, these rivers are routes whereby the Mun's (ritual practitioners) guide the soul of the deceased, cleanse them along the way, and reach them to their rightful resting place at Poomzoo lyang, the region around Konchenchyu/Kanchendzonga. These etiological beliefs continue to figure in the protests against the constructions of multiple dams on the rivers. Sikkim falls in seismic Zone IV in India, as a result, it is a region prone to a hazardous level of seismic activities. On 18th September 2011, an earthquake of 6.9 magnitude hit Sikkim, a natural ca-

lamiy but the tunnelling of mountains to deviate the course of rivers aggravated the damage. The earthquake triggered many mudslides as a result, lives and properties were lost. There were many whispers heard post the earthquake: ‘The Ruums(Deities) are not happy’, the warnings of the activists had materialised into a sad reality. Further, in 2016 owing to a massive landslide in ‘So-bhir’ in Dzongu, swept away an entire face of a cliff along with its inhabitants, an artificial lake of about 150ft wide was formed and is currently known as Mantam lake. The lake posed a great threat to lives and a high alert was issued by authorities who are still struggling to build a bridge to connect the cut-off villages. The sign, according to many in the near-by village was now all-too-clear, the displeasure for the damming projects grew as a result of this incident. After several years, few projects were scrapped but there are several remaining that threaten to displace the indigenous beliefs. Mayalmit continues to remain vocal about the impact of these projects and has been an active member of ACT for over fourteen years. Currently, she is the president of the Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (SILTA), which has been functioning as a whistleblower and the members proactively participate in preserving the cultural heritage of the Mutanchis.

Mayalmit closely monitors dam-related activities occurring along the riverbanks, she has lost count of the times she has had a brush with the authorities while trying to get particular details about the projects through Right to Information (RTI), a constitutional device where a citizen of India can access information to ensure transparency. She uses the acquired details to spread awareness and to protect the rights of her people. There were as many as 30 hydel power



Image: *Takzen Lepcha.*

projects slated for the rivers in Sikkim. Of late the Panang (Upper Dzongu) power project of 320 Megawatts—which currently stands abandoned by Himagiri Hydro Energy Private Limited post a massive landslide—and proposed Stage IV, 520 Megawatts in lower Dzongu from Heegyathang towards Pidang, has been a cause of concern for Mayalmit. These projects threaten to badly affect the inhabitants of not just the upper reaches of Dzongu but also the settlers downstream, posing a grave concern for transboundary river neighbours like Bangladesh as it threatens to dry-up areas where Teesta forms its river basin. The Stage IV dam is proposed by National Hydroelectric

Power Corporation, India in lower Dzongu. According to Mayalmit, the social, economic, and environmental exploitation is rampant in the areas where the projects have been proposed. Mayalmit’s efforts are currently focused on sharing with the world the severity of the issue, she makes use of various platforms, media, and engages with international indigenous forums to vocalise the problems and come up with solutions and a road map to tackle the unchecked unsustainable developmental projects in Sikkim. She has one question ‘What is development?’ And it is crystal clear that if the rights of the indigenous people are compromised in the name of development, then the concerned authorities need to revisit, re-access, rethink the idea of development which wrests the fundamental rights of the indigenous people. Mayalmit has conducted multiple workshops to spread awareness about the situation at hand. She informed that women in Heegyathang have been vigilant and stated:

If we organise a meeting or a protest, the women will work in advance, cutting fodder for their cattle two, three days in advance so that they can attend the meeting. I think we underestimate the women folks in the village, they have more

information, more knowledge, are more aware of what will happen when the dams come—for me that is inspiring.

Mayalmit is a first-generation learner of modern education from her family but she has made many sacrifices like dropping out of her first-year college to participate in anti-dam protests and facilitate the movement with all her abilities. Her parents have been supportive of her life choices, and they seem to understand that their daughter is putting up a fight for the greater good. Mayalmit's fight and brush with the unperturbed authorities are all too real, yet she inspiringly states:

Let the river bless our future generations like I feel blessed to see these rivers flowing peacefully. Our ancestors have passed on the rivers to us, and it's our responsibility to leave the river undisturbed, to keep it safe, and pass it on the next generation. As I always say the land was given to us by our ancestors, we have no rights to sell it off to these dam developers, we have to keep safe and pass it to our coming generation.

In these words lies the indigenous pedagogy.

There are many who have grown up listening to the rivers in Dzongu but some of these rivers now are dammed, one can no longer hear their wild gushing, as is the trademark of any Himalayan river. It is indeed inspirational to find passionate indigenous leaders like Mayalmit who have continued fighting for their land and rivers, who have resisted the onslaught and greed for development. The reality remains, there have been battles won but the war at large continues. If you want to learn more about the ACT you can find more from their website: <http://www.actsikkim.com/>.



Mayalmit along with other Dam Activists in Darap (Sikkim).



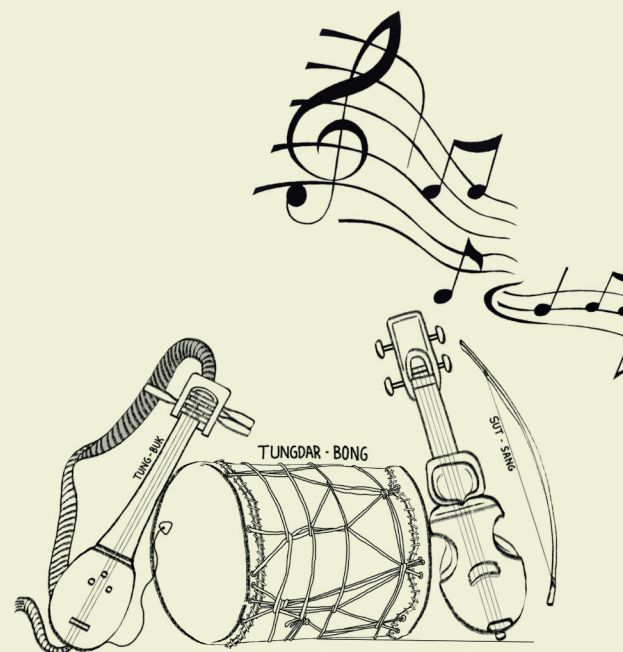
SOFIYUM NOTES

STRINGING BRAND OF ACTIVISM

By Reep Pandi Lepcha

Awareness and concern for the dwindling Lepcha language speakers brought a group of young people to proactively take their passion to a new level in 2011. The odds were stacked against them, but these lads made music a perfect medium for achieving their vision. Sofiyum identify themselves as a folk-fusion band, and are composed of several members who belong to the *Mutanchi*/Lepcha community- the indigenous people of Sikkim. Lepcha is on UNESCO's list of Endangered Languages and this is an issue of grave importance that Sofiyum has consistently raised awareness for. The name Sofiyum translates to 'breeze' and the band truly embodies the quality of the gentle breeze as their efforts of reviving language through music is getting across the *Mutanchis* of Sikkim and its surrounding areas. Their lyrics have moved many, and have instilled a feeling of belonging and nostalgia among the young and old. Folk-music appeals to a diverse demographic in Sikkim and the old-age flavour of folk music with a blend of contemporariness is a near-perfect concoction for Sofiyum's drive. They envisioned bridging the language gap by bringing together the generations of language speakers and learners under one fold, their music.

As many as twelve members have given shape to the vision that is Sofiyum today.





At a performance organised by TEDx Talks-Chennai. Follow the link to be a part of the mesmerising Himalayas:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rHIGOd0nBA>

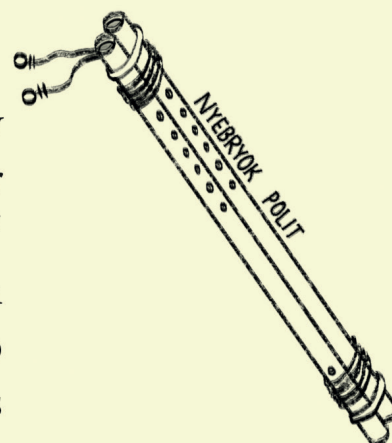
Current band members are:

Mickma Tshering Lepcha (<i>Tungbuk, Puntong, Vocals</i>)	Ongyal Tshering Lepcha (<i>Sutsang, Tungbuk, Vocals</i>)
Ruthap Lepcha (Drums, percussions)	Noel Lepcha (Bass, Vocals)
Rikel Lepcha (<i>Tungbuk, Guitar, Vocals</i>)	

From using traditional musical instruments of the *Mutanchi*/Lepcha community during performances, Sofiyum does it all as part of their cultural promotion drive.

Nyebrok Polit:

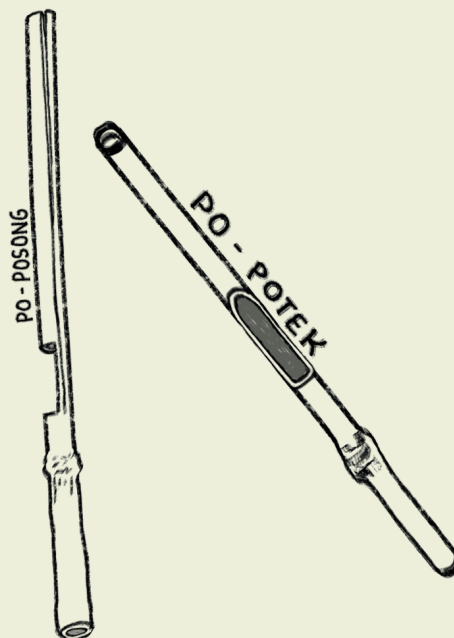
A double-barrel flute with six holes. The *Mutanchis* play on this flute as a means of communicating with their deities. It is a way of communication with their *ruums*/ gods for providing them with everything, and to inform them of their well-being. Of late, this flute is also used to welcome guests during ceremonies or during auspicious occasions.



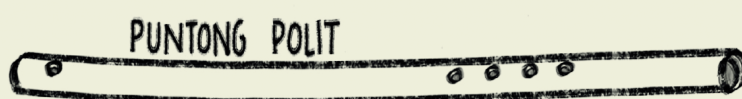
Po-posong/Po-potek:

This curious instrument which is currently used for percussion initially had agrarian beginnings. It was a technique to keep animals and pests straying into the fields, at bay.

Made out of bamboo that is split in the middle and lefts hanging from a tree in the fields with a rope whose ends are tied to this contraption; the other tied near the hearth for easy access. This percussion instrument is a miniature version of the one used in the fields.



Puntong Polit:



Unique to the community, with five holes in total, including the blowhole, this flute is crafted with the help of a species of bamboo called the *poyong* which is found in the region. It is a popular belief among the indigenous people that *puntong polit* is a wish-fulfilling instrument, as it was gifted by the *ruums* for the purpose. It needs to be played at the crack of dawn to initiate its magical properties. Even ritual healers like *muns* (shamans) use it during their chants.

Bum-Pothyut:

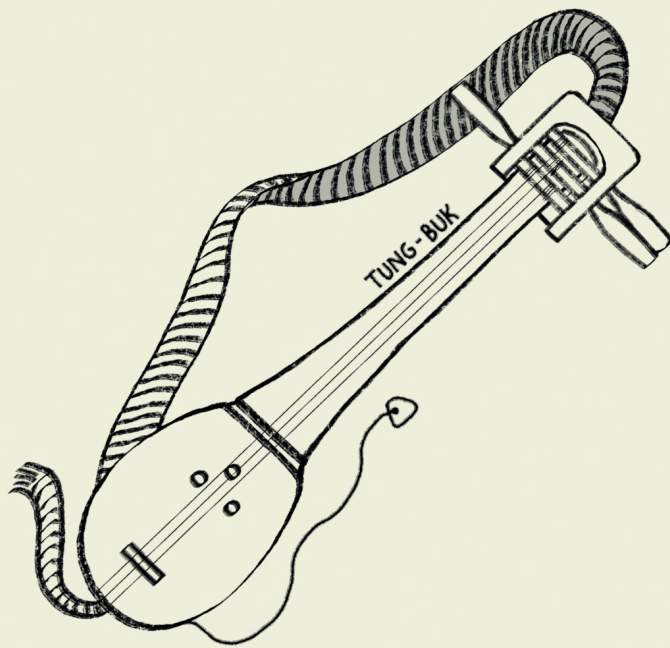


A unique instrument which can mimic bird-calls, is made out of bamboo. The hunters use this instrument to pass on coded-messages to their fellow hunters because human voices would alert their prey. The ingenuity of this instrument also rendered it a clever tool for warfare. Currently, the indigenous musicians use it to produce the effect of different birdcalls which is a popular part of the Lepcha folk-songs.

Bling Thoap:

It was primarily used by the *muns* (shamans) to keep rhythm during their recitation but currently used as percussion for its shallow sound.



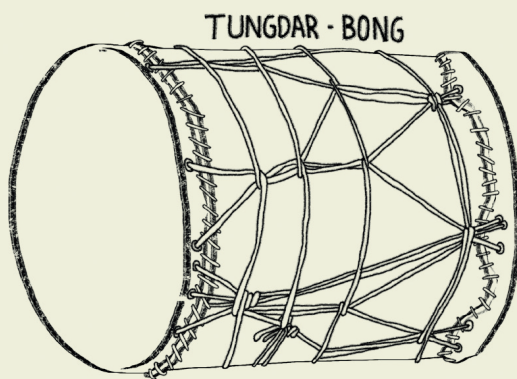
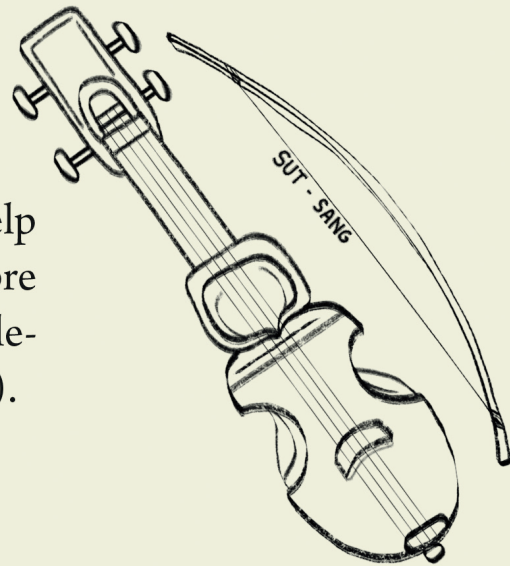


Tung Buk:

A three-stringed instrument carved out of hardwood to avoid the cracks which may develop over the years. A go-to instrument for artistes and the cattle-herders who passed their time doling out tunes while their cattle grazed.

Sut-Sang:

A four-stringed instrument played with the help of a bow and made out of soft-wood. The fibre for the strings is usually derived from the nettle-plant (*kuzosurong*) or even hattibaar (*borloop*).



Tungdar-Bong:

A traditional drum carved out of a solid block of wood. A deer or a goat hide is used to cover either-ends of the drum. Used as a percussion instrument, it was popular during warfare to boost the morale of the soldiers.



Illustrations were done by Chewang Rinchen Lepcha, Animation Film Designer at Echostream, a multi-disciplinary design studio with their own YouTube channel.

Echostream is also responsible for a wonderful, short documentary featuring different folk instruments of various ethnic communities in Sikkim.

Watch it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr4rU40bMg4&feature=youtu.be>



‘Folk culture for me is a mirror, wherein I search for my roots and who I am.’ - Mickma Tshering Lepcha

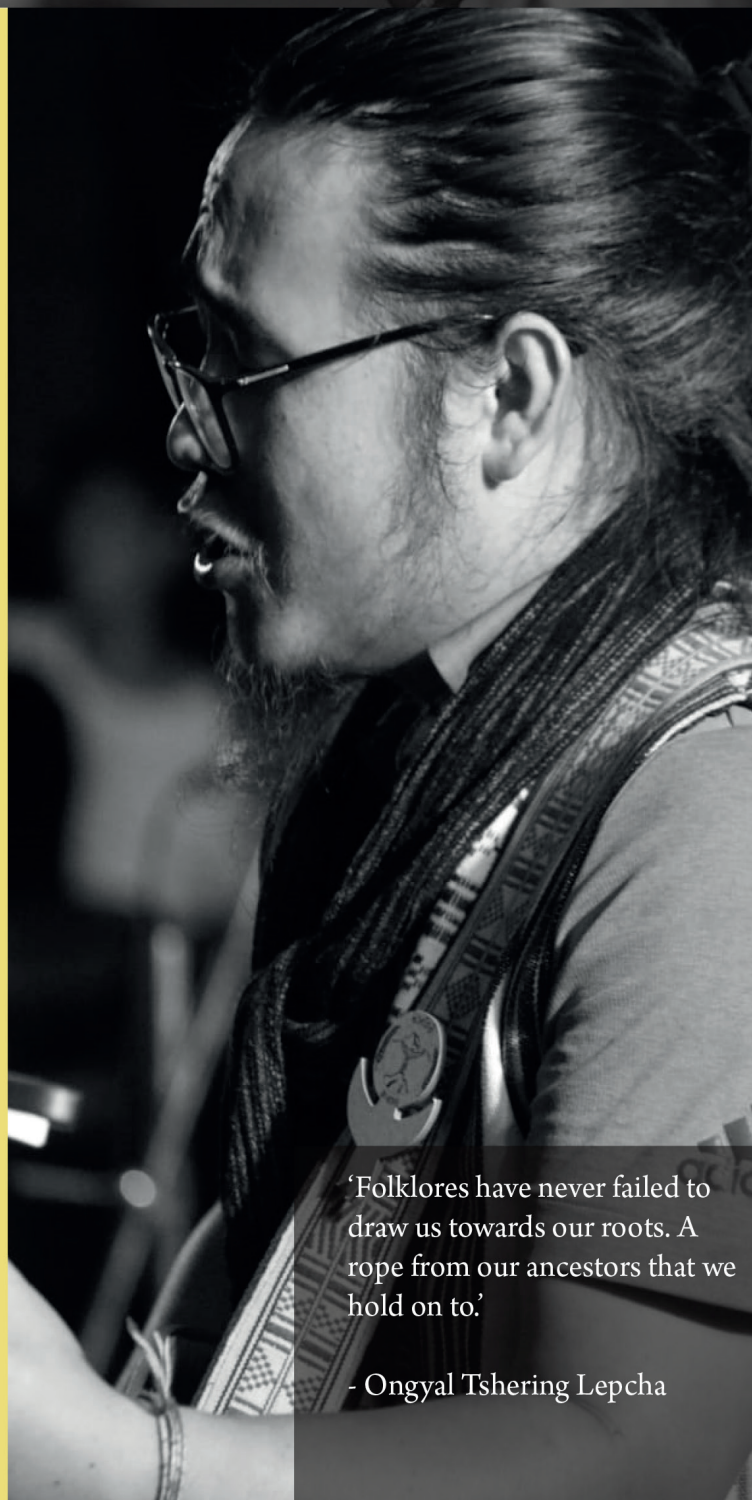
Resource persons:

Mickma Tshering Lepcha
and
Namgyal Lepcha (Passingdang,
North Sikkim).

Sofiyum, while creating music to revive the *Mutanchoi* language, are also good Samaritans at heart. They have engaged in multiple fund-raising drives in the past to provide relief to communities impacted by natural disasters. Some of them are Uttarakhand Flash Flood Relief Fund, Nepal Earthquake, Kerala flood, Chong village west Sikkim flash flood, Dzongu north Sikkim.

Sofiyum members are all graded artistes of All India Radio, Gangtok. The growing popularity of their brand of activism led to the band featuring in a documentary series called ‘Harmony’ with A.R. Rahman, a world-renowned music composer and singer. Sofiyum continues to bridge the people with their music and their good deeds. Some of their previous performances include World Music Day Festival Celebration, Shillong Song and Dances of Northeast India, Ziro Festival of Music, Arunachal Pradesh.

They remain vocal about the activism that they practice.



‘Folklores have never failed to draw us towards our roots. A rope from our ancestors that we hold on to.’

- Ongyal Tshering Lepcha

WRITING AS RESISTANCE: SOME REFLECTIONS

By **Dharamsing Teron**, *Centre for Karbi Studies, Karbi Anglong, India.*

Karbi, also known as *Arleng* (meaning The Man)¹, to which I belong, is an indigenous tribe, in highland Karbi Anglong region in Assam state in India's Northeast. For a longer period of history, however, we were known as 'Mikir', a derogatory exonym given to us by Assamese intellectuals², which the British colonial empire used to categorize and traumatize generations of our people.

Such derogatory and inappropriate portrayals of Karbi have in fact been going on for centuries. When the colonizers first arrived in 'Mikir country',³ they called them worshippers of 'malignant demons...malicious spirits...'⁴ The American Baptist missionaries found them extremely ignorant of religious things⁵ while the Presbyterian church categorized them as the most degraded of the heathen tribes of Assam⁶. A noted Assamese historian called them 'sakhamrig', a Sanskrit term for 'monkey'⁷. Such negative portrayals continued even in post-colonial narratives as so-called researchers produce highly insensitive and unsubstantiated materials taking full liberty of the lack of indigenous responses. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, for instance, claimed that Karbi society '...is staunchly patriarchal in social organisation...' and that 'no society is more male dominated than the Karbis...'⁸ which does not have any truth whatsoever. Jogesh Das also claimed that the 'Mikir theory of creation...is very much influenced by Hinduism.'⁹ Likewise, Birendranath Datta claimed about 'a vague belief' among 'Karbhis...that they are the progeny of Valmiki, the author of Ramayana...'¹⁰ Jatin Sharma justified the Columbus title erroneously conferred on Karbis by claiming that it was '...not an imposition but recognition of a peripheral reality made with a hope to understanding the identity of the greater Assamese community and constructing the state from the below.'¹¹



These 'narratives of oppression'¹² go hand in hand with political and economic subjugation of Karbi in majoritarian democracy. When Assam state imposed Assamese language in educational institutions in 1973, Karbi youth protested which was violently put down. As a response, 'Karbi Youth Festival' (est. 1974) emerged to assert Karbi cultural identity which inspired a powerful political movement for Karbi autonomy under the leadership of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) from 1986 onwards. I was part of both these processes as frontline organizer and leader. I participated in electoral politics and was elected to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (1989-1997) and the Assam Legislative Assembly (2001-2005), for one term each – as an extension of the autonomy movement.

The years of struggle for cultural resurgence and autonomy made me more aware of the unwritten tradition, culture and history. I realized - Karbi identity at the heart of the autonomy movement - is rooted in these undocumented and vanishing traditions. I realized - writing was (and is) as important as the autonomy struggle - against misrepresentation and academic double-speak.

I took to writing as an extension of my activism, from the public to more individualized pursuit - to document the rapidly vanishing oral tradition, ritual performances, verbal and non-verbal expressions and numerous cultural symbols, festivals and community celebrations. In 2007, I began with a small organization named 'Karbi Young Writers' Guild'

with a handful of enthusiasts and colleagues which managed to bring out the first volume of a collaborative work named 'Karbi Studies' in January 2008. Incidentally, the first colonial ethnographic work called 'The Mikirs' by Edward Stack and Charles Lyall, came out a century ago in 1908. In the long and tedious interregnum, not much of substance was produced by Karbi authors. The first Karbi PhD holder appeared only in 1990 and the number only increased beyond 30 by 2020 after a Campus of the Assam University was established in 2007 at Diphu. The second edition of the first volume of Karbi Studies appeared in 2012 as 'Memories, Myths, Metaphors' which was followed by my solo effort of Karbi Studies named 'Reclaiming the Ancestors' Voices...' (2011). The efforts continued with the publications of the 3rd and 4th volumes, namely - 'Folktales from the Fringe' (2012) and 'In Search of the Drongo and Other Stories' (2014). These books are attempts to question and counter-argue the relentless, negative and harmful portrayals of Karbi. Currently, I am heading a small research organization called the 'Centre for Karbi Studies' (CKS), formed in 2015, as its founder Director, to continue indigenous research activities, and to deconstruct, reconstruct and rewrite Karbi tradition, culture and history. CKS is taking initiatives to introduce full-time academic course in 'Karbi Studies' in 2021 in partnership with MEWSC (Marginalized and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre), UCC (Ireland) and scholars – both institutional and non-institutional – which is an effort to integrate Karbi knowledge system with the academia.

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FEMININITY AND EMPOWERMENT – SOME NOTES ON UKRAINIAN WONDER TALES

By *Alina Oprelianska*, University of Tartu, Estonia

Having been born and brought up in Ukraine, I got used to a paradox of an omnipresent patriarchal society and the dominant position of a woman in a family at the same time. There is a commonplace Ukrainian proverb, which says that “Man is the head of a family”, and embodies the patriarchal society premises, and which is supported and encouraged by the Orthodox Church. Besides, there is another widespread proverb: “Man is the head, but woman is the neck”, which means that a woman (the neck) rules the direction of a movement and sight (of the head, of a man).

Such a rule-the-world entanglement is inherent for Ukrainian culture, and inevitably was reflected in Ukrainian customary law and wonder tales. Here I use wonder tales in a one row with customary law, because I follow Lutz Röhrich’s idea that “Few of the miraculous elements in folktales seem to have a link to living folk beliefs” (Röhrich [1956] 1991: 57). By this, neither Röhrich nor I mean that all the beliefs that can be found in the folktales are alive now, rather used to be active and believed, though in Ukrainian context some of the beliefs remain alive nowadays. Even though Röhrich mentioned beliefs and miraculous elements only, I can add that, firstly, customary law was a living part of the society and regulated interpersonal relationships; and secondly, such an important part of life should have been reflected in the

folktales in the same way as beliefs did. By customary law, I mean laws and rights that occur among folks and serve as a source to regulate property rights. Ukrainians applied an official law system in the exclusive situation when despite the custom a conflict was not solved. Otherwise, customary law regulated labour division, property rights, and civil cases. But before moving to wonder tales and how they are intertwined with customary law, let me first explain the phenomena of a patriarchal society with women dominance.

We should not go back to a remote past or even recall the archival material of the turn of the 20th century, to define what two proverbs, mentioned above, actually mean. Contemporary Ukrainian family in its majority, especially in rural areas (which covers a major part of Ukraine) is built in the way that a man officially embodies the concept of the head of the family, whereas a woman is divided between job, family, and household duties. Hence, when a man is not capable to meet the requirements of masculine duties imposed on him, a woman is the one who leads and runs the household, family and all the necessary decisions, including a proper job for a husband. Such a description might seem too generalised and the one that is not up to modern movements. Indeed, it is not. Here I purposely omit the newest movements for feminism and women's position in general, but rather concentrate on a major part of Ukrainian society of rural areas or which was born there, and which is far from, so to speak, progressive intellectuals ideas and which merely do their best to cope with existing realities. A story about a semi-patriarchy and divided woman is the story that I have heard for so many times from my friends and the people whom I acquainted with, and that I had been observing in my native town since childhood, for sure, from different points of view.

THE ONTOLOGY OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Thinking about this phenomenon, I assumed that it should have been rooted in the times of the Soviet Union. To be precise, the first drive should have been in the 1920th with the invasion of Soviets and an establishment of a distorted feminism. By distorted feminism I mean an idea and cultural pattern where a woman can “stop a galloping horse”, and where she is depicted as a big asexual and even non-human cubic figure that embodies the strength of a Soviet woman.

The second wave that should have influenced masculinity too, was the Second World War and related to its propaganda when the concept of a “protector” was established. This concept meant that a man should have protected the country, while a woman should have taken care of children, job and all the duties at home and be ready to go to the War as well. The main problem with this concept, to my mind, was that once the Second World War ended, men did not find a way to implement the imposed stereotype, while women were able to go on with the established concept, and they did, and they keep going on until now in Ukraine.

However, the ontology of this phenomenon has its roots more deeply. The letters of one traveller who had a trip through Ukraine in the 1816s describe the position of women and men in such a way:

Женский пол здесь трудолюбивее мужского. Малороссиянки не только заботятся о малютках и стариках, не только пекутся о приготовлении всего нужного для домашней жизни; но и отправляют работы мужчин, - с которыми живут они в согласии, исполняя желания и волю их, не будучи однако ж в рабском повиновении [Women here are more industrious than men. Malorossian [Ukrainian] women not only take care of children and elders, not only care about household keeping; but also do men's job, with whom [with men] they live in a consensus, following their wishes and wills, though [women] are not in a slavish obedience] (Levshyn 1816, 45-46).

Even though the shadow of a personal opinion covers this description, it is not so distant from reality. Another ethnographic description from the 1877 year from central Ukraine contains an intriguing notion. Describing labour division and mentioning that “A woman plays quite an equal role” (Bogdanovich 1877: 158) in the family, the author then says:

Интересно, что вскоре после женитьбы многие из мужей выказывают свою власть и нередко довольно жестко, но это длиться не долго и почти всегда конец тот, что женщина забирает главенство в доме [It is interesting that soon after the wedding a lot of men demonstrate their power [authority] and often [demonstrate it] in a quite hard way, but it does not go on for a long time, and almost all the time it ends up in a way, that a woman takes the heading position in a house [family]]” (Bogdanovich 1877, 158).

As can be seen, both authors have stressed the empowered position of a woman in a, so to speak, peasant culture already in the 19th century. It leads us to the conclusion that such a position should be reflected in customary law, and, consequently, in wonder tales.

HEROINE'S FEMININITY THROUGHOUT THE CUSTOMARY LAW

Gender Studies on folktales and feminist approach has developed the depiction of femininity (Jorgensen 2019) and the development of girls' sexuality in female folktales (Girardot 1977; Jones 1986, 1993; Bacchilega 1993). Thus, Cristina Bacchilega asserts that “patriarchal ideals of femininity” (Bacchilega 1993, 3) are reflected in wonder tales and are imposed on the heroines, which is correct for Ukrainian folktales too, but not limited to it. As I have said above, patriarchal society is not such a homogeneous idea in Ukraine. Therefore, I can assume that besides the “patriarchal ideals” of female features and beauty, or what is called “femininity”, there is also an interpretation of patriarchal realities by women, or to be precise, what women need to live on a proper level in a patriarchal society. Bacchilega mentioned that “gender is understood within the frameworks of class and social order” (ibid: 2), and if we talk about a woman of a peasant class (and so is the heroine of female tales), what could be the social order then? What is demanded from her and what does her gender role perform when patriarchy exists but does not function properly? To answer this question I will move to wonder tales ATU 480D “The Kind and The Unkind Girls”, which in Ukrainian variants is titled as “The Mare's Head” (*Кобиляча Голова*), or to be precise, to the aim of the heroine's journey.

Ukrainian variants of this tale type tell about the old man's daughter and the old woman's daughter, both girls are of marriageable age. Stepmother hates the old man's daughter, accuses her of laziness and forces her husband to drive the daughter away from home. He calmly obeys the wife and brings his daughter to wood and leaves her in a secluded hut. In the late evening, the Mare's Head knocks on the door and demands the girl to help her. She performs all the tasks, and then the Mare's Head asks her to step into the right ear and to go out from the left one. She did, she sees a lot of goods inside the head, takes all the necessary things and comes back home rich. Stepmother demands her husband to bring her daughter to the same place. He did, but she failed the tasks and was eaten by the Mare's Head, and only bones in a sack remain after her.

As can be seen, the result of the journey is material goods. Therefore, I can assume that the aim of the journey is material goods too, or, better to say, the lack of it. Why should the girl gain material goods and not just get married instead? Why does she get material goods as a reward instead of a favourable spouse? Besides, why would stepmother accuse her of laziness and demand to send her away? The answer to these questions lies in the field of customary law. Applying Ukrainian customary law for the analysis, I am going to emphasise on labour division and property rights it entails,

the inheritance of property and the right to own property. Let me start from the last point – the right to own property. According to Ukrainian custom, only the one, who works, can get a property (Chubynskii 1872, 32), and this law was applied to both sexes. Being accused of laziness, even though she was not a lazy one, the heroine loses her right to be economically equal to a family.

The next law is related to the labour division. In Ukraine, a woman took care of the household and some cattle including a cow. Since she was the one who ruled and took care of it, she was also the one who had a right to own profit from this job and to use it (ibid.: 33, 42-43). For that money, she was able to buy different stuff for herself, including a necklace that played a prominent role in a woman's appearance, and to buy clothes for her daughters, or to save for a cow or land. Nobody was able to ask her about that money (ibid.: 42-43). Thus, living in a patriarchal society, a woman still had an opportunity for economic autonomy.

The third and the last point is about dowry. It was divided into two parts – the one, prepared exclusively by the mother from money she earned from the household keeping, and another part was given by parents and might have contained the cattle or a real estate (ibid.: 42, 54). A real estate, the land, can be inherited from the mother's side (if she had or bought one) or be endowed by father if he bought it and wished to endow her daughter with land or if he bought it and did not have sons. The dowry, inherited from the mother's side, is called *materyzna* (материзна) (ibid). That is what the girl lacks in the tale and that is what she gets as a reward.

CONCLUSION

What does customary law, described above, means for the wonder tale and for the empowerment of women? Otherwise, her daughters would not get a dowry and would not get a good mate. It is also necessary to mention that despite the beauty in modern meaning and love, dowry was of high importance. Having a rich dowry a girl could choose by herself, while having a poor one, she should wait to be chosen if ever will be chosen at all. Getting all the goods and proper clothes and the necklaces, she has turned herself into a favourable spouse. It is remarkable that the tale mirrors customs about the material goods that are needed for marriage, rather than marriage itself, moving the stress to a material side.

Taking into account that women took care of the major part of the household, it was and it is logical that women often took the heading position in the family, especially, when it is supported by the rights to own property and money. This right was inherited from Kyivska Russ times, was partially described in the second and third Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and remained important in customary law in the 19th century. Soviet times played a role in the problem of owning property, but the pattern of empowered women remains until nowadays.

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* Cover illustration by Kateryna Shtanko to Ukrainian fairy tale "The Mare's Head", made for "100 of Ukrainian tales. The Best Ukrainian folk tales. Tom 2". Kyiv: A-ba-ba-ha-la-ma-ha. 2013.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES ON COVID 19 IN LITHUANIA

*Asta Skujytė-Razmienė, Institute of
Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius, Lithuania*



NEWSLETTER
No. 8: 2021

In the 21st century, every ailment seems to be demythologized and demystified. I would argue that an individual living in a modern Western society would rarely imagine plague as a woman, a child or a spirit, think of sacrificing a person in order to deflect the approaching cholera, and attribute anthropomorphic or zoomorphic features to other illnesses and diseases – at least as vastly, as it used to be done in the previous centuries. Most contemporary people know that diseases are caused by viruses or bacteria and are treatable with antibiotics or preventable with vaccines. Nevertheless, when in 2019 China reported of a new Coronavirus SARS-Cov-2 causing the disease COVID-19, which rapidly spread across the world, coping with the virus and its consequences became a tremendous challenge to many countries and citizens.

Although for the past months various measures were implemented to flatten the curve (from mandatory wearing of masks to quarantine), the rising numbers of infected people as well as dead, the lack of vaccines, the question of immunity against the virus even after recovering from it, brought to many people anxiety and fear. Such situations are usually convenient for spreading conspiracy theories and false (or fake) news attempting to cover the etiology of the disease (by confirming or denying it) as well as suggesting the ways of prevention or treatment. In an attempt to uncover what kind of theories and advice from vernacular medicine is circulating in the Lithuanian society, in July 2020 the Lithuanian Folklore Archives (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore) released an online anonymous survey containing 29 questions covering the topic “The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Quarantine on the Lithuanian Society”. The form of the questions was adapted from the questionnaire created by the Estonian Folklore Archives (Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv). During two months, we received 108 completed forms and in this short overview, I am going to present some outlines based on the results of the survey as well as point out a few aspects that might enable comparing the COVID-19 to the previous pandemics in a mythological sense.

Out of 29 questions of the survey, 25 dealt with the pandemic and quarantine, while the last four aimed at collecting general data about the participants (sex, age, education, location). The most active group of participants were women (72,2 %), while men comprised 26,9 %. From the perspective of age, the most active group were people from 42 to 51 years (28,7 %), people from 22 to 31 years comprised 26,9 % of the participants, while the third most active group were those from 32 to 41 years old (20,4 %). Other groups shared the remaining quarter (from 52 to 61 years – 13,9 %; people up to 21 years – 5,6 %, participants from 62 to 71 years – 4,6 %). As it was expected, the survey was most actively shared and filled in by people with higher education (82,4 %), leaving other groups to share 17,6 % (people with post-secondary education – 7%, secondary education – 7%, vocational education training – 1,9 %, lower secondary education – 0,9 %; 1,9% of the respondents chose “other”).

Because of this reason, this survey mostly represents the opinions of a certain group of people. Nevertheless, as the last question shows, although 51% of the respondents marked their location as “Vilnius” (the capital

city of Lithuania), 49 % of the participants were from other cities, towns and villages, including two forms that were filled by Lithuanians who currently resided abroad (Denmark and the United Kingdom).

The survey itself included these topics: information on COVID-19 (sources, etiological theories, vernacular medicine, and the role of the media), medicine-related behavior during the quarantine (visiting the medical institution, shopping in pharmacy), mental state (general well being, contacting the psychologist, religious practices), shopping habits, lifestyle changes. Although, as already mentioned, the intention of the survey was to detect conspiracy theories and false news, it also gave a chance to glimpse what people feel in the case of the current pandemic, and what causes them anxiety or fear. This data is going to be useful in the future research, especially bearing in mind the lack of similar information from the previous pandemics.

In order to discover what kind of narratives are circulating in contemporary Lithuanian society, the respondents were asked to write down (if possible) all the theories on the COVID-19 (or, korona, as the folk now usually call it) that they have heard. There were almost no cases of leaving this survey field blank: most of the participants listed two and more theories on the origins of the virus. The results show two major types of theories addressing the origins of the SARS-Cov-2 virus: the first one stresses the natural origins of the virus, while the second (and the largest) one claims that the virus was created artificially.

The keywords mentioned most frequently in the first group include Bat (48), market (14), Pangolin (10), and Wuhan (10). As the reason and means for the virus spreading among humans, the respondents depicted the virus as naturally “jumping” from an animal to a human host, e.g.: “It jumped from a bat onto an unknown animal and then jumped onto a human, and has acquired the ability to spread among humans” or “It originated among bats, then it was transferred to people and continued spreading”. According to epidemiologists, “the virus started in bats and jumped to humans “naturally,” possibly from people who handled infected animals at a market in Wuhan, China”, which makes these “origin narratives” close enough to the scientific facts.

However, a large part of the narratives in this group tend to associate the origins of the virus to the consumption of the meat of wild animals (e.g. “infected [with the virus] while eating the soup with batmeat”; “By eating an infected bat”; “It [the virus] appeared naturally, it was transferred to a human while eating an incorrectly processed bat and/or pangolin”). I would argue that this is where the process of “folklorization” begins. This particular “variation” might be influenced by images of “bat soup” that started circulating in Lithuania soon after the news of a new unidentified virus appearing in China reached our country. However, there are some other deviations from the “mainstream narrative” in this group, especially since the bat in the narratives might be changed with snake (5 cases), pig (1 case), raccoon dog (1 case), and monkey (1 case). This demonstrates how contemporary folk can create a narrative that is close to the scientific facts but at the same time is already a deviation.

Despite the information from the World Health Organization (WHO) stating that “many researchers have been able to look at the genomic features of SARS-CoV-2 and have found that evidence does not support that SARS-CoV-2 is a laboratory construct”, the second (and the largest) group of the narratives circulating in Lithuania claim that the virus is artificially created. In 39 cases, the virus was described as created in a laboratory. In other 34 cases this theory was expanded by adding that the virus was released on purpose (19 cases), or it was “leaked” or “escaped” by coincidence (15 cases). As other scholars point out, “the fact that the Wuhan lab is a

branch of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention and is located about 300 yards from the food market where scientists believe the outbreak started is pointed out to cast doubt on the 'official' conclusion." Answering the question of who is responsible for creating or releasing the virus, the respondents listed various "culprits": organizations (secret/intelligence service – 2 cases; terrorists – 2 cases; scientists and pharmacists – 2 cases; masons – 1 case; Lithuania's State Social Insurance Fund Board under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor – 1 case), famous people (Bill Gates – 5 cases), or countries (China – 28 cases, USA – 13 cases, Russia – 3 cases, Israel – 2 cases, France – 1 case). As the reason for creating the virus, respondents mentioned the creation of a biological weapon (8 cases), powerful people wanting to control the number of people (4 cases), control of the market (1 case), avoiding financial crisis (1 case), inserting people with microchips (3 cases) and controlling them via 5G (17 cases), or preventing the World War III (1 case). Additionally, in 15 cases respondents claimed that there is no virus: "In general, I think that this is just a flu that somebody crowned [as dangerous] and made people fear it. It is just a method of controlling the market. Flu with complications in lungs was on the rise 10 years ago, but nobody even batted an eye. It is a little strange that this "deadly" virus passes with no consequences for most people".

As many of the respondents wrote in their forms, that one of the most terrifying things to them is the ability of certain persons to carry the virus without any symptoms. Paired with the fear for the health of the elders and those already ill, as well as the possibility of overfilled hospitals, the fall of economy, not knowing how potentially dangerous the virus is and when the vaccines are going to be available, were the causes of anxiety and stress. These might be a few reasons why the need of scapegoating – looking for culprits – arises. If during the times of plague people used to blame various minorities, or believed that God punished them with pestilence, currently these "divine powers" are attributed to the (often-anonymous) rich people or personified countries. The involvement of laboratories in these narratives not only shows how institutions can be generalized and mythologized, but also should be seen as a warning sign to all the scientific community, because in the contemporary folk view, science might be seen as a source of danger and potential evil.



Liminal organization —

Workshop “‘Indigeneity’, Orality, and Liminal Ontologies: Methodological Pluralisms and Approaches to Culture”

January 14-17, 2020 in Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India

By **Maria Momzikova**, *University of Tartu, Estonia*



Image: Longbir Engti Kathar

CONFERENCE REPORT

In the winter of 2020, people from the Karbi indigenous community and scholars from different parts of the world including Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Denmark, the US, the UK, Italy gathered together in Diphu (Karbi Anglong, Assam, India) for several days to participate in the workshop “‘Indigeneity’, Orality, and Liminal Ontologies: Methodological Pluralisms and Approaches to Culture”. The workshop was hosted by the Karbi indigenous community and particularly the Centre for Karbi Studies. There were papers from participants who work or study in foreign or Indian academic institutions as well as from Karbi scholars and people interested in their culture. I was privileged to be one of the organizers of the workshop.

The academic part of the program consisted of lectures and presentations. Lectures were delivered by Anil Kumar Boro (Gauhati University), Lidia Guzy (University College Cork), Jyrki Pöysä (University of Eastern Finland), Claire S. Scheid (Independent Researcher), Laura Siragusa (University of Helsinki), Uwe Skoda (Aarhus University), Dharamsing Teron (Centre for Karbi Studies), Ülo Valk (University of Tartu). Lecturers focused on topics of liminality, indigeneity, orality, marginalization, colonization, religious practices, human and non-human encounters. Participants from Karbi, Indian and international localities presented 38 papers focusing on similar topics. Young scholars, local activists, researchers, and professors gathered listening and giving comments to each other.

The non-academic activities of the workshop focused on the promotion of the Karbi culture. The workshop was inaugurated by the Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Shri Tuliram Ronghang. Tirim Chingduk, Karbi Indigenous Ritual to Invoke the Ancestors, was conducted by Dhonison Lekthe and Jensing Ronghang during the opening ceremony. Participants also experienced the night bonfire with the Karbi traditional music and dances and the excursion to religious sites in Diphu. Coffee-breaks and lunches were full of traditional Karbi food. The artist Longbir Engti, made a small exhibition of his visual art in watercolour and ink techniques. The designer Serleen Ingtipi, presented clothes from her brand CHOI inspired by the Karbi traditional dress and ornaments.

I have to say that this workshop might not have taken place. In autumn 2019, massive protests opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act started in India; these were especially violent in Assam. Main organizers of the workshop, Margaret Lyngdoh and Dharamsing Teron, had been monitoring the news. New information was coming every day. Dates of the workshop had been fluctuating, the program had been shortened, and some international participants cancelled their travelling due to universities' travel restrictions to India and particularly to Assam. The workshop's organizers were spread between India and Estonia, sometimes Indian part was unavailable due to lockdowns and Internet blocking which added additional problems to the organizational process. As a result, the dates of the workshop were limited, and organizers had to withdraw the fieldwork in local villages from the program. Participants got the note of warning that the workshop can be cancelled any day due to the unpredictable political situation in India. All this maintained the feeling of liminality during the organizational process both for organizers and participants. When the workshop was coming to an end, Margaret Lyngdoh said that she would never title future workshops using the term "liminality".

Happily, the workshop was not cancelled and went productively surrounded by a lovely atmosphere. Who could know at the time that this small workshop in India was a rehearsal of the global Covid-19 crisis that started in March 2020, when people all over the world were faced with similar liminal problems of changing their schedules and cancelling planned academic activities. All that teaches us to be flexible and let out a sigh of relief when the state of liminality is over.

LAKE QOOQA AS A NARRATIVE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY, OROMIA/ETHIOPIA

By Assefa Tefera Dibaba, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself
Gregory Bateson

The present study was planned for the 18th ISF-NR Congress, June 2020 at University of Zagreb, Croatia, focusing on “Encountering Emotions in Folk Narratives and Folklife,” and rescheduled for September 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a string of ‘narrative turns’ in other disciplinary fields like folkloric/literary studies (ecopoetics/ethnoecology), environmental history, and anthropology, I used “life hi/story narratives” from Amudde, Arsi, Oromia/Ethiopia to trigger a few methodological and theoretical rather broad questions of folkloric and ecological nature in doing a narrative research: What is a narrative? Is personal narrative story folk-

lore? Where do stories come from? What should the researcher do with the stories s/he collected? What



Figure 1.

does the story reveal about the people and the environment in which they live? Thus, the purpose of the present study was to explore the unsettled human-ecology relationship in Amudde using “narrative inquiry” methods of “temporality,” “sociality,” and “place” (Clandinin, 1990) about the Qooqa Lake pollution. People’s narrated life experience directs attention toward the past, present, and future (temporality) of place, events, and things in the area of study (place), which affects the personal and social conditions of the participants understood in terms of cultural, institutional, social, and linguistic narratives.

THE OROMO PEOPLE AND OROMIA

The Oromo are the most populous single ethno-nation in Northeast Africa and they constitute the larger portion of the inhabitants of Ethiopia (Central Statistical Agency, 2010). They speak Afaan Oromoo (Oromo Language), a Cushitic branch, which is spoken in Ethiopia and Kenya and is the fourth widely spoken language in Africa after Arabic, Swahili, and Hausa (Lodh, 1993). Until the Oromo were colonized by Abyssinia, another African nation, with the help of the European colonial powers of the day, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (1870-1900), the

Oromo developed their own socio-political and cultural system called the Gadaa system, a uniquely democratic institution of paramount human and ecological significance (Hassen Mohammed, 1992). To find out how the local ecological knowledge and local institutions address the major challenges of eco-colonialism in Oromia which has imposed immense human dislocation, environmental degradation, violations of land property rights (land grab), equity and compensational injustices, people’s life-histories are reliable sources (Jackson, 2002; Gedicks,

1993). The case of the historical forceful eviction of Suba, the Jiille branch of Tulama Oromo, in the previous Qooqa plain is no exception. In this study the life experience narrative of informants from Amudde, East Arsi, Oromia, and Amina's story in particular, was analyzed from the people's perspective. Currently the Oromo are in some debate about what constitutes human good when things fall apart and how to endure life in adverse conditions as the socio-political and ecological crisis is unfolding.

There are lots of narratives about Lake Qooqa. The present study aimed at two objectives. One is, using ethnoecological data, to explore the Green Lake itself as a narrative, which is, in its current situation, a prototypical image of degradation and anthropogenic impacts, and to trace trajectories of the narrative of cultural resilience to the historical grief of loss that people in the study area suffer. Second, toward this end, I used people's stories obtained through interviews from the research site, and, particularly, "Amina's story" about the loss of 7 members of her family, of complications related to drinking the polluted water, as an evidence to show, sharing Sandra Dolby Stahl's claim, that the narrative of personal experience belongs in folklore studies to the established genre of family story.

By linking dimensions of the stated problem, in this project, using a narrative method, I gathered evidences

from across interdisciplinary fields of ecological humanities, folklore, and social sciences, and from the primary data collected in Amudde near Qooqa Lake in the last two weeks of January 2020, and after, through interviews and observations to determine,

- a) how local institutions, ecological knowledge, and indigenous practices work with the mainstream environmental conservation strategies to enhance cultural resilience and whether those strategies are socially and culturally acceptable;
- b) what local institutions and coping strategies are environmentally viable today in relation to the ongoing ecological changes and social dynamics in the study area;
- c) what scientific conservation plans and local water harvesting methods are used; and
- d) what roles and responsibilities the people play to solve the problem and to envision the prospect of ethnoecological approach to human and ecological crisis related to Qooqa Lake.

Ethnoecology is a human and nature-focused approach to the local ecological knowledge about people's relationship to their environment (Johnson, 2010; Berkes, 1999), and ecotheology is a concern about a sanctified relationship between God and humankind, God and nature, and humankind and nature (Kelbessa Workineh, 2010).

NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A METHOD

Personal experience narratives about a social-ecological crisis caused by industrial wastes discharged into rivers and lakes in and around the capital, Addis Ababa, particularly the Qooqa Lake, were collected to determine the people's resilient reintegration process.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

What is narrative? For the purpose of the present study, by “narrative” I mean, sharing Margaret S. Barrett’s view, a “mode of knowing” and “constructing meaning,” a “method of inquiry,” a “story, an account to self and others of people, places, and events, and the relationships that hold between these elements ...the capacity to speak, and through that medium, to construct a version of events” (Barrett 2009, 6-7).

What is “narrative inquiry”? In this study, narrative inquiry is understood as an interpretive approach which involves a storytelling method. Thus, the story becomes an object of study about how the individual (or group) makes sense of events and actions in their lives set in place and time. The study aims to explore the potential of narrative inquiry as a research tool in ethnoecology (folklore-oriented ecology) to enhance the understanding of how stories convey local knowledge about the unbalanced human-nature nexus.

What should the narrative researcher do with the stories s/he collected? Ethnographically speaking, “the first-person accounts are realistic descriptions of events” set in time, and thus, “it is the events described and not the stories created that are the object of investigation”; whereas, in using narrative inquiry as a multidisciplinary research tool, “narrative analysis then takes the story itself as the object of study” (Mitchell and Egudo, 2003, 2). In this regard, some might consider “analysis” to imply objectivity, and “interpretation” to imply subjectivity; whereas, “both work in tandem because we analyze narrative data in order to develop an understanding of the meanings our

participants give to themselves” (2016:189). To Ruthellen Josselson “narrative research is always interpretive at every stage ... from conceptualization of research, to data collection, to writing research text” (Josselson, 2006, 4).

Is personal narrative story folklore? The multifaceted narrative form is another challenge to a narrative researcher. Elliott Oring (1986), an American folklorist, shares the view that “Narrative is another word for story, and narrating is a method by which an experience is transformed into a verbal account,” recapitulating an experience and “matching a verbal sequence of statements to some sequence of events which is purported to have occurred” (ibid). Among some sub-varieties of “narrative” include personal experience story, and life history (emphasis mine), just to name a few” (Oring, 121). To Elliott Oring, “folk narratives are generally conceptualized to be those narratives which articulate primarily in oral tradition and are communicated face-to-face” (122-123). I should add here that, among some characteristics of “folk narratives” include: folk narratives must be re-created with each telling; with this recreation processes, they reflect both the past (language, symbols, events, and forms), to evoke meaning at present about contemporary situations, concerns, values and attitudes (Oring, *ibid.*, 123). In this study, narratives are understood as stories, an ordering of events in time and place, “an effort to make something out of those events: to render, or to signify, the experience of persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner ... elements of the past, present, and future” (Sandelowski, 2007:162, 1982).

NARRATING THE QOOQA LAKE

Qooqa Lake is found on the Awash River in East Shawa Zone, 75 km southeast of Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), the capital, and south of the main Mojo-Adama road. The ecosystem around the lake includes the surrounding farmlands, the Awash River, the woodland, and the hot-spring below the dam. The only large trees left around the shores of the

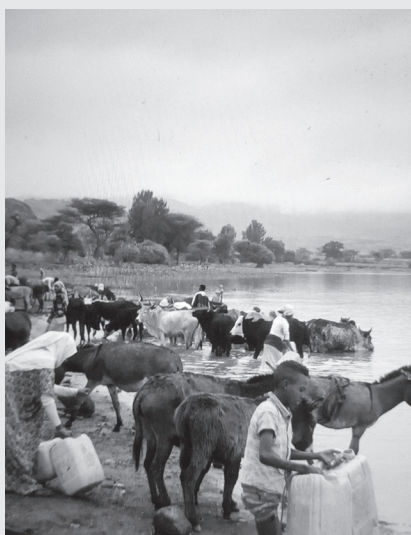
lake are qilxuu (figs) as a result of clearing for crop cultivation. Although the main human activity in the area is farming with a special focus on growing horticultural crops and pulses using the alluvial soil, the area where eviction and pollution became a social problem for over 60 years, land and land resources have been a bone of contention.

Studies show that the Qooqa Reservoir originally with a catchment area of about 12,068 km², including other shallow water bodies, is “of high ecological and socioeconomic importance,” the importance which has been “compromised by nutrient enrichment that resulted in turbid,

algae-dominated waters associated with animal communities ... the change to aqua-system that lead to loss of biodiversity and pose a serious threat to public health” (Major Yeshimebet, 2016, citing Perrow et al., 1999; Eshetu Ferezer, 2012; Degefu Fasil, et al, 2011).

THE POLLUTION PROBLEM

Ethiopia is considered the water tower of east Africa because of its great resource of surface and groundwater. However, in spite of its available water, the country is unable to provide access to clean water in either rural or urban areas. Since its foundation in 1887 by removing the Oromo natives of Galan, Ekka, and Gullalle of the Torban Oboo lineages, Addis Ababa (Finfinne) the capital has grown from sparse settlements to an expansive and highly populated city causing water-bodies and ecosystems in its vicinity to suffer immeasurable crises. Its recent unplanned urban development and industrialization has caused considerable internal displacements and environmental degradation and, consequently, the encroachment has been met by furious protests over the last few years. Around the Qooqa Lake, the Mojo River, and the Aqaqi River, pollution has been putting a tremendous



pressure on both social and natural capital. The practice of recycling solid wastes such as composting and biomass

is at its experimental stage in the country (Ademe and Alemayehu, 2014). The liquid waste management is also at its rudimental stage and there is no binding rule implemented for industries how to dispose of their wastes without affecting the environment and the society (Major Yeshimabet, 2016).

Among the major waste-waters that drain industrial disposals into the Qooqa reservoir include the Aqaqi River (great and little Aqaqi), which is the tributary of Awash River, Mojo River, which takes the raw effluent directly from Mojo mill factory, from the butter houses and poultry farms, and from Shoa and Ethio-tanneries (Major Yeshimabet, 2016; Degefu Fasil, et al, 2013).

Figure 2.

DISCUSSION

In the interviews, I asked the informants (individuals & group) to reflect on Oromo cultural ecology, on what is sacred and secular in their domain, on indigenous ecological practices, on their water harvesting personal experiences and to tell their stories, on indigenous agricultural knowledge, on alter/native ways of balancing human-ecology solidarity, on causes and consequences of the Qooqa crisis, and on the challenges to and limitations of indigenous

ecological practices. Throughout the interview process, I obtained not only information (facts, names and dates) from the interviewees, but also insights, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and practices relevant to the lake and other related issues.

The data collected on multiple narrative voices (multivocality) and nuanced senses of place (multilocality) about Lake Qooqa was organized and discussed in two

subsections. First, contested world-views: a) although it is generally agreed that the culture and tradition in which both Christianity and Islam emerged were Jewish and Arabic cultures, respectively, it remains unclear how both religious creeds could totally fit into the diverse cultures of the world in general and to the culture of the study area in particular; b) it is equally puzzling how the (eco-)culture of the study area can accommodate non-indigenous religion (e.g., Islam, Christianity) without being marginalized itself. Second, contested ecologies & the “bulee” / “algae” metaphor; a) it is discussed that taking advantage of the lack of regulations and clear policies, state-owned facilities such as the Qooqa dam and the power plant, multinational corporations (e.g., floricultures), factories (e.g., tanneries), and local entrepreneurs (e.g., horticultural irrigation systems) unsettled the ecosystem, nullified the traditional ecological knowledge and culture, dislocated the local political system and integrity of the indigenous people (social cohesion), with immeasurable psychological impacts and non compensable loss of values; b) metaphorically speaking, the Oromo and other peoples around the capital, Finfinne (Addis Ababa), have been subjected to a second-class citizen as they suffer forced evictions and every form of social and environmental injustices.

Following Amina’s story from Amudde featured on the Al Jazeera Television Documentary, 2009, the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) based in North Amer-

ica joined in a serious debate with Pittards, a UK based P.L.C., investing in leather products in Ethiopia to address the pollution of Lake Koka and referring the problem to the management of the Ethiopia Tannery, later taken over by Pittards. However, Pittards, in its letter to OSA in 2009, denied the accusations, stating that OSA’s study of Lake Qooqa’s pollution was based on evidence from 2003 whereas Pittards took over the tannery in 2005. Still, its management offered to consider a meeting with OSA to discuss the matter in the future. Four of the presentations on one panel of the 2009 Oromo Studies Association took up the issue of Qooqa Lake pollution and the inattentiveness of investors committed to development without environmental sustainability.

Studies show that there are proved evidences of high concentration of deadly heavy metals such as Mercury, Arsenic, Chromium, Lead, and Cadmium above normal levels for clean and drinking freshwater in the lakes along the Rift Valley including Qooqa Lake (Zinabu & Pears, 2001; Major Yeshimabet, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) also found that those heavy metal contaminants are deadly carcinogenic (cancer-causing) chemicals. The same heavy metals were found in the industrial waste discharges from a tannery and in effluents from a textile factory adjacent to the lake (Zinabu & Pears, *ibid*; www.gadaa.com).

SUMMARY

The analysis in this study demonstrated the cultural significance of the sacred lake, Haroo Roobii, until it was over-flooded by the man-made Qooqa Lake in 1960, which, metaphorically speaking, has two meanings to the people living in the area. First, as a result of the externally induced and internally motivated socio-cultural changes and religious pressures, the alter/native indigenous practices and life-ways have been dominated. Second, the fact that they use Qooqa Lake (the Green Lake), which is polluted by contaminants (bulee), has the implications to the people in the study area that although they have been facing human and ecological challenges, and forced to use

the “unclean water” for drinking, washing, cooking, irrigation, fishing, and for ritual purposes, while they have been dying and suffering throughout the successive regimes, the people are resilient and grappling with unbearable environmental and human conditions.

With all these in mind, I sum up by echoing Gregory Bateson’s concern in his “The Roots of Ecological Crisis”: the causes of environmental degradation “lie in the combined action of a) technological advance; b) population increase; and c) conventional (but wrong) ideas about the nature of man and his relation to the environment” (Bateson 1987:343). The latter cause relates to the present

day unethical relationship of man toward nature which, according to Bateson, dates from the Industrial Revolution (p345): (a) It's us against the environment; (b) It's us against other men; (c) We live within an infinitely expanding "frontier"; (d) Economic determinism is common

sense; (e) Technology will do it for us. He adds that these ideas appear to be false under modern ecological theory.

Note: Figure 1. and 2. Lake Roobii & Qooqa Lake connected. Amudde, in the 1960s. Jan 27, 2020. Photo: Author.

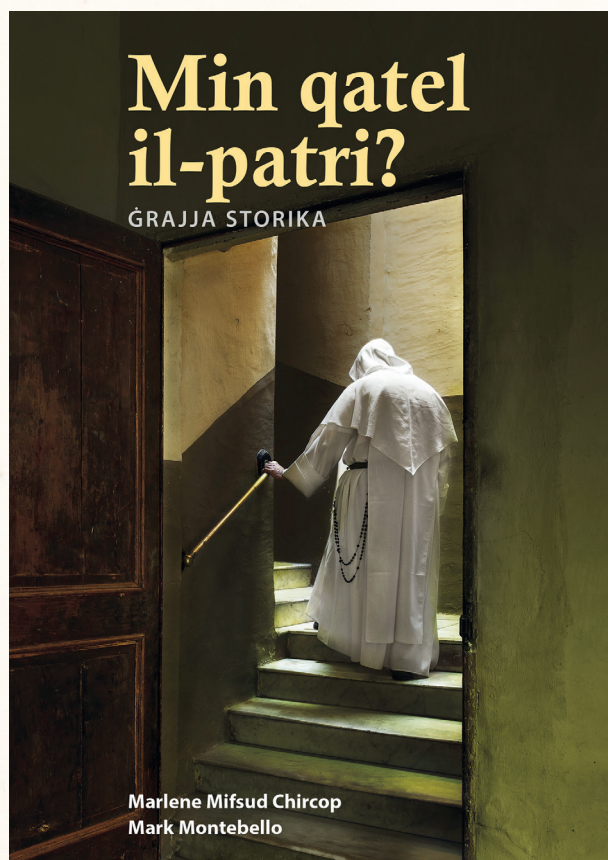
Dr Assefa (aka Asafa) Tefera Dibaba is a poet, educator and researcher based at Addis Ababa University (Oromia/Ethiopia). He is the author of anthologies of poems in English and Oromo including: *Anaany'aa* (1998, 2006), *Edas-Edanas* (1997), *Finfi (Ilyaada)* (2014), *Decorous Decorum* (2006), and *The Hug* (2011), and has published works of prose including *Danaa* (2000), *Eela* (2009), *Theorizing the Present* (2004, reprinted as *Beyond Adversities*, 2010). He first moved to the United States in July 2010 after receiving the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund for the persecution he was facing in Ethiopia. He stayed in the United States to pursue a PhD at Indiana University (2011-2015). His recent research has focused on ethnoecology and ecopoetics, and his latest poetry collection is *Symposia* (2018). Dr Assefa just published another collection of his poems in English titled *Ate-Loon* (2020).



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Who Killed Padre Grimani? An 18th Century Murder in a Ballad

By **Marlene Mifsud Chircop**, University of Malta, Malta

This paper is a case study of a crime ballad. In my dissertation (2015) “The Maltese ballad ‘ghana tal-fatt’, its cultural transition and social element”, this case study deals with the cultural mobility of an eighteenth-century nine-verse typically short popular crime ballad *Kieku tafu, huti, x’gara ... /O, my brethren, if you knew what happened*” or *Per l’omicidio successo in persona del P. Lettor Vincenzo Grimani – Canzona in Maltese/About the murder of P. Lettor Vincenzo Grimani – a song in Maltese* (Mifsud: 166-167), which for quite several years had seen no real closure.

18th Century scholar Rev Dr Ignazio Saverio Mifsud (1722-1773), had access to the sonetti in the Public Library archives; he reproduced this important ballad, about Dominican friar Vincenzo Grimani’s murder in his journal *Stromata* a few years after the crime was committed along with the sonetti referring to the murder (Mifsud: 160-165, 168-173) which, however, had been written before, immediately after the first accusation of the Sicilian soldier. Chaplain Gaetano Reboul, Mifsud’s contemporary, also recorded the passing of Grimani in his journal.

Written ballads in Maltese, which usually deal with crime or some form of adversity and which date from the time of the Order of St John or before, are quite rare, except for the 19th and 20th -century ones printed in chapbooks. Ballads such as *L-Gharusa tal-Mosta/The Bride of Mosta*, *Bint L-Awditur/The Auditor’s Daughter* and *Guditta u Robertu/Guditta and Robertu*, from the 16th to 18th centuries, still existed orally in folk memory when the late folklorist Guze Cassar Pullicino collected them in the 20th -century. This fact does not exclude orally transmitted ones about historical events or those that had been transformed into legend, in the time of the Order and which were printed in the latter decades of the 19th -century and the early 20th -century in the nationalistic spirit of the times. There could have been other unrecorded ballads

the Maltese sang and which for various reasons had fallen into oblivion, illiteracy has been rampant among the folk. Crime ballads are almost always written soon after the crime is committed. The Grimani ballad itself does not reveal the perpetrator of Grimani’s murder. Indeed some of the early ballads do not reveal if known perpetrators had been brought to justice. This ballad is an interesting case of interacting with cultural and literary factors. It shows the social aspect of a Maltese ballad and its related sonnets in Italian and Sicilian in an intricate weaving of aspects of poetic genres, criminality, and social and institutional intrigue, especially between the Maltese and the Sicilians and among the Maltese Dominican friars themselves.

This ballad underwent cultural mobility contemporaneously with the false accusation, so notorious, was it? The narrative of the sonetti available stops just after it is discovered that another Dominican friar in the convent of Porto Salvo, Padre Michel’Angelo Brincat, has been accused of the crime, albeit falsely. This kind of cultural mobility rarely happens in Maltese balladry and even later authors tend to wait for the outcome of the case before they write, let alone having it reproduced in another cultural form. The popular sonetti, evidently written by rival authors of Maltese and Sicilian origins, both camps hurling mutual accusations at the nationality of the presumed perpetrator of the crime, go much further than the ballad itself in that they attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding the crime with contrasting allegations.

The ballad evokes a macabre scene. A thirty-five-year-old Dominican friar, Vincenzo Grimani, was found murdered, suffocated in his own blood, on the bed in his cell in the Dominican convent of Porto Salvo in Valletta – which still stands – on 23 April 1738, St George’s Day, celebrated in Malta, most probably killed on the night between the 22 and 23 April.

This anonymous ballad mentions twenty stab wounds poor Grimani had received from his vicious assailant/s. It is not yet known if a post mortem was held or if a report on it exists, but the ballad states "La ġew barbiera u lanqas tobba/ There came neither barber-surgeons nor doctors" v. 5. Therefore it cannot be known which stab wound/s killed Grimani, which were minor wounds or if any were inflicted after death. The cell door had been locked from outside and the key was thrown away among the nettles in the convent's larger garden where it was found by a small boy four days later v. 3, 4. The news of the most horrid murder spread to the cities v. 6. The ballad writer says he would have never believed people could be so cruel. The singer or writer's sympathy goes to the victim's mother who went to see her dead son v. 7, as did hundreds of others v. 8, attesting to Grimani's popularity.

To the best of our knowledge, this ballad first appeared in print in 1931 (Lehen il-Malti: 6-7) as "Kieku tafu, huti, x'gara/O, my brethren, if you knew what happened", along with a longer also anonymous poem "Jahasra minghajr htija/Alas, I'm not guilty" (Agius De Soldanis: 110-113) in the same issue, both poems having been painstakingly collected by folklorist and linguist Ninu Cremona from I.S. Mifsud's Stromata in the National Library of Malta and reproduced in modern Maltese orthography. In the second half of the twentieth

century, one or both were included in anthologies (Fenech: 24-26, Friggieri: 40-41, 44-46). Cremona refers to the ballad as having been written in 1738 and also to the murdered friar having been thirty-five years old (Reboul: 48) – a fact corroborated by Padre Grimani's death certificate in archives of the parish of Porto Salvo (Liber Mortuarius f. 143).

The longer poem reproduced by Agius De Soldanis (1712-1770) mentioned above, seems to have been written sometime between 1650 and 1750, by a Gozitan priest/poet who imagines himself in Gozo, being dragged to Malta by guards and unjustly and harshly imprisoned for a whole year, unable to say Mass. Abandoned by relatives and friends, he turns to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary for consolation. Dwelling on his pain and frustration, the poet, in the harshest language he can muster, turns against those who were responsible for his plight, yet leaving out their names. Maltese linguist Dwardu Fenech believes the poem is based on fact, but De Soldanis, although a historian, left the source of the case under wraps. For similar omissions historian, Rev Dr. Alessandro Bonnici OFM criticized De Soldanis (Fenech: 23). The suffering of this victim of injustice is reminiscent of that of Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat accused of Grimani's murder, mentioned in the Dominican archives.



The Grimani ballad is "ghana tal-fatt". Right up to our times, folk singers of Maltese "ghana tal-fatt" sing about a murder or a calamity immediately after it happens. Or else, they sing about events other folk singers had sung before them, but which had originally been sung or written immediately after the event had taken place. So in the case of the Grimani ballad most probably folk singers first sang about Grimani's murder in the traditional ballad style and the ballad, still in folk memory, was later written by I.S. Mifsud in his journal while listening to it being sung, or he might have copied it from someone who had already written it.

This Grimani ballad was recently sung by two folk singers, Zeppi Spagnol "Il-Kelba" and Kalcidon Vella "Id-Danny", both of whom decided independently of each other to change a few words in the original Grimani ballad so that it could be sung, as some words the writer had used would have detracted from the rhythm and diction of the ballad. This goes on to prove that whoever first wrote the ballad had been listening to it being sung or else remembered it, but missed some words, filling in with his own instead. It is not to be excluded that some verses might have been forgotten altogether over the years.

In the ballad, many questions had been left unanswered, and it is precisely these unanswered questions which the sonetti attempt to unravel by debating the case in Italian, the language of culture, or Sicilian, lending the weight of their arguments to defend their faction.

One motive of the murder – the rivalry between the Sicilians and the Maltese – let loose a hornet's nest, probably in the first weeks following the crime, causing the early stage of the event to become culturally mobile through the sonetti. Besides the ballad in Maltese (Mifsud: 166-167), we find no less than thirteen sonetti and canzoni (Mifsud: 160-175) in Italian including two in Sicilian written by different authors, Maltese and Sicilians hurling accusa-

tions at each other following the murder.

The first sonetto "Per l'enorme caso successo li 23 aprile 1738 nel Convento de' RR. PP. Pred. di S. Domenico della Valletta, ove nel suo letto si trovo ammazzato con 20 colpi di stile il Lettore Vincenzo Grimani Maltese/About the grievous case which happened on 23 April 1738 in



the Convent of the Rev Dominican preachers in Valletta, where Rev lecturer Vincenzo Grimani, Maltese, was found in bed murdered with 20 dagger blows" (Mifsud: 160), a dialogue between Malta and Sicily, is the reaction to a Sicilian soldier's having been accused of the murder whereas as the poet rightly pointed out the murder had been committed by a Maltese. Both poems in Sicilian dialect which follow, "Canzona Siciliana in ottava/Sicilian song in octave" and "Altra Canzona in Siciliano/ Another song in Sicilian" (Mifsud: 161) uses the metaphor of a snake retiring inside its den "Lu serpi intra la tana ritiratu" (l. 8, l. 2). A note in between each canzona (Mifsud: 161) says that the Sicilian's case had been tried by Judge Giulio Cumbo, notorious for his severity with criminals, but he found the Sicilian not guilty (Attard: 8, Borg: 8). In this canzona Padre Brincat, nicknamed "corbello" or "Brincatteddu" (l. 8) is mentioned as the newly accused. In the next sonetto "Risposta alle retroscritte composizioni Siciliane/Replies to the previous Sicilian compositions" (Mifsud: 162) Malta, as the voice of the people, admits its mistake in misjudging the Sicilian soldier. There follow three sonetti of better diction, one of which "Sopra l'istesso soggetto/About the same subject" (Mifsud: 163) is a reaction to the murder, another "Che alli PP. Domenicani lecito era lo che hanno fatto/That to the Dominicans what they had done was lawful (Mifsud: 164) emphasises the Dominican friars' good deeds, while the last of these three "Che I PP. Domenicani debbano per le loro mani far prove quell frate e compagni conosciuti rei dell'omicidio/That the Dominicans must own up who their guilty companions are" (Mifsud: 165) prods the Dominicans into action against the perpetrator of the crime, allegedly one of them.

An eighteen quatrain dialogue between Sicily and Malta "Pel retroscritto sacrilego omicidio, canzone anacreontica dialogo tra Sicilia e Malta/About the aforementioned sacrilegious homicide, a song in anacreontic dialogue between Sicily and Malta" (Mifsud: 168-171) sees Sicily defending its countrymen against Malta's accusations. Sicily suspects a conspiracy of silence "chi non parla e troppo tace/ he who does not speak but keeps too silent" (v. 3, l. 4) which gives a reprieve to the perpetrator "col tacer darebbi pausa/ by not speaking reprieve is given" (v. 17, l. 4) – as in fact happened – and maintaining that Sicilians stop at words and are dogs that bark but do not bite

whereas it is the Maltese who lie down quietly harboring grudges "Un po d'odio chiuso in mente" (v. 11, l. 3) that must be feared "sfuggire/ solo quel quieto" (v. 15, l. 3-4). The style of the repartee in this dialogue, with more than a hint of warning on the part of Sicily, is reminiscent of improvised Maltese folk singing without musical intervals "spirtu pront bla qalba". Of note also is the repetition of the first line in almost every two consecutive verses which is sometimes still used in present times in Maltese "spirtu pront/improvised folk singing".

The next sonetto, "Dialogo tra Mimmo e Pippo sopra lo retroscritto omicidio successo nel Convento dei PP. Domenicani/ Dialogue between Mimmo and Pippo about the aforementioned homicide in the Dominicans' Convent" (Mifsud: 172) ends with a pun on the word "corbello" (l. 14). Of note are the literal and metaphorical meanings of the word "corbello". There would be some ambiguity in this line if one takes the hint that "fraticello/little friar" (l. 12) Padre Brincat had been falsely accused. However, this last point is being said in retrospect and furthermore, a couple of words and some punctuation are not very clear.

One of the last three sonetti in the collection, "Pel retroscritto omicidio/About the aforementioned homicide" (Mifsud: 173) goes further than the crime itself in that it sees what happened in the Valletta convent as "un gran flagello/a great scourge" (l. 2) since the Dominican convent of Porto Salvo "non e piu Porto Salvo/is no longer a haven" (l. 5) but "luogo destinato per il macello/place destined for butchering" (l. 6). So the friars seem doomed as one can no longer escape death "che in chiesa tante volte l'han fuggita/those who escaped to a haven in the church" (l. 11). Here there is a possible reference to the many times' criminals took shelter in churches to escape the law. "... salvava robba e vita/... saved property and life" (l. 13) refers to Padre Grimani's belongings and life having been taken away from him. About Grimani's stolen belongings we also read in the *Giuliana*, a journal of events connected with the Dominicans' life. The risposta critica al retroscritto/Critical reply to the aforementioned (Mifsud: 174) in the sonetto following the last one serves as a balance in the aftermath of the crime. The last sonetto in the collection *Per l'omicidio del Padre Lettore Grimani/About the homicide of Padre Lettore Grimani* (Mifsud: 175) laments the passing of Grimani.

The Dominican Archives

It is also important to analyze the background and the aftermath of the crime. To find out more about Grimani's murder both the *Giuliana Antica* in the Dominican Convent in Rabat, compiled by Padre Vincenzo Maria Zammit OP and the 1925 *Giuliana* in Valletta, compiled by Padre Marcolino Mercieca OP, based on Zammit's were consulted. Sure enough, in both, there was the Grimani case as it had happened in the Convent of Porto Salvo, upsetting the whole city, since the Dominicans were held in high respect. Padre Vincenzo Maria (Gwanni Gualberto) Zammit OP (c.1719-1799) the historian and chronicler (Fsadni: 79-81) of the *Giuliana Antica* in Notabile (as at the time the Dominican Convent in Rabat was still part of Notabile, Mdina) writes about Padre Grimani's murder although it happened in the Dominican Convent of Porto Salvo in Valletta. The reasons for the inclusion may be: a matter of policy and logistics as far as documentation is concerned,

the gravity of the crime, Padre Vincenzo Grimani having been buried in Rabat (Camilleri), the Rabat Convent also featuring as the place from where the alleged suspect escaped and where the real suspect had been held for some time. However, it must be kept in mind that Padre Zammit was writing twelve years later, in 1750.

The discovery of the murder, a story of revenge for private grievance, went as follows. When in the morning of 23 April 1738 the Frate Converso went to wake up Padre Grimani to prepare to say Mass and there was no reply, Prior Fra Domenico Boeri was informed and he ordered the door to be forced open. The grim scene of Padre Grimani lying in a pool of blood, his body riddled with stab wounds like a sieve – "crivello" – met their eyes. Other shocked friars entered the cell which had been denuded of Padre Grimani's belongings and money. The officers of the

Sant'Uffizio and the judicial authorities were informed but the perpetrator was not discovered. Padre Michelangelo Brincat was suspected of the murder and dealt with inhuman treatment though continually protesting his innocence until his death in exile in Sicily.

A long time afterward another suspect of Grimani's murder was discovered. However, Padre Zammit, although sure of the murderer's identity, stops short of revealing his name (Giuliana Notabile: ff.144-145). So does Padre Mercieca, the later Dominican chronicler in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The latter states that his purpose in writing about the case was to clear the name of the learned and good Padre Michelangelo Brincat who was unjustly suspected and condemned "esiliato dai giudizi degli uomini che spesso sbagliano/exiled by the judgements of men who often make mistakes", "dalla giustizia fallace degli uomini/by the erring judgment of men" for the murder of Grimani, but he reveals no more about the real suspect and his motive. Who the real suspect was and what one can conclude to have been possible motives can be deduced from further evidence in the *Giuliana Antica*. Padre Mercieca seems convinced that the person Padre Michelangelo Brincat mentions in the letter is the guilty party (Giuliana Valletta), yet reproduced only part of the letter.

Padre Zammit does not mince his words when he blames the friars involved with mismanagement of the situation and states his reasons. These friars had made recourse to the Grand Master, thus offending the Curia Vescovile. Too much time had been allowed to elapse to be able to discover anything. Moreover, the judge, Giulio Cumbo, was allowed to stay in the convent and to enter the murdered man's cell to compile the process and discover who the murderer was (Giuliana Notabile: ff.144-145). A Sicilian soldier had been suspected of the murder but was set free by this same Judge Giulio Cumbo (Mifsud: 161, Borg: 8, Attard: 8). The Judge and later Padre Zammit must have known better how evidence should have been collected.

As further evidence of mismanagement, note line 20 in the ballad in Maltese, mentioned in the eighth paragraph of this article, which says neither barber-surgeons nor doctors came to the murder scene. Could it be that the general public found this strange? One can conclude that to have received so many stab wounds, Grimani must have tried to fight back his assailant/s and therefore must have had time to recognize them, which further necessitated that they kill him. We also know those four days after the murder the key to the cell was found in the Porto Salvo convent's larger garden (Giuliana Valletta). This garden no longer exists. The ballad mentioned above gives only the basic facts and does not say when the key was found or who the boy who found it was. Was he one of the many people who benefited from the friars' charity?

According to Padre Mercieca, one motive of the murder could have been theft since linen and money went missing. Another could have been the envy of an exemplary, learned, and much favored young *primo lettore* who had a few days before been given a cell all to himself in the upper corridor whereas all the other thirty-three friars shared, some three to a cell. Yet another motive could be the disagreement, already mentioned in Sonetti, between Maltese and Sicilian friars leading to the latter resenting Grimani. Following investigations by the officials of the Inquisition, Padre Michelangelo Brincat, "il Brincatello/Brincatteddu (Sic.)" was unjustly arrested, without being told on what grounds, and locked in the Valletta convent's tiny prison

cell; a "sepoltura/grave" says the *Giuliana Antica*. The assessor of Padre Brincat's case was also the sadistic judge Dr. Giulio Cumbo who happened to be the oldest practicing judge in Maltese history, till age ninety-six, notorious for his use of torture (see "iz-ziemel ta' Cumbo/horse rack"), his ruthlessness and having sentenced a 120 accused to the gallows and of which he kept a record (Bonello: 3-5, Borg: 8, Attard: 8, Testa: 39 n 135).

What must have made matters more difficult in establishing guilt, as far as personal relations were concerned, is that the actants in this real-life drama were at one time students' together, members in the same Council (Liber Consiliorum, Libro Consigli) or lecturers' pre-and post-1729, the year when the Dominican College was allowed to grant degrees. Lists of signatures of the attendees in council meetings also include Padre Enrico Ercole's. Worthy of note, regarding the longer poem mentioned earlier, the sonetti and the *Giuliana Antica*, is that De Soldanis, I.S. Mifsud, and Padre Vincenzo Zammit were contemporaries of Vincenzo Grimani and of the Brincat brothers.

On 17 May 1738, the Libro Consigli of this convent noted that the Council could not accede to Padre Michelangelo Brincat's plea to be freed from his chains, to make sure he would not escape. This was signed by the members including Padre Rosario Agius and Padre Domenico Boeri (Giuliana Valletta).

"Padre Michelangelo Brincat, a Dominican friar accused of homicide, was kept in custody at his convent in Valletta – an underground Humid, dark, and narrow cave, seven spans by five, built for the purpose. The friar's feet were tied firmly to the ground by a cross-bar, and since he made his 'personal needs' inside the cell the smell was horrible. He was dying a slow death, getting food only three days a week but Mgr Gualtieri (Inquisitor 1739-1743) took pity on him and reported the matter to the Cardinal Inquisitors to take prompt action" (Ciappara: 508). This proves that inquisitors were not as bad as they were reputed to be. Besides, Inquisitor Gualtieri paid a courtesy visit to the Dominicans when he arrived in Malta and could have found out about Padre Michelangelo Brincat's inhuman plight also from that visit. It must have been because of Mgr. Gualtieri's intercession that Padre Michelangelo Brincat was transferred to the prison in the Rabat convent.

Only six years later Padre Rosario Agius was given a taste of the tiny cell in Porto Salvo – considered worse than the Inquisitor's prison – having been accused by the Inquisition of solicitation. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and was never to hear confessions and say Mass again (Ciappara: p. 523). However, each year Padre Agius, who signed the Libro Consigli on 17 May 1738 in Padre Michelangelo Brincat's case, asked to be moved somewhere better: the Rabat Convent, a spa in Sicily to regain his health and back to Porto Salvo and his wishes were always granted (Ciappara: p. 494). Admittedly Padre Michelangelo Brincat was a murder suspect though on flimsy evidence. Yet Padre Agius' treatment was a far cry from what had been meted out to Padre Brincat!

Padre Michelangelo Brincat's elder brother, Padre Giuseppe Brincat from the same convent, was later allowed to join him in the Notabile (Rabat) convent to be of comfort to him. Padre Michelangelo did manage to escape to Sicily, allegedly helped by his brother Padre Giuseppe, as recorded in Libro Consigli of this convent on 26 January 1740. A new commission was set up to decide on the com-

plicity or otherwise of Padre Giuseppe Brincat. The chosen commissioner was Padre Mro. Rosario Agius was assisted by the assessor Giulio Cumbo once more. Incidentally, Judge Giulio Cumbo was a benefactor of the Dominicans and was eventually buried at the Porto Salvo Dominican Convent (Borg: Il-Berka 8). Padre Giuseppe Brincat was found guilty of complicity and was imprisoned.

Padre Mro. Generale decreed that Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat be assigned to the convent in Licata, still a suspect, as was later Padre Giuseppe Brincat. For many years the two brother friars were given responsibility for the Vestibule in the Licata convent while they received the land rent qbiela every year for life from two plots of land in Gozo, a family property of theirs. Padre Giuseppe died in the convent in Licata some years later and the convent inherited his share of the rent while Padre Michel'Angelo remained in exile, always maintaining his innocence and pleading that justice is done (Giuliana Valletta).

To be able to follow the train of events at the time of Grimani's murder and later, one should know that in the Convent of Porto Salvo there were contemporaneously six friars by the name of Brincat: two brothers known as "gurbelli", one of whom was Padre Michel'Angelo given a bad reputation on being accused of Grimani's murder (the elder brother being Padre Giuseppe), two brothers, sons of Antonio Brincat, a surgeon at the Infirmary, Fra Ludovico Brincat born in Żebbuġ and who graduated Maestro and another Brincat, Padre Pietro, a baker's son, born in Valletta, who joined the Dominicans "per impegno del Signor Decos" and who followed a whole course of studies.

During the same time that Padre Lettore Bellia was Prior; Padre Lettore Domenico Genovese was Vicar in the Convent of Porto Salvo and was ordinary judge in the case of Padre Lettore Pietro Brincat about the theft of the lantern lampiere. During Padre Domenico Genovese's time as Prior and Vicar General (he had also been a judge in Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat's case), Padre Michel'Angelo wrote to him from Licata. At the time there was already the suspicion of a different alleged murderer of Grimani and Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat knew it, as shown in his "Ricorso del Padre Lettore Michele Angelo Brincat al Vicario per palsare l'innocenza, di chi era intracciato/intacciato Ha scritto la velata definizione/Letter of Padre Lettore Michel'Angelo Brincat to the Vicar to show his innocence, who had framed him ... wrote a veiled definition". Padre Michel'Angelo's letter of 28 August 1756 discovered recently by Fra Llewellyn Muscat OP, exists in its entirety (Giuliana Notabile ff. 168-170). He asks Padre Genovese to clear his name from the infamy he had suffered, to inform the Provincial in Sicily that he was neither the murderer nor the accomplice of Padre Grimani's murder but that he was innocent, about what he had suffered, his horrendous imprisonment, that he offered his sufferings for his sins.

He wrote that he had been wrongly suspected of Grimani's murder on the following grounds: the blood on a shirt on which his bitch had whelped, he had not belonged to the same party as Grimani (could Padre Michelangelo have belonged to the pro-Sicilian party?), nor was he Grimani's friend. In his letter to Padre Genovese, Padre Brincat reveals who the suspect should be, an insider trusted by the Dominicans. Further than this Padre Marcolino Mercieca would not reveal.

The discovery of Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat's letter is of particular importance to the case. What he wants is to

have his name cleared of suspicion. He only hints at the new alleged suspect. Of note is that the title of the letter's entry includes the word "velata/veiled". This is only a part solution, as Padre Brincat leaves it to the Dominicans in the higher echelons to decide who the perpetrator of Grimani's murder was.

Among other indications of his innocence, Padre Brincat brings forward the following points: he reminds Padre Genovese that he should know that Padre Lettore Oliva, then a student, did not want to accompany Grimani for fear of being killed with him. This can be seen as evidence that Grimani knew something incriminating others and was in fear of an attempt on his life. Padre Francesco Brincat had said in the presence of all the friars that when he was a novice of Padre Pietro Brincat, he had seen the belongings of Grimani brought out from his room (by whom or from whose room is not clear). At the hour of the murder another novice, Padre Lettore Decano at the time the letter was written, had seen the lamp of the novitiate was lit, then put out and lit again and ongoing to Padre Pietro Brincat's room at about eleven did not find him there. Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat asks Padre Genovese to check for himself with Padre Pietro Brincat, who under oath swore to Padre Maestro Mari (Vicar) that he was told in confession by a "Penitente Reo" that Padre Michel'Angelo was innocent (Giuliana Notabile). Padre Michel'Angelo's letter is very close indeed to the Gozitan poet's outburst in *De Soldanis*!

On his deathbed in the convent of Girgenti, Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat took oath on the Host (Viaticum) that he was not the murderer, had been undeservedly punished, dishonored, and exiled but he offered all his sufferings for his sins to go to a better life.

Regarding this third alleged suspect, echoing Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat's letter in part, Padre Mercieca goes on to say that he was an insider who had highly benefited from the Valletta convent, but was discovered to have committed a great theft, was imprisoned, became a bedridden invalid in a hospital where he died at Santo Spirito hospital, and it was hoped God would forgive him (Giuliana Antica, Giuliana Valletta), "morto da miserabile sacerdote nell'Infermeria/died as a miserable priest" after a long illness (Giuliana Notabile: ff.168r-170v). This "miserable priest" implies that he was defrocked by the Dominican habit. However, unless the guilty party confessed his guilt, it was difficult to establish it even then, let alone thus long after the crime.

Padre Marcolino Mercieca stops his account of Padre Brincat's letter at Padre Olivaso as not to reveal who the suspect was, in order not to "mention and denigrate people"; although he says "they would have deserved it". Besides the word accomplice which Padre Michel'Angelo denies he was, the many stab wounds which might not have been inflicted by a single person, Padre Marcolino Mercieca's use of "people" and "they" above, hints at accomplices, or at any rate people who should have known better.

From the Giuliana Antica Fra Llewellyn Muscat OP discovered the following information. After Grimani's murder, Padre Pietro Brincat was Lettore Primario and at the same time Sacristano Maggiore and Master of the novices in Porto Salvo and very much under the protection of Maestro (Ex-parte Priore) Fra Enrico Ercole. In the meantime, Padre Pietro Brincat frequented a lay household and was very friendly with the girls living there. He was furthermore found guilty of receiving the money to say masses

which were never celebrated. When this was discovered he was punished and sent to the Notabile convent (Rabat). During this time the theft of the lampiere and tin plates was committed and these objects were found in the house of another woman Pietro had befriended, thus relapsing. For these reasons, Fra Pietro Brincat was persecuted, "sfratato/unfrocked from the Dominican habit" and died a miserable priest in the Infermeria (ff. 168r-170v) which could have been the one in Valletta. However, Padre Marcolino Mercieca mentions the hospital of Santo Spirito.

In an Act of 15 May 1750 of the Rabat Dominican convent, regarding "robba del Padre Pietro Brincat trovata in casa di Secolari e poi venduta dal Convento per le spese ..." Prior Giuseppe Bellia and the friars in Council, after considering that the friars at the convent of Porto Salvo were unable to meet the expenses accrued in the case of Padre Pietro Brincat and also his subsistence throughout his refuge in the Collegio de' Preti d'ubbidienza di San Paolo, decided to pay for these by selling all Padre Pietro's belongings found in lay people's households, to meet in part such expenses and thus keeping good relations between the two convents (Giuliana Notabile f.172v.). One must say here that Dominican convents were independent of each other.

Conclusion

How right were the sonetti to advise the Dominicans to look for the murderer among their own? What did Grimaldi know that it was feared he could reveal? Could it be that someone had been manipulated, without knowing, into giving Grimaldi a cell all to himself on the upper floor to be easier prey quicker? Could it be that Grimaldi's stolen belongings were a cover for the real motive of the murder?

Despite the veiled indications in Padre Michel'Angelo Brincat's letter and the turn of events in Padre Pietro Brincat's life, the relevant documents which prove the latter's guilt beyond doubt still have to be researched. Even if these are found, one has to also consider the tension inherent in such institutions, the conditions under which these people labored, and the element of conflict in general and in particular.

Two hundred years later, Tancredi Borg, one of the compilers of the Maltese encyclopedic dictionary in the second quarter of the last century, wrote about Grimaldi's murder in *Il-Berqa*.

The author has consulted various scholars of Maltese history about the Grimaldi murder, but only Prof. Ciappara and Eddie Attard are at present known to have come across it while researching other material. We are of course not excluding any other documents we have not yet come across, documents which have not yet been made available to us, or further research which might have been carried out on this subject over the last two hundred years.

In 2014 I teamed up with the Dominican Rev Dr. Mark Montebello OP I had known as my student many years before, carried out more research locally and overseas and in 2016 Grimaldi's story was published by Klabb Kotba Maltin, under the title of *Min Qatel il-Patri?/Who Killed the Friar?* Fr Montebello and I remain indebted to Fra Llewellyn Muscat's contribution to our research. Speakers at the launch of the joint publication above, during which the ballad was sung by folk singers, were an-

thropologist Prof Carmel Cassar and lecturer of Maltese literature Dr. Bernard Micallef both from the University of Malta. Recently Fr Montebello and I translated the novel into English for a wider audience.

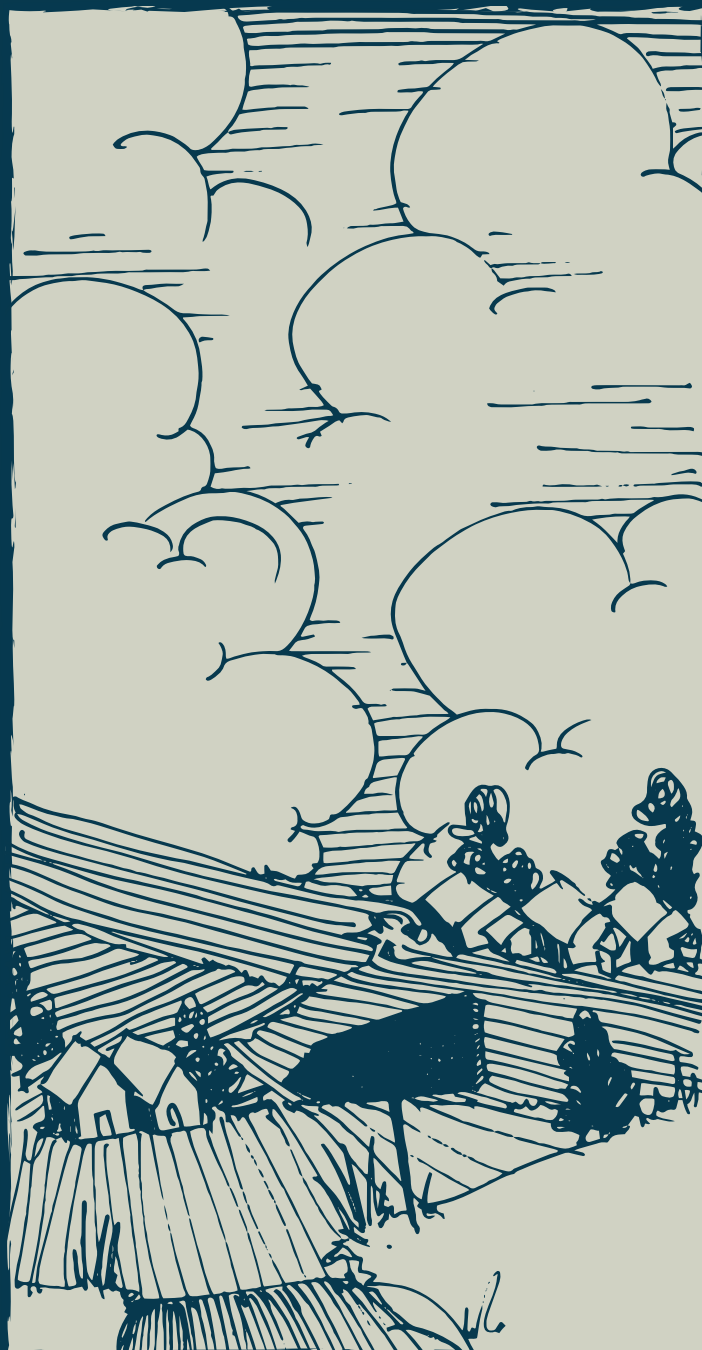
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Notes

- *UoM, Science in the City, activity held at the Castellania in Valletta, a performance where science was presented in interaction with the arts based on a research project by M. Mifsud Chircop, dramatization by Dr. Marco Galea, folksingers and folk guitarists' introductory and concluding participation, in conjunction with the Department of Forensics (UoM) and the Malta Police Forensics Section.

PANDEMIC NARRATIVES OF AONGLEMLA FROM NAGALAND



WRITTEN BY
TALILULA

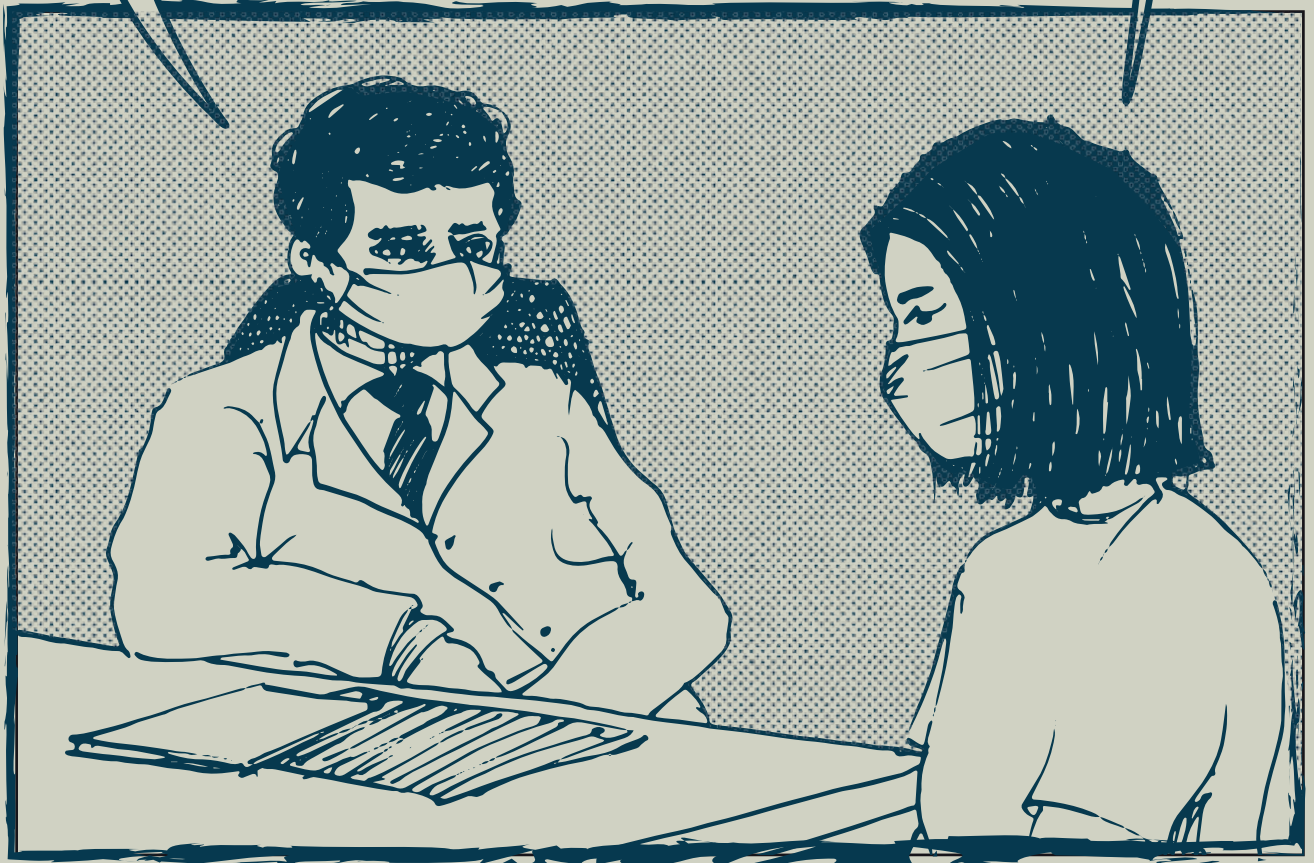
ILLUSTRATED BY
MOA LENTUR

TWO WEEKS OF SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, POOR APPETITE AND THE INABILITY TO CATCH THE SMELL OF KEBABS AND BUTTER CHICKEN FROM ROYAL DINNER DHABA, ADJACENT TO THE LIBRARY SHE FREQUENTED DAILY MADE ACHEN HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS.



I THINK I MIGHT HAVE CORONA VIRUS.
I WANT TO GET TESTED.

I CAN'T GET YOU TESTED. I DON'T HAVE THE TESTING KITS
AND MOST HOSPITALS WON'T BE WILLING TO TEST YOU EVEN
IF THEY HAVE THEM. IT WOULD BE SAFER FOR YOU TO GO
BACK HOME. ALL STATES ARE TESTING RETURNEES SO YOU
CAN GET TESTED THEN. THE SITUATION HERE WILL PROBABLY
WORSEN, AND YOU MIGHT GET STUCK, SO I SUGGEST YOU
BOOK TICKETS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND GO HOME.



HUNDREDS OF MASKED FACES TURNED UP AT THE DELHI RAILWAY STATION THAT AFTERNOON TO CATCH THE SPECIAL TRAIN THAT WOULD TAKE THEM TO DIMAPUR, AND THEN TO DIFFERENT QUARANTINE CENTERS.

WITH THE PANDEMIC, MANY HAD LOST THEIR JOBS, SOME HAD LEFT BECAUSE OF PRESSURE FROM FAMILY, WHILE OTHERS WERE STUDENTS LIKE ACHEN, EQUALLY UNCERTAIN OF THEIR ACADEMIC FUTURE.



HOME IS WHERE MOST OF US RETURN WHEN OUR LIVES GET UPENDED. WE TRY TO SEEK COMFORT FROM FAMILIAR PEOPLE AND PLACES WHEN NOTHING ELSE AROUND YOU MAKES SENSE.

IF ACHEN HAD ANY DOUBTS ABOUT GETTING INFECTED, SHE WAS PRETTY SURE SHE WOULD CATCH THE VIRUS DURING THE JOURNEY.



ALL SOPS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS WERE ABANDONED AS EVERYONE RUSHED AND JOSTLED TO GET INSIDE THE TRAIN.

ONCE INSIDE, IT WAS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PASSENGERS TO REMEMBER THE RULES OF MAINTAINING PHYSICAL DISTANCE. EVERYONE SEEMED CHATTY AND CHEERFUL. IT WAS AS IF THE TRAIN HAD INSULATED THEM FROM THE CHAOS RAGING OUTSIDE.



THE MOMENT THE TRAIN FINALLY REACHED DIMAPUR STATION, THE PASSENGERS ERUPTED WITH JOY AND CELEBRATION. THEY HAD REACHED HOME, FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

AFTER HOURS OF CHAOTIC JOSTLING AT THE STATION, WAITING IN LONG QUEUES, AND TAKING THE DREADED TEST THAT WAS NOT AS PAINFUL AS SHE IMAGINED, ACHEN COULD FINALLY TAKE A BREATHER IN HER TINY HOTEL ROOM, THAT WAS NOW A PAID QUARANTINE FACILITY.



HER ROOM WAS TINY AND BASIC AT BEST, BUT IT WAS STILL A FAR BETTER OPTION THAN THE SHARED DORMS AND UNHYGIENIC BATHROOMS OF GOVERNMENT FACILITIES IN DIMAPUR. SUCH HORROR STORIES SHE HAD HEARD! AS EXHAUSTED AS SHE WAS, SLEEP WAS HARD TO COME BY WITH THE PENDING TEST RESULTS. WHAT IF SHE TESTED POSITIVE? THEN WHAT?

BY A STROKE OF PROVIDENCE, ACHEN'S TEST CAME OUT NEGATIVE AND SHE WAS ALLOWED TO TRAVEL TO LONGSA WHERE SHE WOULD STAY FOR FOURTEEN DAYS IN A QUARANTINE FACILITY, BEFORE FINALLY GOING HOME.

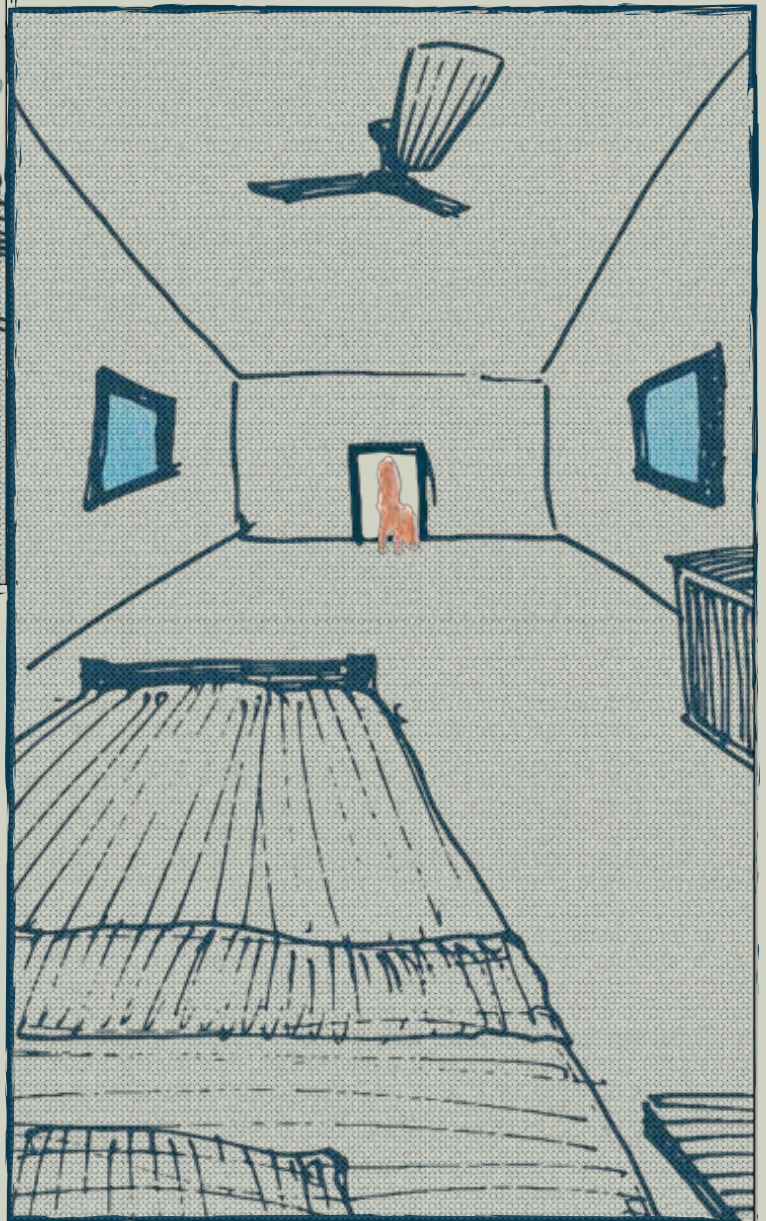


BYPASSING ASSAM ROUTES AND MANOELIVRING THROUGH POTHOLE RIDDEN ROADS, THE SUMO THAT WAS PROVIDED FOR ACHEN TOOK LONGER THAN THE USUAL SEVEN HOURS REQUIRED TO REACH LONGSA IN MOKOKCHUNG DISTRICT.



ABOUT 15 YEARS GO, THE GOVERNMENT
HAD BUILT A COUPLE OF HOUSES
FOR A PROJECT THAT NEVER SAW
FRUITION. IT WAS NOW TRANSFORMED
INTO A QUARANTINE CENTER FOR
THE RETURNEES.

AN HOURS DRIVE AWAY FROM THE
MAIN VILLAGE AND SITUATED IN THE
WOODS, IT WAS AN IDEAL PLACE
FOR ISOLATION. ACHEN WAS THE
FIFTH RETURNEE, AND WITH AMPLE
SPACE IN THE CENTER, THEY WERE
ALL ALLOTTED SEPARATE ROOMS.





ON THE THIRD NIGHT, AS ACHEN WAS READING AND DOZING OFF, A STRANGE NOISE OUTSIDE SUDDENLY SHOOK HER WIDE AWAKE.



IT WAS A PIERCING SOUND, LIKE THE RAUCOUS LAUGHTER OF A WOMAN WITH AMPLIFIED AUDIO EFFECTS, AND IT REVERBERATED ALL OVER THE WOODS....

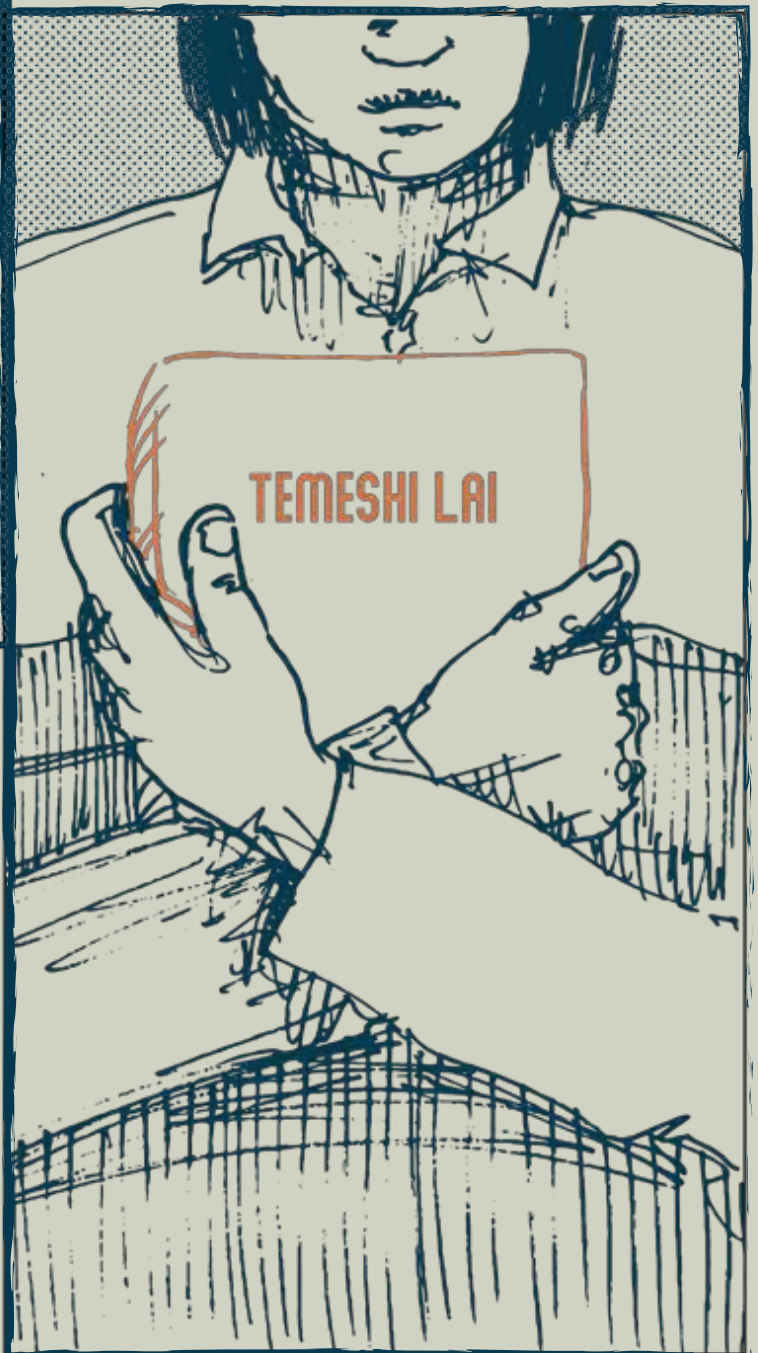


BEFORE SLOWLY FADING INTO THE SHADOW OF THE NIGHT.



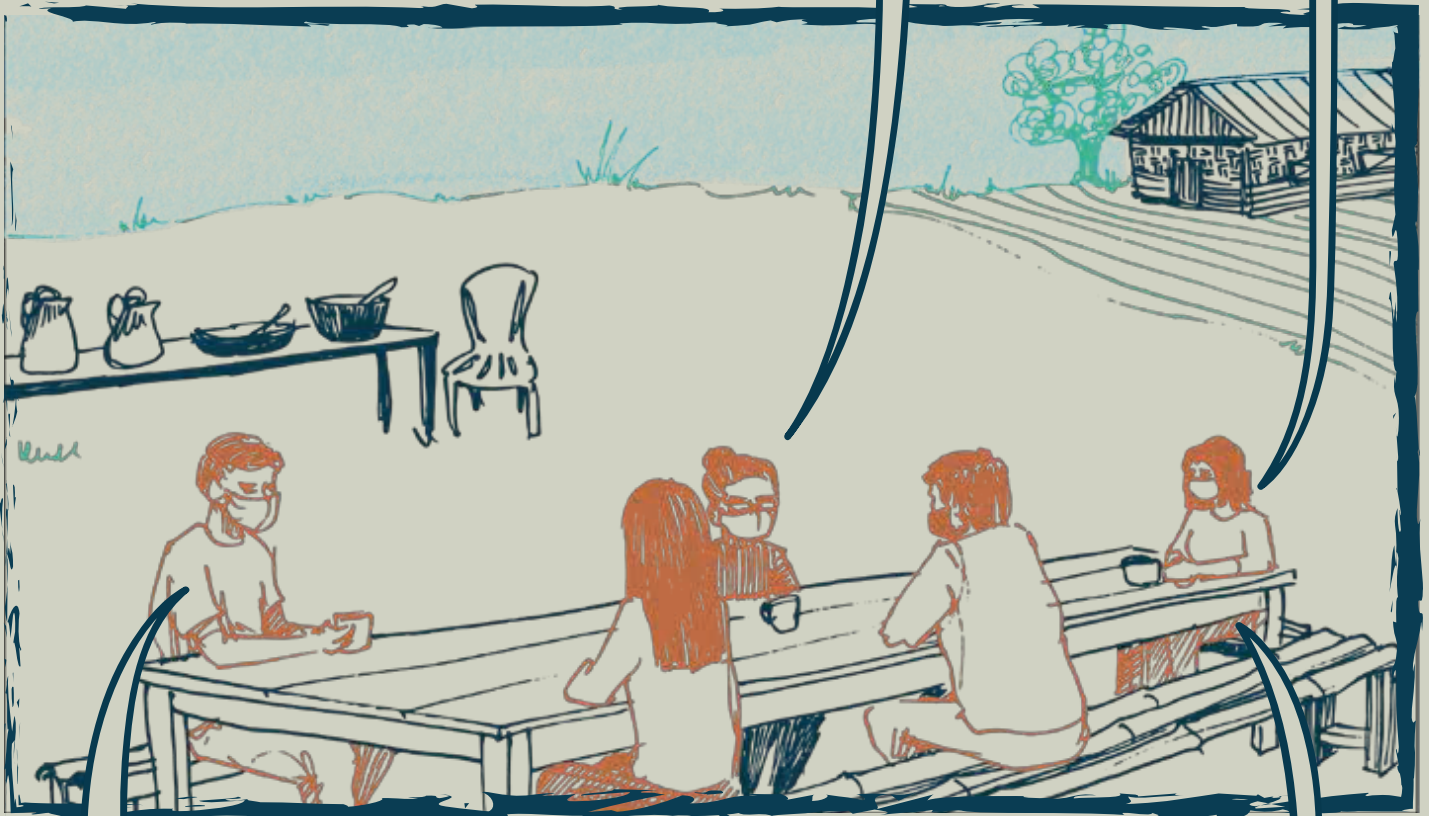
ACHEN FOUND HER BIBLE AND
CLUTCHED IT TO HER CHEST,
PRAYING FERVENTLY TO SAVE
HER FROM WHATEVER
MALEVOLENT SPIRITS ROAMED
AT NIGHT.

ONLY WHEN SUN RAYS
PEEKED AT DAWN, WAS SHE
ABLE TO GET SOME SLEEP.



THIS USED TO BE A VERY DENSE FOREST,
BEFORE IT GOT CLEARED FOR THE PROJECT.
LOTS OF WILDLIFE, MUST BE SOME WILD ANIMAL.

I AM SURE IT IS AONGLEMLA! ONLY SHE LAUGHS LIKE THAT.
YOU KNOW UNCLE TZÜKTI SAW HER IN THIS AREA MANY YEARS
AGO. SUCH A SHORT FIGURE, WITH LONG HAIR AND BACK-
WARDS FEET, PLUS THAT LAUGH! AKAKAKA, SO SCARY! DO YOU
KNOW HE TRIED TO SHOOT HER WITH HIS RIFLE BUT SHE
ESCAPED? I HEARD HIS WIFE DIED SUDDENLY AFTER THAT.



OH NO, IT IS A BAD OMEN! MY GRANDMA SAYS THAT
USUALLY PEOPLE DIE OR FALL SICK.

IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO. I AM SURE YOU GUYS WILL BE FINE.

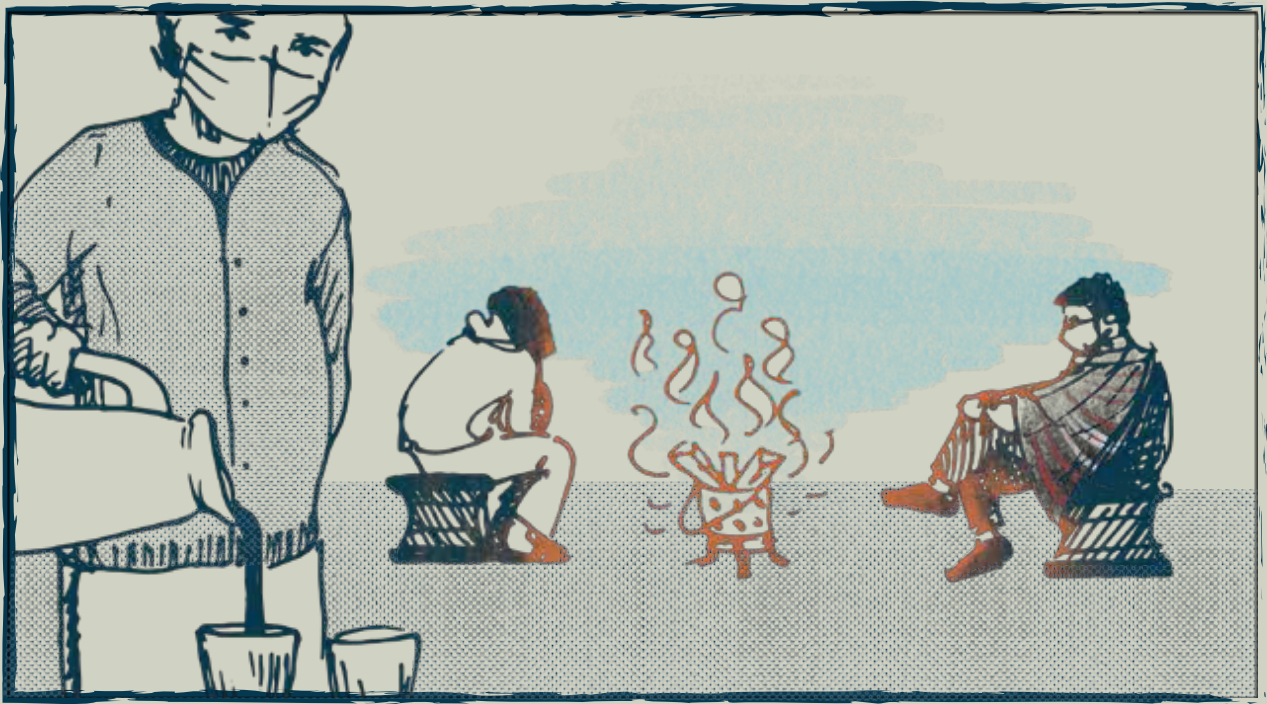


SOON WITH THE FOUR RETURNEES COMPLETING THEIR QUARANTINE PERIOD, ACHEN WAS THE ONLY ONE LEFT AT THE CENTER. THE WORKERS ALL LEFT BY 11 PM, SO IT LEFT HER COMPLETELY ALONE IN THIS ISOLATED FOREST. THE MERE THOUGHT TERRIFIED HER.

AROUND 12 AT MIDNIGHT, AFTER ALL THE WORKERS HAD LEFT, AN OLD BEAT UP CAR DROVE STEALTHILY INTO THE QUARANTINE CENTER.



LEAPING OUT FROM THE BED, ACHEN WALKED OUT INTO THE COLD EERIE NIGHT AND LIT HER TORCH LIGHT AT THE TWO FIGURES COMING OUT OF THE CAR.



MAR AND AKA HAD SET UP AN ALARM TO WAKE THEM UP SO THEY COULD VISIT ACHEN. AS SOON AS DAWN BROKE, THEY SLIPPED AWAY AS STEALTHILY AS THEY CAME.




HER PARENTS CAME VISITING EVERY NIGHT, AND IT MADE ACHEN FEEL MORE SECURE AND LESS LONELY. THE NIGHTS DID NOT SCARE HER AS MUCH AND NONE OF THE WORKERS SUSPECTED A THING.



ONE NIGHT AS THEY WERE CONVERSING OVER TEA, A LOUD SOUND INTERRUPTED THEM. WAS IT AN ELEPHANT ON THE RAMPAGE? IT FELT LIKE THE ENTIRE FOREST WAS VIBRATING WITH THE STRENGTH OF EACH STOMP. THE THREE OF THEM INSTINCTIVELY CROUCHED DOWN AND WAITED UNTIL THE FOOTSTEPS FADED INTO THE NIGHT.



JUST AS THEY GOT UP, A LOUD BOOMING LAUGHTER ECHOED ALL OVER THE HILLS. IT WAS THE LAUGH OF AONGLEMLA, EQUALLY NOTORIOUS AS THE ENTITY HERSELF, AND HAD SPAWNED MANY URBAN LEGENDS.



THAT IS AONGLEMLA! I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS! IT HAS BEEN SO LONG SINCE I HEARD HER LAUGH! OUR FORESTS ARE NOT AS THICK ANYMORE, ALL THIS LOGGING AND DEVELOPMENT, SO SIGHTINGS HAVE BECOME VERY RARE.

WAIT, HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED HER BEFORE?

ONCE, DECADES AGO, BEFORE I MARRIED YOUR MOM. A VERY FLEETING ENCOUNTER, BUT ITS NOT A MOMENT YOU FORGET.

ISN'T IT A BAD OMEN? DIDN'T SOMETHING TRAGIC HAPPEN TO YOU, LIKE UNCLE TZÜKTI? WAIT, IS SOMETHING BAD GOING TO HAPPEN TO US?

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU HEAR, TALAK. NOTHING BAD HAS HAPPENED TO ME TILL NOW.

SHE DOES HAVE MAGICAL POWERS, BUT I DON'T THINK SHE INTENDS TO HARM HUMANS. IT COULD JUST BE A COINCIDENCE BUT REMEMBER, TSÜKTI WAS THE ONE WHO TRIED TO KILL HER, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. YOU SHOULDN'T MESS WITH SUCH POWERFUL BEINGS IN THE FIRST PLACE.



MAR AND AKA CAME TO PICK UP ACHEN AS IF THEY HAD NOT BEEN VISITING HER EVERY NIGHT ON THE SLY. WITH THE COMPLETION OF 14 DAYS QUARANTINE, IT WAS FINALLY TIME TO GO HOME.



A STRANGE YEAR FOR EVERYONE WITH THE PANDEMIC. SO MANY RUMOURS ABOUT THE VIRUS TOO. WAS IT FAKE? WAS IT A BIOLOGICAL WEAPON, OR THE RECKONING- THE BEGINNING OF THE END? FOR ACHEN, IT WOULD BE THE YEAR SHE STARTED TO BELIEVE THAT AONGLEMLA IS MORE THAN A MYTH, AND THAT THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS BLACK AND WHITE, EVEN FOR SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES.

OTSÜ TATEMBANG



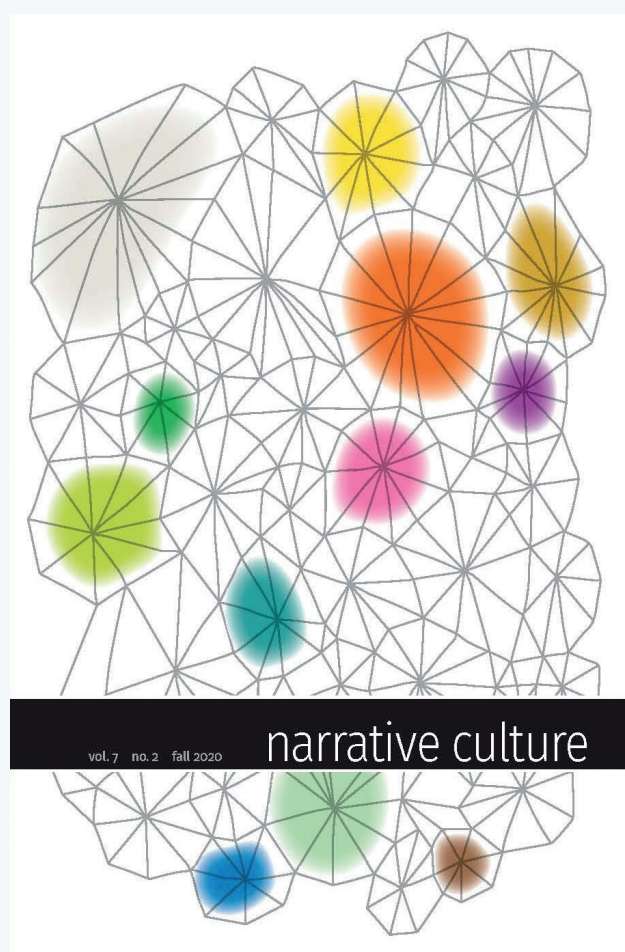
THE END

JOURNAL IN FOCUS: NARRATIVE CULTURE

Affiliated with the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, the journal *Narrative Culture* was initiated in 2014 by Ulrich Marzolph, who served as president of the ISFNR from 2009 to 2016, together with Regina F. Bendix, both of Göttingen, Germany. In 2019, Francisco Vaz da Silva of Lisbon, Portugal, joined the editorship. The international scholars serving on the journal's editorial board include Cristina Bacchilega (University of Hawai'i, Mānoa), Michael Foster (University of California, Davis), Pauline Greenhill (The University of Winnipeg), Galit Hasan-Rokem (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Frank Korom (Boston University), Kimberly J. Lau (University of California, Santa Cruz), Kirin Narayan (The Australian National University), Máiréad NicCraith (Heriot-Watt University), Dorothy Noyes (The Ohio State University), Diarmuid Ó Giolláin (University of Notre Dame), Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (University of Tartu), Ingrid Tomkowiak (University of Zurich), Ülo Valk (University of Tartu), and Mike Wilson (Loughborough University).

Narrative Culture covers the breadth of narrative expression relying on interdisciplinary expertise grounded in the tradition of historical and comparative folk narrative research. The journal claims traditional narrative as a broad and pervasive, in fact an essential constituent of human practice, warranting a holistic perspective to grasp its place comparatively across time and space. Traditional narrative, as the editors see it, comprises themes and motifs that rely on a long, and sometimes international tradition, as well as traditional modes of narration in oral and written practice giving rise to ever new narrative shapes and contents. By widening the scope from "narrative" to "narrative culture," the journal embraces the trans-medial representation and transmission of traditional narratives and narrating as a cultural practice in numerous forms of expression. In other words, *Narrative Culture* explores cultural expression as outlined and defined by the impact of narrating traditions, both old and emerging.

Inviting contributions that document, discuss and theorize the impact of narratives in various forms of cultural expression, the journal opens an interdisciplinary platform that integrates approaches spread across numerous disciplines. In addition to folklore, the concept of "narrative culture" is particularly relevant for ethnographic and historical research, but it also addresses questions relevant for psychology, communications, media and performance studies. The denomination of narrative culture thus aims to be both exclusive as a demarcation against the numerous approaches (in various journals and scientific societies) focusing primarily on



techniques and practices of narration in literature as well as inclusive in terms of wide theoretical and methodological approaches exploring the range and impact of traditional narratives and narration. In terms of genres, the field thus outlined is defined by a large variety of forms, including not only oral and written texts, but also popular narratives in images, three-dimensional art, customs, rituals, drama, dance, music, film and so forth.

Aspects of performance and its context are a key to understanding the impact of various modes of narration. Acknowledging the collective human element as present in the constitution of narration, in the work of narrators (performers, artists, etc.) and audience alike, sheds new meaning to the adaptation of vernacular or folk narrative in the modern world. The journal welcomes contributions from researchers in all related disciplines. Affiliated with the ISFNR, the journal seeks to offer a platform and readership for scholars within and beyond the Society. Beyond the practical agenda of relying on a substantial permanent readership, linking the journal to the ISFNR both acknowledges the long historical trajectory of research committed to narrative culture(s) and inspires future approaches to the role and impact of narrative culture in historical and contemporary societies. Folk narrative research originally focussed on a limited number of traditional genres such as myths, religious and historical legends, folktales and fairy tales, or jokes and anecdotes as represented in oral tradition and their written expression in literature. It aimed at documenting, preserving, and studying humanity's narrative heritage. Today, vernacular narrative research also deals with narrative material as a source of inspiration for literature and the arts, and with the fairly recent yet communicatively powerful phenomenon of the internet as a platform for the propagation and dissemination of all kinds of narratives and new modes of narrating.. In other words, the ISFNR's general scope as documented by the wide range of contributions presented at its conferences has over the past decades grown beyond its original aims, and the journal intends to reflect this growth as well as encourage new and innovative research beyond the originally defined frame. The field of folk narrative research has properly grown into a research endeavour addressing "narrative culture" as an overarching human phenomenon across all channels of communication. Traditional narrative provides a nexus where literary, anthropological, historical, and communications perspectives fruitfully intersect. Simultaneously, narrative culture is an ideal key concept for globally comparative perspectives of human sensibility.

The current state of the field is living proof of its global relevance. Human communication strives toward narratives. These narratives are elaborated in a multitude of performative keys, enacted and disseminated in all possible media, and evaluated by audiences for the competence of their execution. Narrative research thus studies a key component of human existence. The vast majority of approaches to narrative research or "narratology" focuses on modes of narration in literature (and related fields), thus studying an expression of elite culture in contrast to the "traditional" tales constituting the "raw material" for folk narrative research. Today, students of narrative culture face a tremendous responsibility, as established research methods are challenged and transformed in the same way as old tales are adapted to address new problems and situations. The journal *Narrative Culture* offers a platform within which such transformations are uncovered and where new and synergetic approaches are tried out. The journal is particularly keen to bring scholars from different scholarly traditions worldwide into conversations with one another. It will thus recognize the opportunities lodged not only in interdisciplinary but also in globally comparative approaches to narrative culture.

Since its inception, *Narrative Culture* has published two issues per year, each of them comprising an average of six contributions. Although we remain open to publishing issues containing different contributions on various topics, we have so far published a fair variety of special issues: issue 2.2 (2015) assembles a selection of papers originally presented at the interdisciplinary conference "Tales That Travel: Storytelling in Eurasia, 10th–16th Centuries," organized by Evelyn Birge Vitz and Maurice Pomerantz and held at New York University Abu Dhabi, February 24–25, 2014;

issue 4.1 (2017), edited by James Phelan, is on “Project Narrative, one of the most important nodes in the network of the international narrative theory community;” issue 4.2 (2018), edited by Michaela Fenske and Martha Norkunas, unites contributions on the theme “Experiencing the More-than-Human World;” issue 6.1 (2019), edited by Stefan Groth, focusses on “Political Narratives/Narrations of the Political;” issue 6.2 (2019), edited by Cristina Bacchilega and Anne E. Duggan, publishes a selection of contributions originally presented at the conference “Thinking with Stories in Times of Conflict: A Conference in Fairy-Tale Studies,” held at Wayne State University, Detroit, August 2–5, 2017; issue 7.2 (2020), edited by Anne Reynders and Remco Sleiderink, deals with the narrative tradition of “The Seven Sages (of Rome),” mainly (with one additional contribution) drawing on papers presented at the International Medieval Congress of Leeds in July 2018. Forthcoming special issues will focus on “Narrative Entanglements and Discursive Entrapments,” edited by JoAnn Conrad; “Belief Narratives,” edited by Ülo Valk; and “Anthropological Encounters with Narrative,” edited by Barbara Götsch and Monika Palmberger.

“Narrative Culture” is published twice a year by Wayne State University <https://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/journals/detail/narrative-culture>. Specific essays can be purchased at <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/narrative/>. Full members of the ISFNR are entitled to a discount. For details please contact Julie Warheit of Journal Marketing & Sales julie.warheit@wayne.edu. As a complimentary service to the members of the ISFNR, the publishers have agreed to offer one essay per year for free download via the ISFNR website.

Establishing a new journal in the discipline of folk narrative studies is not an easy task, and the journal’s editors owe a profound debt of gratitude to Wayne State University Press in Detroit for their devoted engagement to support the new venture. As a matter of fact, Narrative Culture fits extremely well into WSUP’s portfolio that already comprises other journals in the field of narrative studies, such as *Fairy-Tale Review*, edited by Kate Bernheimer; *Marvels & Tales*, edited by Cristina Bacchilega and Anne E. Duggan; and *Storytelling, Self, Society*, edited by Joseph Sobol and Jessica senchi. A major flagship of the Press is the *Series in Fairy-Tale Studies* edited by Donald Haase.

Narrative Culture invites the members of the ISFNR to submit papers produced in the context of their current research. As before, we remain open to suggestions for third-party edited special issues on any relevant topic of our field. Submissions undergo

rigorous peer review and will be accepted by the journal’s editors when meeting our general standards. That said, we extend a special invitation to scholars from outside the Global North to submit their work.

The editors, **Ulrich Marzolph**, **Regina Bendix**, and **Francisco Vaz da Silva**

THE BELIEF NARRATIVE NETWORK (BNN)

By **Mirjam Mencej**, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The Belief Narrative Network (BNN) is one of the committees of The International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR). Its members are folklorists and other scholars involved in working on belief narratives, or in any other way interested in belief narratives. There are at present 135 members of the BNN from all over the world. (For more information see: <http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>)

Apart from organizing Belief Narrative Network conferences every year – whether in the frame of the ISFNR congresses or interim-conferences, or else in an independent organization of the Committee – and publishing conference papers from the BNN conferences in books or special issues of journals, the Committee has in the last few years initiated also various other activities with the aim to encourage and stimulate the research of belief narratives and to link and bring together its members. One of the first actions we instigated in January 2017 was the launch of the electronic Belief Narrative Newsletter. While it started as a monthly issue, it has since settled as a quarterly issue. The Newsletter is aimed to bring news about the activities, related to the belief narratives and belief narratives scholars: conferences, round tables and other events etc.; current publications of the BNN members; Call for papers; information on useful websites for the belief narratives scholarship; belief narratives in the news; reports on the state-of-arts of belief narratives in various countries; scholars' inquiries related to their research etc. Briefly, we envisioned the BNN Newsletter to be a site of an exchange of information and discussion on any topic, interesting for belief narratives scholars.

In order to stimulate belief narratives research we have in 2017 also decided to awarding Prizes for the best student paper in the field of belief narratives. The prizes – one to the BA or MA and one to the PhD student – are awarded every two years, i.e. at the interim ISFNR conference and at the ISFNR congress. The winning papers are selected for publication in the journal *Folklore, Electronic Journal of Folklore* (Tartu), and in addition, the winners are awarded scholarly books and their ISFNR and/or BNN conference participation fee is waived. So far one prize has been awarded.

Bearing in mind the present corona situation, we have in spring 2020 launched a BNN Facebook account aimed at gathering and sharing Corona/ Covid folklore of all kinds: jokes, memes, conspiracy theories, (personal) experience narratives, and so on, but also contextual information, observations, photos from the field etc. (see: [https://](https://www.facebook.com/groups/625573241323757)



Mirjam Mencej,
chair of the Belief Narrative Network Committee

www.facebook.com/groups/625573241323757) While many people and institutions are already collecting such folklore, our hope was for our Facebook page to become a hub for international material, allowing comparison and further research to anyone interested in this topic. Indeed, there are at present 438 people from all over the world contributing to our Facebook page.

Given that due to the corona situation we were deprived of meeting at the ISFNR congress and getting to know about our colleagues' recent research, we have decided to try to fill the gap by launching a new series of monthly events: online presentations entitled the ISFNR Belief Narrative Network Online Lectures. Since September 2020, we have been able to every first Friday of each month watch a pre-recorded lecture by a scholar working in the field of belief narratives, dealing with her or his research, followed by a lively on-line discussion with the lecturer. So far we have listened to Timothy Tangherlini, Kaarina Koski and Ülo Valk, but the list of future lecturers is already full until the end of 2021. All the recordings of the lectures are being put at the ISFNR/BNN website: <http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>

If after this short presentation of the Belief Narrative Committee you have become tempted to join our Network, you are most welcome to do so! Just write to the following email address: mirjam.mencej@guest.arnes.si and let me know about your wish. We will be happy to greet you in our midst!

On behalf of the BNN Executive Committee members: Willem de Blécourt, Terry Gunnell, Anders Gustavsson, Desmond Kharmawphlang, Fumihiko Kobayashi, Mare Kõiva, Kaarina Koski, Dilip Kumar Kalita, Mirjam Mencej, Maria Ines Palleiro, Tok Thompson and Ülo Valk.

IN THIS CORNER OF THE WORLD: STORIED PLACES AND THEIR NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS WITH ECOLOGY

By **Henry Robert Goldsmith**, *Independent Researcher, India.*

This brief write-up tries to encapsulate the experience of changing environments, which shapes and sometimes almost negates particular narratives and traditions specifically in the context of the Assamese community in the small town of Jorhat. This essay illustrates the significance of holding onto these belief narratives and how, in doing so, it inevitably helps us sustain the ecology around us. I begin with a personal experience narrative that involves entities residing in the liminal state between our reality and theirs.

On an evening during the Indian summer, the dingy city draws a paramount of colours, animals and humans alike into its midst, mystifying them into a unity of space. As the sun bows down for its slumber, in its wake, it makes the water gleam with sparkles of red and orange. The red dragonfly flutters its wings trying to mask itself with the colour of the setting sun. The noisy crickets, emplacing themselves in the corner of the room, begin to hum their songs. The fireflies rub their wings and get ready to light the world around them, and to find their mates. And in this space I sit, by the edge of the pond, trying to fulfil my childhood hobby of fishing. I sit on a murha (a stool made up of bamboo canes), with my food bait (a flour paste for the small fish and some worms for the big ones) on one side. On the other, there is half a bucket of water to keep the fish in. It was a slow evening and I had only caught two small puti fishes (*Puntius sophore*). As the twilight drew in, I heard my mother calling me from my house. She beckoned me to get inside since it was getting darker by the minute- not because I wouldn't be able to catch fish anyway but because the Jolkuwori would come out.

Later that night I asked my mother what a Jolkuwori is. She described it as a creature living in the depths of the pond. Its purpose was to capture anyone fishing late after dark. She would pull in the person, taking them into the depths of the pond, and would eat them. Now, I was a kid then and I took it to heart and promised I wouldn't fish after sundown. But I was curious about this creature living in our midst. It had an overwhelming presence then because as I looked into the pond even during the day I would imagine a creature coming out of it. I wanted to really grasp at what this creature looked like and hence I went to someone who I believed would have the knowledge about this and possibly also had the experience of meeting one. This old saint was – my grandmother. Her description was a bit different from what my mother had told me so. She said that the Jolkuwori is half woman and half fish, mostly between a mermaid and a siren. My grandmother told me the Jolkuwori's face is very beautiful, with long green hair and a very slippery skin that glimmers as she comes out. Her victims are the fishermen who would stay by the banks near the river or a pond, after dark, half-dipped in water trying to draw the last net in. She would sometimes pull in the victim and at other times would lure them with her beauty and her songs. Now there was my question- Why aren't women taken in? For of course, she said, it was mostly men who do fishing, and women are wiser to not venture out to the pond after dark but most importantly, a Jolkuwori would never hurt a woman.

This story told me quite a number of things, the existence of an entity or more in and around urban spaces and the ecology in which it thrives and thereby the variations in the perception of these entities. The environment where these entities existed through time was full of lush green ecology. It was residing among the tall bushes, up in huge mango trees, in the depths of the pond. In between the animals and the humans, these and such other entities had a place of their own. So, what changed?

The space where these entities resided seemed to have changed with time. Due to the influx of population the ecology was slowly changing and turning into a concrete jungle and with the space being transformed, these entities lost their place and also their existence. They were also perceived differently among different communities that came to reside in the neighbourhood. In my conversations with another family about their views on Jolkuwori, they said that in their community, which was Bengali, they viewed this creature as a fairy princess and that one would be lucky to encounter one such creature. But since the space was taken, where would these entities live? How would people now know the importance of these stories that made up much of our subconscious understanding of habits and beliefs? The truth is that there is no transition so far as I have seen. The loss of the space meant the loss of the narratives of these entities as well. My nephew and nieces, who are younger now never actually got to experience these stories and perhaps never will. So, is there a possibility of holding on to these stories and even more so is it important for the stories to hold on too? I believe it is, especially in the current context. These stories have served as a medium to identify how nature operates around us. With the inevitable invasion of these spaces, we have taken more from the environment than we have given.

This ultimately leads to the decaying of the environment, the effects of which we can see today with more sickness in the entire year compared to five years in the last decade. These entities and stories have served as an agent or a signifier to remind us to value and respect the ecological space in which we reside. It also reminded us that we only share this small space between the earth and the sky and that we should protect it the best we could. For if we went beyond what was intended for us then nature will try taking it back. These narratives also birthed a lot of tradition. So, for example, to ward off the Meccho Bhoot, the fishermen would throw one fish back into the river after their last catch. That tradition is still followed even now, most probably out of habit than the context, but something remains nonetheless. We cannot undo the colonization of these spaces, what we can do perhaps is stop taking more.

In conclusion, humans have always invaded and taken up spaces and resources more so than what is needed. The transformation of ecology from a natural to a concrete one is progressing with immediacy. And on the other side of it, the eroding and degrading of the ecology is climbing at a much faster pace. Perhaps this is the year both meet in the middle and we see the result of it all around us. I reflect back upon how my mom asked me to come back home after the twilight. Not because I can't catch the fish after dark, but because it is enough.

A Pair of Silver Earrings

Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, North Eastern Hill University, India. A short story translated by Ellerrine Diengdoh. Reprinted with kind permission of the The Little Journal of Northeast India; See, <https://the-little-journal.com/issues/detail/5f22eabe48cb1e0017f9d156>

We could finally rest after days of frantic activities associated with the death of my father, who the neighbours lovingly called “Bah Ba”. Family, friends and acquaintances from far and near had come to pay their final respects but what lent more depth to this elaborate event were the verbal utterances of grief performed through songs by my paternal relatives and an elderly man from the Pahambir village who accompanied them on his Maryngod. As is customary in every funeral home in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, most people who came, including Bah Kro, a Karbi, who was the headman of Umsaw Nongkharai, narrated my father’s good standing in the village and laid great emphasis on his unblemished name. He, however, recalled one incident, when my father in his youth got drunk on a local brew and ended up sleeping in their place of worship. For this misdemeanour, he was fined ten rupees!

Now recalling the days, I remembered an incident which took place a week after the New Year. I was enjoying my winter break as was the rest of the village, sunning myself in the courtyard when my father came up to me and presented me, I thought at first, a pair of silver earrings. They were round, solid, and silver. What struck me about them was that they had no design marking them – just a loop which could readily be attached to the ear.

My father at this point looked at me and said: “Daughter, I have made peace with life. It has been kind to me in my old age. I have seen many things come and go: in my youth, I have watched the hills of my birth splashed with the bronze of bamboo flowers and have seen the road—on which so many cars now ply—when it was nothing but a trail of dust. Darling, take and hold on to these earrings because they represent a slice of memory borrowed from a world you will understand only when I am gone. There will be people who will visit you and ask about them: you are to give them these objects without a question or doubt.”

This was soon forgotten as days rolled by punctuated by the songs and chirpings of the birds. My holiday, however, ended all too soon and this idyllic lull was replaced by the exuberant voices of children returning to school. I too as a school teacher, returned to work, but one afternoon as I was enjoying my habitual cup of tea, four strangers appeared at my door. Judging by their costumes, I knew they were Karbis, but not the ones who resided in Khlieh Umsaw Nongkharai, a Karbi village nearby.

I invited them in and offered them a lyngknot (small stool) to sit on. They informed me that their surname is Teron and that they had come from a village called Umwang. Wasting no time, they explained to me that the sole purpose of their visit was to collect the silver earrings. “You see, Kong,” said the man who was obviously their leader, “These earrings belong to Ka Men, our grandmother. Unfortunately, she was killed by your grandfather.” I was shocked to learn that my grandfather had taken someone’s life. But the man continued, “Kong, we know that you doubt us, but there is an old man who lives in Khlieh Umsaw, U Dopsing Timung, who will validate the story of these earrings and how they came to be in your grandfather’s possession.”

Since I was instructed by my father to return the earrings to anyone who came for them without begrudging them, I obediently took them out from a box of clothes and gave it to Elder Teron. They politely thanked me and left.

Curiosity led me that same night to Khlieh Umsaw, to meet the old man called U Dopsing. After inquiring about him from people who had lined up to fetch water from the locality tap, I found him living with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren in a big house whose roof was partly covered with tin while the side of the kitchen was still thatched.

After introducing myself to the old man, I narrated the incident of how a group of people from Umwang had come to claim the silver earrings. Grinning with bemusement, U Dopsing cleared his throat and began: “Your grandfather once cultivated the slopes of the hill where the big sawmill now stands. In those days, the woods were thick with vegetation. One year, we saw a good harvest, but wild boars plundered the fields. Your grandfather, your father, and I—since we were good friends—decided to stake out the fields that night. U Ba’s father had carried a flintlock, some gunpowder, and bullets, and we crouched on the peak of the slopes hoping to catch the marauding animals.

As dawn broke, we heard a sound in the undergrowth and in an instant, a herd of wild boars led by a female boar emerged. Your grandfather took aim with his loaded gun in the direction of the beasts. Thlam-lam-lam roared the gun shattering the stillness of the hills and the female boar went crashing into the channels among the rows of paddy a little further away. We could no longer see her, but we heard her guttural gut-wrenching squeals of death.

In a moment, it was over and silence returned. By morning, we cautiously made our way to where the boar lay. After making sure that she was no longer alive, we went to inspect her remains. There she lay majestically – the only indication that she had died was the lacerations around her neck made by the bullets which tore through her flesh.



At this point, your father and I decided to find some help to carry the boar to the village. Four men carried the trophy amidst great rejoicing, while huge numbers gathered awaiting their share of flesh. The cleaning—to remove the hair—began with U prew and ka wait. When they reached the head, your grandfather stopped short and gaped. Crying out to other men who were there, he pointed to the ears. Everyone was shocked at this point, for what adorned her ears were the silver earrings.

U Dopsing cleared his throat and continued “After three days, we came to know that a woman by the name of Ka Kuna Teron, from a village of Ka Raid Umwang, had died in the wee hours of the same morning, when your grandfather shot that boar.

She had never suffered from an ailment in her life, and all they noticed after she died were these mysterious bruises around her neck. It was believed by all who lived in the Umwang village that the woman who died was a were-pig who transformed herself occasionally into a wild boar.”

Footnotes :

Bah Ba – “Bah” is a term of respect meaning elder brother.
“Ba” is a given name.

Maryngod – A stringed instrument played with a bow

Lyngknot – A short wooden stool

Kong – A term of respect meaning elder sister.

U Prew – Dried bamboo/reeds

Ka wait – Machete



PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

ARTICLES

Gustavsson, Anders. “How to Reach a Successful Humanistic Research Career?” *Forskarkarriärer: 13 forskare berättar om sina karriärer*, edited by Åsa Morberg, Anders Gustavsson and Carl E. Olivestam. *Acta Acadmiae Stromstadensis*, Vol. 49 (2020): 161–182. Available at: <http://stromstadakademi.se/wp2/publikationer-2/aas/>

Abstract: My subject area is European ethnology. The aim is primarily to study the material and social life of people, as well as their world view, with qualitative methods and with a historical perspective up to the present. During my first time as a doctoral student in the late 1960s, there was an objective research ideal in the history sciences. It was about searching for a true and neutral reality regardless of the scholars who conducted the surveys. You wouldn't mention anything personal. The researcher was perceived as a neutral observer and analyst of reality. Truth was important in the search for knowledge. In the 1990s, the objective ideal of my subject was replaced by a subjective one. It became legitimate to reflect on the impact of the scholar him/herself in the research process. In international cultural research there is a connection to the term auto-ethnography. There, researchers in the 2000s have used themselves explicitly in the research process. Auto-ethnography is a working method that means that researchers use their personal experiences and self-reflections in the analyses. The aim is that researchers may better understand and interpret other people and cultures. This is the reason for my motivation to write about my personal research development during many years.

Gustavsson, Anders.
“Nineteenth-Century
Cholera Epidemics in
Sweden from a Popular
Perspective”. *ARV: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*,
Vol. 76 (2020): 119–151.

Abstract: My focus is on the many cholera epidemics which hit Sweden from 1834 until 1873. I have studied how cholera epidemics affected the countryside from an ethnological, folkloristic and cultural historian's point of view. Popular practices and ideas in difficult crisis situations are the subject, rather than top-down regulations. How did the population perceive the cholera and how was the disease treated on the local level when it broke out? The different epidemics share a common feature: the disease has been spread by shipping across the oceans and then along inland waterways and the shores of larger lakes. A cholera epidemic outbreak immediately raised questions regarding barriers against the immediate neighbourhood. Smoking with juniper or tar was used as a protection against cholera infection. This points

to the opinion that the cholera contagion was airborne, namely a miasmatic view. In towns, the disease hit the socially weak areas where poverty, bad hygiene, and overcrowding reigned. This tendency was apparent in the countryside as well. Since the cholera hit local communities suddenly and many died within a short time, it is to be expected that strong fears appeared. There are informants who had survived cholera and left tales of shattering memories. In many cases, the themes in legends about cholera had roots going back to the Black Death in the fourteenth century.

Abstract: Two unique figurative representations of the mythical Baba – from Grobnik and Gračišće, Croatia – are discussed in this paper. They are the only ones in figurative form found until today. The author introduces a newly discovered figurative representation of the mythical Baba in St. Mary's church in Gračišće, Istria. It is a drawing of a fat old woman accompanied by an inscription written in Gothic Latin letters that reads Stara Baba Vukoša/Old Baba Vukoša. Contrary to the opinion that this is a sarcastic comment about some fat woman from Gračišće, it has for the first time been placed and interpreted in a mythological context. In the inscription of Stara Baba Vukoša the author reveals the well known connection of the Baba with the supreme Proto-Slavic goddess Mokoš, as well as with Mati syra zeml'a/ Damp Mother Earth, the oldest deity in Slavic mythology. On the basis of several indicators discussed in the paper, the author concludes that the drawing of a fat woman, accompanied by this inscription, must have been inscribed into still wet plaster by some infertile woman, or a woman in need who, having preserved the “old faith”, still in the 15th century prayed for help (also) to the pagan goddess Mokoš (i.e. the primal goddess Mati syra zeml'a/Damp Mother Earth) in the votive church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the most common Christian substitute for Mokoš.

Vince Pallua, Jelka. “A Newly Discovered Figurative Representation of the Mythical Baba – “Old Baba Vukoša” in St. Mary's Church of Gračišće in Istria”. In: (Belaj, J., Belaj M., Krznar, S., Sekelj Ivančan, T., Tkalec, T. ed.), *Sacralisation of Landscape and Sacred Places*, Institute of Archaeology, Zagreb, (2018) 105–117. Available at: http://iza.zrc-sazu.si/pdf/Pleterski/Pleterski_Sacralization_2018.pdf

Vince Pallua, Jelka. "What can the Mythical Frog Tell us? The Symbolism and Role of the Frog in History and Modernity". Folklore, Electronic Journal of Folklore, Printed version, (Guest editor: Mirjam Mencej), Vol. 77 (2019) :, pages 63–91. Available at: https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/1041309.What_can_the_mythical_frog_tell_us.pdf

Abstract: Frogs have always been related to the mythical origin of life. In mythologies throughout the world, frogs were associated with the primeval waters out of which life arose. The author looks at the rich symbolic language of this amphibian, with a special focus on its clear female symbolism – fertility, fecundity, female genitals, abundance, regeneration, renewal of life, pregnancy, eroticism, wetness/life, etc., as well as divine symbolism as revealed in the Polish and Croatian words for frog – boginka and bogiña (goddess). The author identifies and discusses past and contemporary imagery, legends, narratives, and fairy-tales, and the folkloristic, mythical, ethnological, archaeological, and linguistic aspects of frogs and their symbolism. The folkloristic triplet toads – babas – mushrooms identified during the research is presented as additional proof of the analogous linguistic triplet with bau or bo roots in some European languages. All three of the items, with the aspect of wetness as a precondition for fertility, as shown in the paper, are symbols of female sexual organs, fertility, and renewal. In the end, the author points to the longevity of the image of the frog presented next to the Virgin Mary in an interesting syncretism of the pre-Christian and Christian worlds.

Abstract: The first part of the article focuses on the collaboration on the topic of symbolism of and the words for daffodils between the Croatian scholar Dr Jelka Radauš Ribarić and her Slovenian colleague and friend Dr Milko Matičetov. Based on their correspondence from 1977, the paper examines their generationally conditioned, similar ethnological reflections. In the main body of the paper, titled "The new interpretation", the author develops a new ritual-mythological interpretation of customary spring-time practices involving daffodils, a water spring and a lime tree in the village of Vodice in northern Istria, Croatia. The former St. George's day's procession, preserved there in the form of children's folklore by the presentation of daffodils to the spring and to a bogič/god on the lime tree is interpreted as a reflection or a relic of a (proto) Slavic, pre-Christian rite. The names for daffodils – jurjevke and Marijine palčke/Maričice – are explained within the same interpretative context.

Keywords: ritual-mythological interpretation, Proto-Slavic mythology, lime tree, Christianization, St. George's day, Jarylo, St. George, Mara, making gifts to water, water spring, daffodils, Istria, Vodice, Slovenian-Croatian professional cooperation.

Studia ethnologica Croatica, Vol. 31, (2019): 9–47. Available at: https://hr-cak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=335815

ON HANNA DYÂB'S STORIES AND THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

Bottigheimer, Ruth. 2020. "Hannâ Diyâb's Tales in Antoine Galland's Mille et Une Nuit(s): I. New Perspectives on their Recording; II. New Conclusions about Western Sources within Nights Texts." In: Antoine Galland (1646-1715) et son Journal: Actes du colloque international organisé à l'Université de Liège (16-18 février 2015) à l'occasion du tricentenaire de sa mort, edited by Frédéric Bauden and Richard Waller, 51-72 (Mémoires de l'Association pour la Promotion de l'Histoire et de l'Archéologie Orientales, 12.) Liège: Peeters.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. 2019. "Reading for Fun in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo. The Hanna Dyâb Tales of Galland's Mille et Une Nuits." Book History 22: 133-160.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. 2018. "Flying Carpets in the Arabian Nights: Disney, Dyâb ... and d'Aulnoy?" Gramarye 13: 18-34.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. 2017. "Vliegende tapijten in Duizend-en-eennacht: Disney, Dyâb ... en d'Aulnoy?" Volkskunde 3: 255-272.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. 2018. "Hanna Dyâb's Witch and the Great Witch Shift." In: Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, Cornelia Osborne (eds) Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present. Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, and Cornelia Osborne. 2017. "Hanna Dyâb's Witch and the Great Witch Shift". Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Springer: 53-77. (=Festschrift for Willem de Blécourt).

2014. "The Case of 'The Ebony Horse. Part I'" *Gramarye* 5: 8-20.
 2014. "The Case of 'The Ebony Horse. Part II Hanna Diyab's Creation of a Third Tradition.'" *Gramarye* 6: 6-16.
 2014. "East Meets West in Thousand and One Nights." *Marvels & Tales* 28.2: 302-324.
 2013. "Øst og vest i Tusind og én Nat." 11-19 in Carsten Niebuhr Biblioteket 24: 201.

Editor's note on the publication history on Hanna Dyab by Ruth B. Bottigheimer: It may be mentioned about the "Hanna Dyab" articles that because of the centrality of fairy tale history and theory to the work as a whole, Ruth B. Bottigheimer has also included mention of a recent foundational article on Straparola's poetics and one on fairy tale translations. She also mentioned, and I quote, "The Hanna Dyab publications to date are articles, and I am finishing up a book that focuses on the storytelling sessions themselves, at which Dyab told Galland stories such as "Aladdin," "Ali Baba," "Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou," and "The Two Jealous Sisters," which are structured along European fairy tale lines. He also told twelve other tales, one of which evidently comes from Jewish narrative tradition. Of the rest, some draw on Arabic narrative traditions such as (but not limited to). The Arabian Nights and Sindbad the Sailor, while others mix in European fairy tale content and/or structure". She also mentions that "Research into the Hanna Dyab tales in the Arabian Nights grew naturally from my work on European fairy tales. The research substrate is very different - the spelling, punctuation, grammatical errors, and dramatic handwriting variation in Galland's journal notations of the fifteen stories Dyab told him in 1709 - but a similar methodology, which I call documentary forensics, has produced meaningful narrative results, revealing that Dyab told the majority of his stories in French, that he spoke French with an audible Aleppo accent, and that the relationship between Dyab and Galland altered significantly over the weeks of storytelling. It has also produced a nearly finished book-length historical recreation of Dyab's performances, interim results of which I've presented at conferences, the most recent of which was a keynote address at the 2020 conference on Orphan Stories at the University of Zürich".

ON FAIRY TALE HISTORY AND THEORY

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. "Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* and Fairy-Tale Poetics." *Kreuz- und Querzüge: Beiträge zu einer literarischen Anthropologie. Festschrift for Alfred Messerli*. Eds Harm-Peer Zimmermann, Peter O. Büttner, and Bernhard Tschöfen. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2019. 289-304.

Bottigheimer, Ruth B. "Translation: Geographical Translocation and Cultural Transformation." 555-559 in *Marvelous Transformations: An Anthology of Fairy tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, eds. Christine Jones and Jennifer Schacker. Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 2013

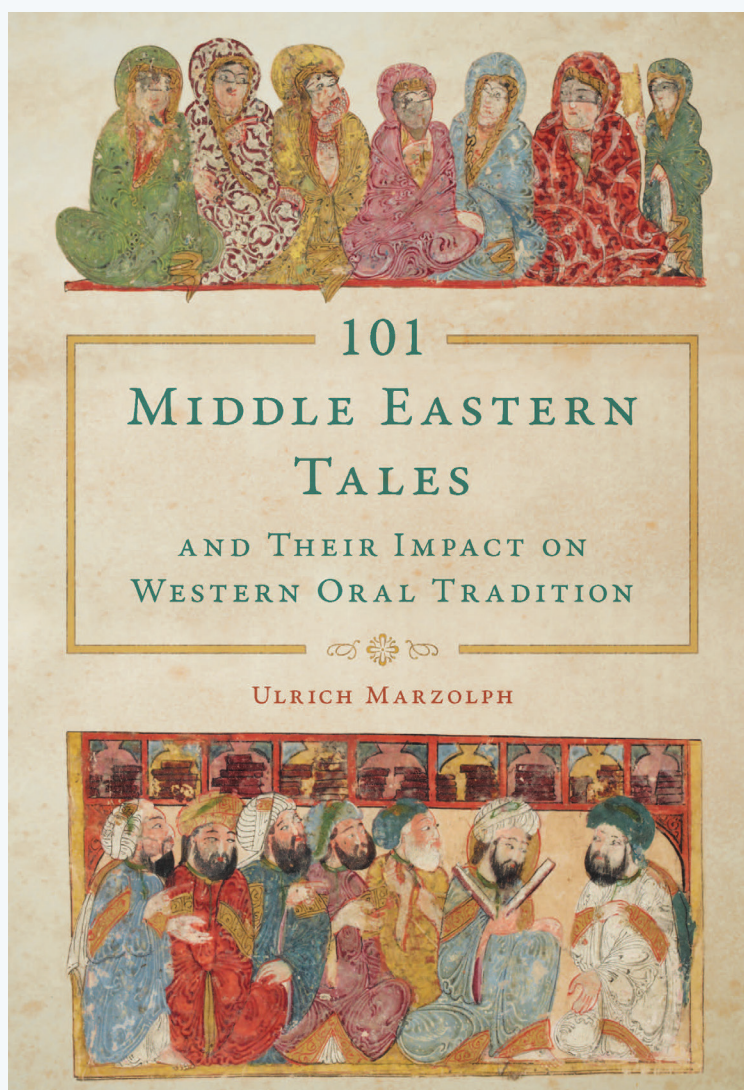
BOOKS

Ulrich Marzolph 2020, *101 Middle Eastern Tales and Their Impact on Western Oral Tradition*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press <https://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/101-middle-eastern-tales-and-their-impact-western-oral-tradition>

Against the methodological backdrop of historical and comparative folk narrative research, *101 Middle Eastern Tales and Their Impact on Western Oral Tradition* surveys the history, dissemination, and characteristics of over one hundred narratives transmitted to

Western tradition from or by the Middle Eastern Muslim literatures (i.e., authored written works in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish). For a tale to be included, Marzolph considered two criteria: that the tale originates from or at least was transmitted by a Middle Eastern source, and that it was recorded from a Western narrator's oral performance in the course of the nineteenth or twentieth century. The rationale behind these restrictive definitions is predicated on Marzolph's main concern with the long-lasting effect that some of the "Oriental" narratives exercised in Western popular tradition—those tales that have withstood the test of time.

Marzolph focuses on the originally "Oriental" tales that became part and parcel of modern Western oral tradition. Since antiquity, the "Orient" constitutes the quintessential Other vis-à-vis the European cultures. While delineation against this Other served to define and reassure the Self, the "Orient" also constituted a constant source of fascination, attraction, and inspiration. Through oral retellings, numerous tales from Muslim tradition became an integral part of European oral and written tradition in the form of learned treatises, medieval sermons, late medieval fabliaux, early modern chapbooks, contemporary magazines, and more. In present times, when national narcissisms often acquire the status of strongholds delineating the Us against the Other, it is imperative to distinguish, document, visualize, and discuss the extent to which the West is not only indebted to the Muslim world but also shares common features with Muslim narrative tradition. *101 Middle Eastern Tales and Their Impact on Western Oral Tradition* is an important contribution to this debate and a vital work for scholars, students, and readers of folklore and fairy tales.



Following an extensive introduction, the book presents detailed discussions of the following tales and/or tale types: 1. The Fox Rids Itself of Fleas (ATU 63); 2. Belling the Cat (ATU 110); 3. The Bird Promises to Give Its Captor Three Pieces of Advice (ATU 150); 4. The Faithful Animal Rashly Killed (ATU 178A); 5. The Cat and the Candle (ATU 217); 6. The Princess and Her Secret Affair (ATU 306); 7. The Unfaithful Wife Transforms Her Husband into a Dog (ATU 449); 8. The Two Hunchbacks (ATU 503); 9. The Unpromising Rascal Makes His Fortune with the Help of a Magic Object (ATU 561); 10. The Mechanical Flying Gadget (ATU 575); 11. The Husband Buried Alive Together with His Deceased Wife (ATU 612); 12. The Contending Lovers Are Challenged to Acquire the Rarest Thing in the World (ATU 653A); 13. The Sensitive Brothers and Their Clever Deductions (ATU 655); 14. Years of Experience in a Moment: The Man is Transformed into a Woman (and Back Again) (ATU 681); 15. The Chaste Woman Coveted by Her Brother-in-Law (ATU 712); 16. The Three Old Men (ATU 726); 17. The Foolish Couple Waste the Three Wishes They Have Been Granted (ATU 750A); 18. The Subaltern Does Not Want to Sell the House to the Ruler (ATU 759E); 19. The Treasure Finders Murder One Another (ATU 763); 20. Greed Makes the Cheater Admit His Misdemeanor (ATU 785); 21. God Willing! (ATU 830C); 22. The Greedy Man Is Blinded and Falls into Misery (ATU 836F*); 23. Drinking Leads to Committing Serious Crimes (ATU 839); 24. The Princess Whose Suitors Will Be Executed if They Fail to Solve Her Riddles (ATU 851A); 25. The Entrapped Would-Be Seducers Have to Work to Earn Their Food (ATU 882A*); 26. The Prince Learns a Profession (ATU 888A*); 27. A Pound of Flesh as Security for a Loan (ATU 890); 28. The Lowly Man Shrewdly Responds to the King's Unanswerable Questions (ATU 922); 29. The Treacherous Treasure-Hunter (ATU 936*); 30. The Robbers Hiding Their Treasures in a Magic Cavern (ATU 954); 31. Whose Was the Noblest Action? (ATU 976); 32. The Villager in the Town of Rogues (ATU 978); 33. The Dishes of the Same Flavor (ATU 983); 34. The Fool Guards the Door by Taking It Along (ATU 1009); 35. The Fools Try to Keep the Bird from Escaping (ATU 1213); 36. Trying to Please Everyone (ATU 1215); 37. The Fool Doubles the Load by Counterbalancing the Wheat with Stones (ATU 1242B); 38. Making a Hole in the Ground to Deposit the Soil from the Previous Digging (ATU 1255); 39. Warming Oneself on a Distant Fire (ATU 1262); 40. The Fool Forgets to Count the Donkey He Is Sitting on (ATU 1288A); 41. The Scholar and the Ferryman (El-Shamy 1293C*); 42. Freeing the Part of the Body Stuck in the Jar by Cutting It off (ATU 1294); 43. The Fox Fears It Might Be Taken for a Camel (El-Shamy 1319N*); 44. Accidental Cannibalism (ATU 1339G); 45. The Thieves Find Nothing to Steal in the Poor Man's House (ATU 1341C); 46. The House without Food or Drink (ATU 1346); 47. The Liar Sows Discord between a Married Couple (ATU 1353); 48. The Frightened Person Withdraws the Vow to Die Instead of a Close Relative (ATU 1354); 49. The Weighed Cat (ATU 1373); 50. Test of Self-Composure: Small Animal Escapes When Lid of Vessel Is Lifted (ATU 1416); 51. The Tricky Lover Regains the Gift He Gave for Intercourse (ATU 1420G); 52. The Enchanted Tree (ATU 1423); 53. The Men Realize That They Will Never Manage to Control Women's Sexuality (ATU 1426); 54. Ignorance Concerning the Use of Flour (ATU 1446); 55. The Burglar's Lame Excuse: The Sound Will Be Heard Tomorrow Morning (Jason 1525*T); 56. The Swindler Leaves an Uninformed Person as Security for His Purchase (ATU 1526); 57. The Thief Claims to Have Been Transformed into a Donkey (ATU 1529); 58. The Subaltern Is Made Lord for a Day (ATU 1531); 59. The Clever Man Privileges Himself When Carving the Roast Chicken (ATU 1533); 60. Quoting the Scripture to Gain an Advantage at the Meal (ATU 1533A); 61. Hanging by Proxy (ATU 1534A*); 62. The Accused Wins the Lawsuit by Feigning to Be Dumb (ATU 1534D*); 63. The Exigent Dreamer (ATU 1543A); 64. Promising to Sell the Large Farm Animal for a Trifle Amount (ATU 1553); 65. The Rogue Trades Water for Wine (ATU 1555B); 66. Welcome to the Clothes (ATU 1558); 67. "Think Thrice before You Speak!" (ATU 1562); 68. The Sham Threat (ATU 1563*); 69. The Trickster Relieves His Itching with a Trick (ATU 1565); 70. The Prankster's Ambiguous Dream (ATU 1572M*); 71. The Thievish Tailor's Terrifying Dream of the Patchwork Banner (ATU 1574); 72. The Drink Served in the Pisspot (ATU 1578A*); 73. The Adviser Is Duped with His Own Advice (ATU 1585); 74. The Inanimate Object Allegedly Gives Birth and Dies (ATU 1592B); 75. The Courtiers Force the Bearer of a Present to Share His Anticipated Award (ATU 1610); 76. The Greedy Banker Is Deceived into Delivering the Disputed Deposit (ATU 1617); 77. The Pauper Regains His Buried Money (ATU 1617*); 78. The Imaginary Tissue (ATU 1620); 79. The Lowly Man Posing as Soothsayer (ATU 1641); 80. The Miracle Cure (ATU 1641B); 81. Who Stole? — The Thieves! (ATU 1641B*); 82. The Dream of Finding One's Fortune Somewhere Else (ATU 1645); 83. The Dreamer Marks the Treasure with His Excrements (ATU 1645B); 84. The Clever Man Privileges Himself When Distributing Food Items among Several Persons (ATU 1663); 85. Anticipatory Beating (ATU 1674*); 86. The Animal Will Not Know How to Make Proper Use of the Meat (ATU 1689B); 87. The Clever Woman Has the Entrapped Would-Be Lovers Publicly Humiliated (ATU 1730); 88. The Clever Culprit Pretends That His Sword Has Been Transformed to Wood (ATU 1736A); 89. The Preacher Cleverly Avoids Delivering a Sermon (ATU 1826); 90. The Numskull Thinks That a Name Ages (ATU 1832N*); 91. How the Preacher's Sermon Makes a Member of His Parish Cry (ATU 1834); 92. The Simpleton Is Not Able to Perform a Seemingly Easy Mental Task (ATU 1835D*); 93. The Illiterate Fool's Reckoning of Time Is Ruined (ATU 1848A); 94. The Rider Goes Where His Bolting Mount Takes Him (ATU 1849*); 95. The Greater Bribe Wins (ATU 1861A); 96. Diagnosis by Observation (ATU 1862C); 97. The Liar Reduces the Size of His Lie (ATU 1920D); 98. The Trickster Forces His Challenger to Admit That He Is Telling a Lie (ATU 1920F); 99. A Nonsense Introduction to the Fairy-Tale World (ATU 1965); 100. Mouse-Maid Marries Mouse (ATU 2031C); 101. The Climax of Horrors (ATU 2040)

The Storytelling Human: Lithuanian Folk Tradition Today 2020. Compiled and edited by Lina Būgienė. Series: Lithuanian Studies Without Borders. Academic Studies Press: Brookline, Massachusetts.

“This book is among the very few publications offering to the English-speaking readership significant insights into contemporary Lithuanian folklore research. Dealing with a broad variety of materials—from archived manuscripts to audio-recorded life stories to internet folklore—it comprises such topics as history and identity; the traditional worldview influencing modern people’s actions; the construction of the mental landscape; types and modes of storytelling; and the modern uses of proverbs, anecdotes, and internet lore. In a balanced way reflecting upon past and present, tradition and modernity, individual and collective, and employing modern research methodologies to dissect and analyze popular subjects and themes, this book presents a condensed view of the popular Lithuanian culture and mentality”.

THE STORYTELLING HUMAN

LITHUANIAN FOLK
TRADITION
TODAY

Edited by
LINA BŪGIENĖ



DEMONOLOGY AND WITCH-HUNTING IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Edited by Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer,
and Liv Helene Willumsen

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT, DEMONOLOGY AND MAGIC



Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer, and Liv Helene Willumsen (eds.), 2020 *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe*, London: Routledge

Demonology – the intellectual study of demons and their powers – contributed to the prosecution of thousands of witches. But how exactly did intellectual ideas relate to prosecutions? Recent scholarship has shown that some of the demonologists’ concerns remained at an abstract intellectual level, while some of the judges’ concerns reflected popular culture. This book brings demonology and witch-hunting back together, while placing both topics in their specific regional cultures.

The book’s chapters, each written by a leading scholar, cover most regions of Europe, from Scandinavia and Britain through to Germany, France and Switzerland, and Italy and Spain. By focusing on various intellectual levels of demonology, from sophisticated demonological thought to the development of specific demonological ideas and ideas within the witch trial environment, the book offers a thorough examination of the relationship between demonology and witch-hunting.

Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe is essential reading for all students and researchers of the history of demonology, witch-hunting and early modern Europe.

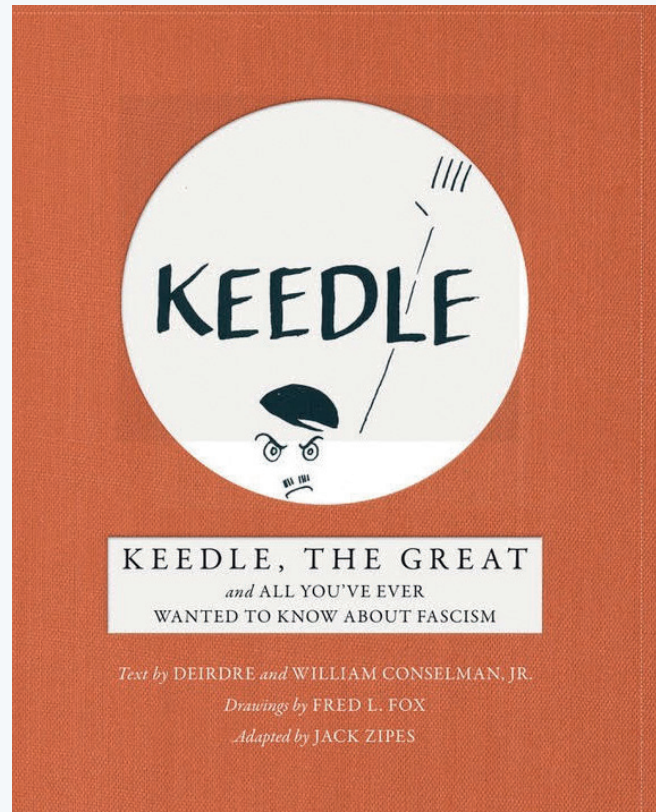
See, <https://www.routledge.com/Demonology-and-Witch-Hunting-in-Early-Modern-Europe/Goodare-Voltmer-Willumsen/p/book/9780367440527>

Keedle the Great, originally written by Deirdre and William Conselman, Jr., and illustrated by Fred L. Fox in 1940, is the story of a scrawny little kid who is cruel to animals. “He can’t stand seeing other people happy and is just mean,” says Zipes. As the story progresses and Keedle becomes a bigger bully, he gets smaller and smaller. It shows that bullies don’t last forever.

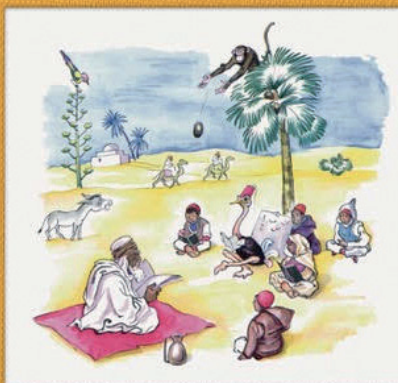
“

“I want to unbury as many great tales as I can before I’m buried”

Jack Zipes, Minneapolis, MN



YUSSUF THE OSTRICH



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
EMERY KELEN
ADAPTED BY JACK ZIPES

Yussuf the Ostrich, originally written and illustrated by Emery Kelen, one of the great political caricaturists of the twentieth century, and released in 1943, is the story of a young idealistic ostrich, who has to overcome racism, war and separation from his mother. “Until I came across this book in a booth at a book fair in Minneapolis, I never thought of ostriches as heroes; but the story and illustrations are just so enlightening and enjoyable,” says Zipes.

Little Mole and Honey Bear’s soon-to-be-released titles share more in common than just being fairy tales from the early part of the 20th Century getting a new life. “I think both books implicitly show that evil will not triumph against good; and that you might have a bully, but he’s not going to last,” says Zipes, who adds that both books speak to the issues we are currently going through here in the United States, as well as those people are facing in the Middle East, Europe and Asian countries. “There seems to be a rise in fascist rulers,” points out Zipes. He has founded a small publishing house called Little Mole and Honey Bear.

Copies of *Keedle the Great* and *Yussuf the Ostrich* will be distributed by Itasca Books of Minnesota, and available for purchase in stores, and online through both Amazon and Barnes and Noble.com.



Place Enchanted

The Khasi Sacred Lands and the Guardian Deities

The Khasi communities of Meghalaya, inclusive of Pnar, Bhoi, Lyngngam, Maram, Nongtraï, Muliang, etc., have a tradition that links them with the spaces around them. The sacred and the cursed place. But the quality of the sacred in the Khasi sense simply means that a given space is the dwelling of a guardian deity and this non-human entity is mostly ambivalent. Sacred translates to *kyntang* in Khasi which implies an association of place with ritual. Cursed places on the other hand are the habitat of the *tyrut*, the feminine non-human who is born where tragedy, or mortal sins, or crimes are committed or have occurred. She can be found at sites of car accidents where there are replays of accidents resulting in death, and blood-soaking into the earth. Sometimes, curse associated with families also follow generationally. But the sacred groves among Khasis are places invested with taboo, rules: and an implied respect is demanded of whosoever visits it. The manifestations of the guardian deity, *ryngkew*, is in the form of the tiger or the snake.

By
Margaret Lyngdoh,
University of Tartu

Deep in the jungles of Northern Khasi Hills ▶ is the Krem Lymbit, or Bat Cave. This place is the dwelling of the guardian deity of the tiger-people (those who have the ability to transform into tigers, or any kind of big cat). His name is Pdah Kyndeng and he views the thousands of bats to be his cattle and his property. Which is why if a person kills a bat from this cave, they are almost always visited by Pdah Kyndeng who metes out justice as he sees fit.



¹This is a Khasi concept where when blood has soaked into the earth, then traces of the accident or tragedy remains. As such, “blood cries out” and this is how the curse of *tyrut* is invited to a given place or even a family.

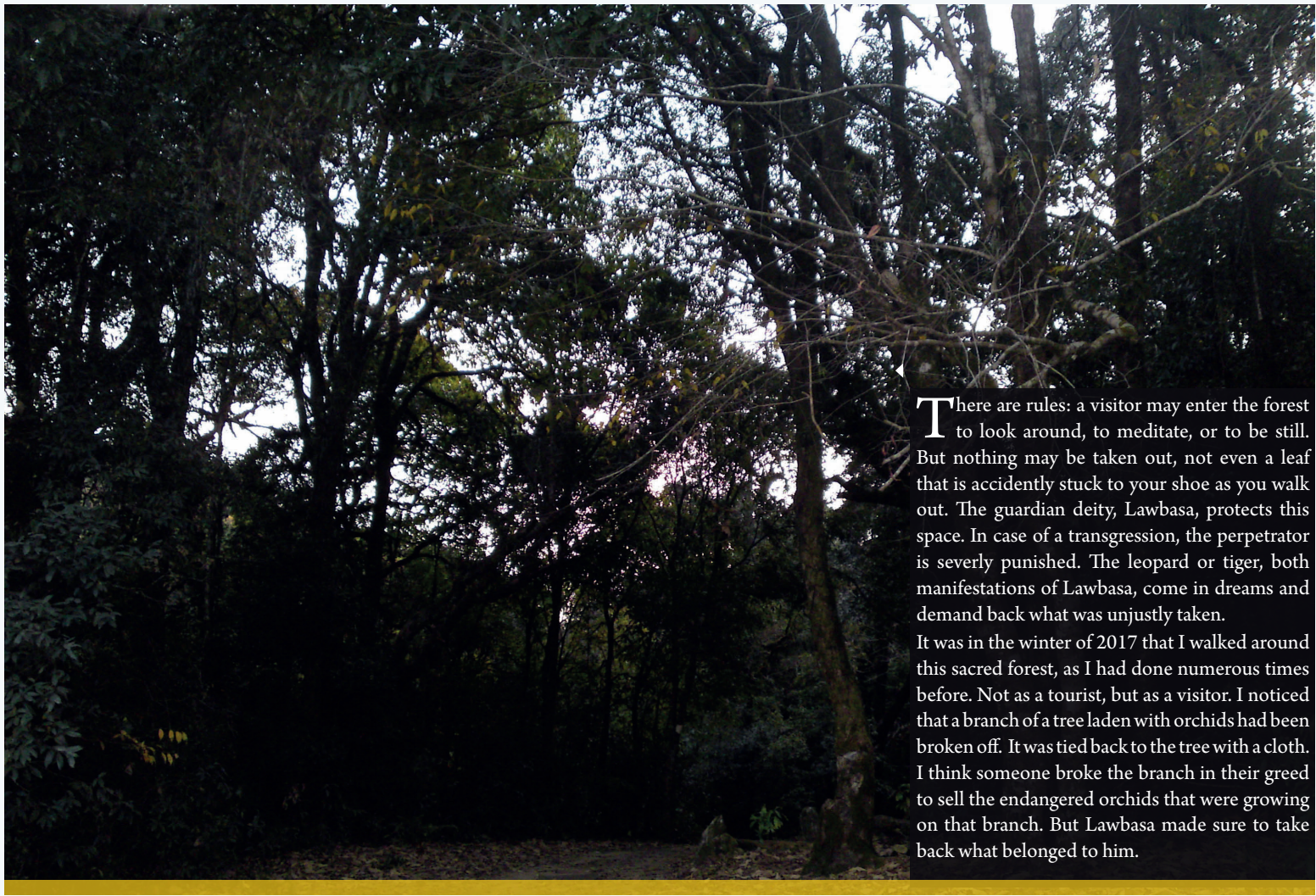


Photo Credit: Tipriti Kharbangar



Travelling southwards, into Mawphlang in the East Khasi Hills District, we find perhaps what is the most renowned of all sacred groves among the Khasi and the Pnar. The Mawphlang sacred grove is a place beloved by botanists and orchid specialists. The forest is populated by vegetation that some botanists have dated to be about 800 to 1000 years old.

Rare orchids and bio diversity characterise this sacred grove. The shroud of enchantment is laid when the forest is bathed only in leaf-green light, brought about by the emerald canopy of tree cover. Here is the sacred grove as seen from the outside. The sacred megaliths mark various rituals and ancestor reverence.



There are rules: a visitor may enter the forest to look around, to meditate, or to be still. But nothing may be taken out, not even a leaf that is accidentally stuck to your shoe as you walk out. The guardian deity, Lawbasa, protects this space. In case of a transgression, the perpetrator is severely punished. The leopard or tiger, both manifestations of Lawbasa, come in dreams and demand back what was unjustly taken. It was in the winter of 2017 that I walked around this sacred forest, as I had done numerous times before. Not as a tourist, but as a visitor. I noticed that a branch of a tree laden with orchids had been broken off. It was tied back to the tree with a cloth. I think someone broke the branch in their greed to sell the endangered orchids that were growing on that branch. But Lawbasa made sure to take back what belonged to him.

The most special place of enchantment in the Khlaw Lyngdoh, is the *Lad Syngi* which translates to crossroads of the ancestors. It is a place where special people who have died, have to walk across in order to reach a liminal reality where they then become *syrngi*, or ancestors.

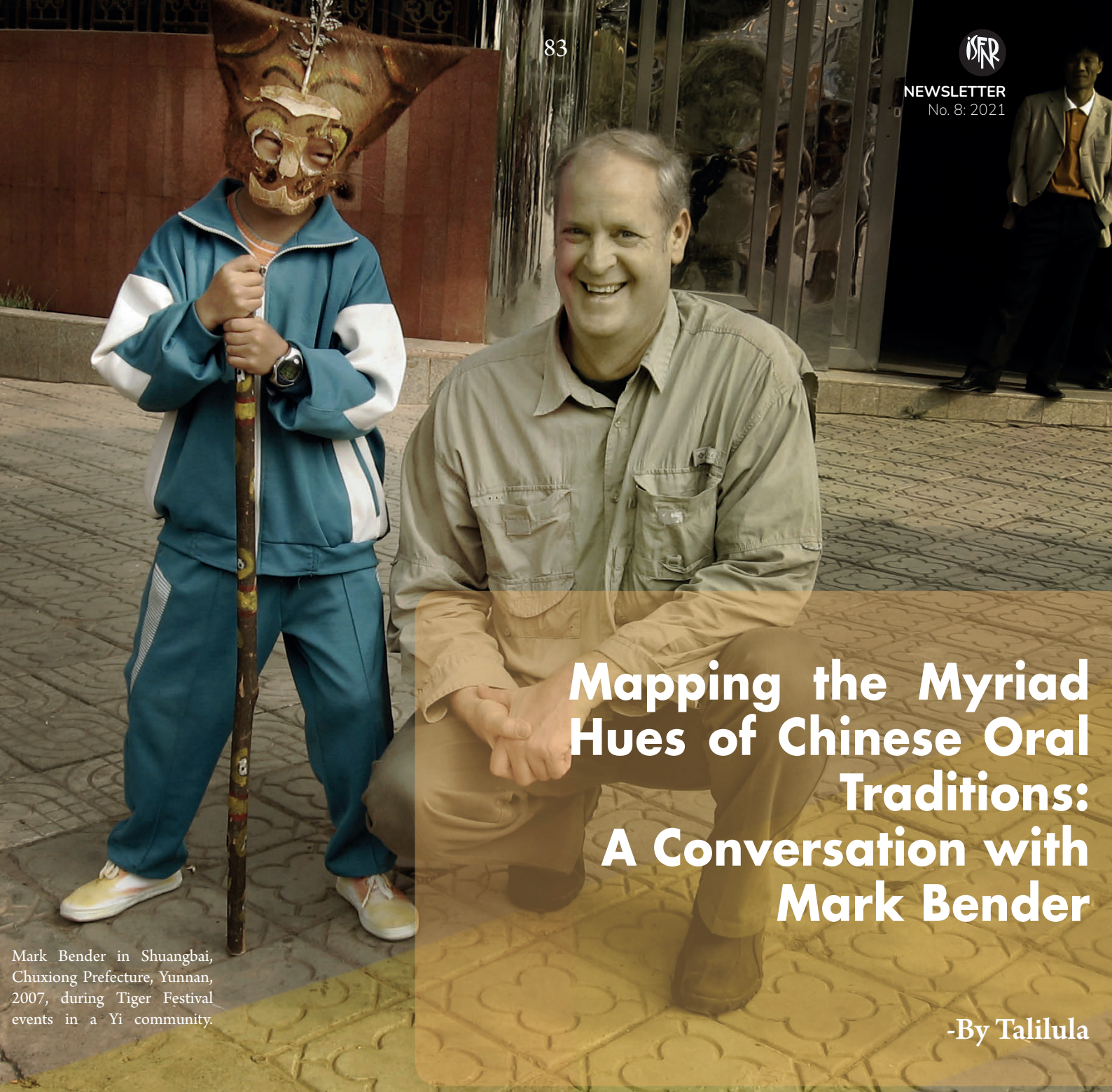


The Khlaw Lyngdoh, the place where the 5 clans of the Khatar Nonglyngdoh clans, you will see the two megaliths that represent the two brothers, sacred forest. Clans perform their Wan and Ksha Makri. These two annual or other rituals in this forest. brothers once vanished suddenly. If you walk there as dusk approaches, and no one knew where they went, in the midst of the ancient swords but it is narrated that they will come again when the world is about to end.



Scholars, travel writers and bloggers, tourists and eco-conservationists see this tradition of the Khasi sacred grove to be a testament of the Khasi people's closeness to nature and as the way forward towards ecological protection. But in the Khasi religious worldview, nature is manifestation of the completion of the creative desire of Supreme Being. All entities: human, non human, other than human persons are proof of this manifestation. Hence, nature as an entity is not separate from humans. 'Closeness to nature' implies the disconnection between the different aspects of life. But it is not so. Sacred forests are then mere extensions of the creators idea of creation, as 'humans' are.

²This tradition is not the only ecological practice among Khasis. The living root bridges, the human animal transformations etc, all contribute to a comprehensive co-existence.



Mapping the Myriad Hues of Chinese Oral Traditions: A Conversation with Mark Bender

-By Talilula

Mark Bender in Shuangbai, Chuxiong Prefecture, Yunnan, 2007, during Tiger Festival events in a Yi community.

T Hello, thank you so much for taking the time to have this conversation with me and consequently, the readers of the ISFNR newsletter. You have done immense research and translation work on different ethnic communities in southwestern China. So to begin with, could you tell us how that began, as well as your experiences navigating their oral traditions through research and writing?

M. Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me. I became interested in translating folk literature from China while an undergraduate in East Asian studies at The Ohio State University in the late 1970s. I had read many translations of Native American folk songs by ethnographers like Francis Densmore, who worked among the Chippewa (Anishinaabe) people in the state of Minnesota. I also was inspired by an interview with Robert Payne, the translator of *The White Pony*, a collection of classical Chinese poetry. The biggest stimulus was Rovall Tvler, the translator of *Tale of Genii*, who briefly

taught Japanese Noh drama at Ohio State in the late 1970s. Soon after I arrived in Wuhan, China in the summer of 1980, I was introduced to Chinese ethnic minority folk literature by a student of the Zhuang ethnic minority group, from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. I began, with little background, a translation of a traditional narrative called *Seventh Sister and the Serpent: Narrative Poem of the Yi People*—the Yi people are another large ethnic minority group in the southwest. The translation was eventually published by New World Press with help and encouragement from Prof. Zha

Ruqiang, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the dean of Chinese folklore studies, Prof. ZhongJingwen, at Beijing Normal University. Under their help and influence, I transferred to Guangxi University in the summer of 1981, and taught literature and writing courses there until 1987. With the support of the university president, Hou Depeng, my spare time was consumed with amateur research on Chinese oral traditions and ethnic minority folk traditions, including folksongs (Guangxi qingge) from the city of Liuzhou, in Guangxi. I worked with Prof. Sun Jingyao on translations of Suzhou Pingtan storytelling, which later developed into a dissertation project and ultimately my book *Plum and Bamboo: China's Suzhou Chantefable Tradition* (Illinois, 2003). We also co-founded *Cowrie: A Chinese Journal of Comparative Literature*, that included articles on folklore and ethnic minority studies in several of the first issues. I also worked with Su Huana, a member of the Daur ethnic group on a translation called *Daur Folktales*, published by New World Press in 1985. That translation involved a trip to Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang. In 1985 I made my first trip to Guizhou province to further my knowledge of Miao (Hmong) epic traditions, which resulted in a decades long collaboration with Jin Dan (of the Guizhou Nationalities Press) and his children, Wu Yifang and Prof. Wu Yiwen, and two different translations of a cycle of Miao creation epics. The first was an English only version, based mostly on a Chinese version (though I was given access to some parts in Miao romanization), and published in 2003 as *Butterfly Mother: A Miao (Hmong) Epic Poem from Southeast Guizhou* (Hackett, 2006), and *Miao Ancient Epics* (Guizhou Nationalities

Press, 2010), a version in Miao romanization/Chinese/English that was edited by Jin Dan and his children, and included the participation of my former student Levi Gibbs. I also made four trips to Yunnan in the 1980s to further my knowledge of ethnic groups and traditional performances in that diverse province. Mythologist Prof. Li Zixian of Yunnan University kindly arranged several visits to Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which was difficult in the mid-1980s. I was sometimes assisted by Fu Wei, an interpreter, and folklorist Shi Kun. In the early 2000s, after graduate school and gaining employment at The Ohio State University, I furthered my connections among Yi scholars and tradition bearers in Sichuan, which before then were mostly in Yunnan. Since 2004 I have been working closely with Prof. Luo Qingchun (aka Aku Wuwu), of Southwest Minzu University, on oral and written literature of the Nuosu, a large sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman speaking Yi ethnic group. We have conducted short term fieldwork in several parts of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Our major project, translated with the help of Yi elder and tradition-bearer Jjivot Zopqu (and his nephew Jjivot Yyzu), was published in 2019 by University of Washington Press under the title *The Nuosu Book of Origins: A Creation Epic* originally written in Yi, is a key text within the very living tradition of Nuosu ritualism and folk culture. I have also had very fruitful interactions with members of the Institute of Ethnic Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, especially with scholars Prof. Chao Gejin (whom I met through Prof. John Miles Foley), and Prof. Bamo Qubumo, a Yi epic specialist. This is a quick review of my major and a few minor projects, with mentions of some of the people with whom I have worked.

“Many works of folk literature, including folk epics that had been collected in the 1950s under large, government sponsored folklore collecting projects were lost or destroyed. Since the late 1970s, down to today, many of these traditions have been to some degree recovered and given new life. Many are now considered as items of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and subject to new interpretations and cultural usages.”

T You have mentioned about the suppression and resurgence of the epics of the ethnic minority communities in China such as that of the Yi and Miao. How significant have these epics and the folklore been in re-asserting the identities of these communities, and perhaps giving them political agency in current contexts?

M. As is well-known, all “feudal” culture, which include many folk traditions was actively suppressed in the PRC during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Many works of folk literature, including folk epics that had been collected in the 1950s under large, government sponsored folklore collecting projects were lost or destroyed. Since the late 1970s, down to today, many of these traditions have been to some degree recovered and given new life. Many are now considered as items of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and subject to new interpretations and cultural usages. The tri-lingual translation of the Miao epic cycle I mentioned above, is regarded by the Jin Dan family and other Miao in Southeast Guizhou as a sort of monument to the traditional cultural achievements of the local Miao people. Although the epic singing tradition is waning, some motifs and themes from the epics are integrated into



Ritualists conducting a dragon-reverencing ritual, Yangmeishan Forest area, Yao'an County, Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, 2007 (Mark Bender Photo)

other aspects of contemporary culture. For instance, images of Butterfly Mother and the Jiwei bird that sat on her eggs (which hatched out elephants, dragons, the Thunder God, and the ancestors of modern humans) can be seen in embroidery and silver on costumes worn by young women in annual festivals, many of which are now large ethnic-tourism events, and have even been integrated into modern fashion by Chinese and European designers. Aku Wuwu, my collaborator on the translation of *The Nuosu Book of Origins*, is among numerous Yi poets who reference that and other Yi epics in their works. Besides folk ritual contexts that feature recitations of passages, themes restaurants in

Xichang in Liangshan Prefecture. Ethnic tourism and ICH, supported by interest in local governments with rural economic development agendas, have potential for furthering exposure of such traditions. Translations of these epics into Chinese, which is a way or representation on the national stage, has been going on since the 1950s. Some teams of Chinese translators (sometimes multi-ethnic, and sometimes in concert with English native speakers) today are producing English translations as part of a greater push to promote awareness of Chinese worldwide. Most of these works, however, still have a limited distribution outside China.

T I found it interesting that the motif of the flood-myth is also present in the Nuosu creation epic. Are there similar tropes and motifs in the Nuosu oral traditions that one finds in creation myths and across cultures?

M. Versions of the flood-myth are found in ancient Han Chinese myths and in the folklore of many of the 55 official ethnic minority (shaoshu minzu) groups in China. Other motifs that are quite common include the initial beginning of the amorphous mass that will differentiate into sky and earth, the separation of sky and earth, the need secure, or prop up the sky thereafter, followed by the implantation of plants and animals in the various ecological realms of earth, water, and sky; a catastrophic burning off of life on earth, which is stopped when a hero shoots down the extra suns (and moons) in the sky, ushering in another era of life and growth; this era may be cut short by a great flood; a brother-sister survive the flood in what mythologist Li Zixian has called a “flood-avoiding vehicle” (such as a calabash); finding no other partners, they

break with taboo and mate, resulting in abnormal offspring; loud noises are used to stimulate the offspring to speak (which often incurs the differentiation of local languages and ethnic groups). Another common theme is that of migrating for a better place to live, which in the *Nuosu Book of Origins* occurs after the offspring learns to speak, multiply, and divide, each language group finding a different niche in the local environment. These are among the common themes with which I am familiar. A good source on such themes is An Deming, Yang Lihui, and Jessica Turner’s *Handbook of Chinese Mythology*, which has been published in several versions. Some of these themes, such as the separation of sky and earth are found among many cultures worldwide.

T You recently edited *The Borderlands of Asia: Culture, Place, Poetry*, which also features writings from the northeast of India. As someone from that part of the region, I am really interested to know what your impressions have been of the region and its inter-linkages with your preceding areas of research.

M. I became involved with Northeast India after meeting Prof. Lima Imchen from North East Hill University in Shillong whom I met at an international anthropology conference in Kunming in 2009. He was astonished by the cultural and environmental continuities he sensed between parts of southwest China and North East India. Originally from Nagaland, he encouraged me to

visit Nagaland and “smell the Naga air.” I had a chance to do so in 2011, when I attended the ISFNR research in Shillong, organized by Prof. Desmond Kharmawphlang. Not only did I have a chance to visit with Prof. Lima Imchen in his home, but also had a chance to do some traveling in Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. A high point was a short stay in a Naga home near Kohima. During my initial trip to the NE, I discovered the vast wealth of poetry being written by indigenous poets in the themes of cultural and ecological change, which paralleled works written by many ethnic minority poets I was working with in southwest China, including Aku Wuwu and the Wa poet Burao Yilu. With the help of Prof. Kharmawphlang, Prof. Ch Sheelaramani and others, I was able to include the works of 12 poets of the North East in the *Borderlands* anthology. Like the poets from China, Mongolia, and Myanmar featured in the volume, the poets from the North East utilized imagery of traditional folk culture, human altered landscapes, natural forests and waterways, and urban landscapes in similar ways.



Mark Bender (with son Marston) and Jiwot Zopqu (tradition-bearer of the *Book of Origins*) and his family at Jiwot's home place in Xide Gaoity, Sichuan, China, 2009.

Many of the featured poets have dealt with often traumatic social and environmental changes within their lifetimes. I feel honored to have collaborated first-hand with many of the contributors and I am thankful to all contributors. I hope the volume can draw regional and global attention to these exciting poetic communities. I made a second trip to the North East in 2011 to attend the Belief Narratives International Symposium at Manipur University in Imphal, where I met with Prof. Mani Meitei and many old and new friends such as Prof. Mayanglambam Sadananda Singh, who visited my university in 2014 when he was a visiting fellow in oral tradition program

at the University of Missouri. The Manipur conference featured traditional epic singers and a riveting community myth-ritual enactment. I saw very real points of comparison between the Manipuri epic singers and performed narrative traditions I had studied in the Yangzi Delta area of China, including the use of stringed instruments, gestures, the mix of song and speech, the use of an array of speech registers to portray characters, and techniques to unfold the story. I was also able to visit some rural areas in Manipur and Nagaland which contributed to my understanding of the local folklore and contemporary poetry.

T Research especially in the discipline of folkloristics requires immersive fieldwork and collaborations with the community and their way of life. With decades of experience on the field, how do you think your work has contributed to the community/communities that you have been researching on? Also, in the light of the current Covid-19 situation, do you have any thoughts on how researchers will/should navigate the issues that have cropped up because of the pandemic?

M. In my instances of fieldwork in China I have almost always worked with collaborators who had a stake in the various communities we visited. I developed a long term relationship with Jin Dan's family, which I think helped in some way to bring outside recognition to certain aspects of Miao culture in Southeast Guizhou and which is also a source of pride locally for such recognition. I was also able to host Wu Yifang in 2005 as a visiting scholar at Ohio State, which was a platform for cultural exchange. I have also helped host over a dozen visiting scholars at Ohio state from various Chinese ethnic groups, many up to a year. Probably the largest scale cultural exchange program has been the China Global May education abroad program that was to have run its tenth consecutive year in 2020 – but was canceled due to COVID-19. The program involves undergraduate students from Ohio state who attend classes and go on cultural trips with students from Southwest Minzu University in Chengdu, Sichuan province. The Chinese-side of the program, which is on the theme of “ethnicity and the environment” is overseen by Prof. Luo Qingchun (aka Aku Wuwu), a professor who organizes an equal number of students of local students as cultural partners to the Ohio Students. Most of the Chinese students are of the Yi ethnic group (and a few Tibetans) from mountain areas in southern Sichuan or northeast Yunnan. Students first attend lectures together presented by scholars of Yi, Miao, Tibetan, Naxi, and Han backgrounds on a range of subjects, including folk beliefs

about environmental conservation, folk medicine, folk ritual, etc. The program also includes visits to various cultural sites in Sichuan (and sometimes Yunnan). The high point is a week-long “service-learning” component at an ethnic minority middle-school in the mountain areas (a different one each year) during which the Chinese and American students team take small cultural exchange classes together, and also participate in cultural exchange workshops with the middle-school students. In the evenings, Prof. Luo and I often work on our translation projects. I feel that the program benefits the local communities in many ways, and Prof. Luo is an expert at leveraging the program to bring positive attention to Yi communities and culture and promoting advanced educational opportunities for students from rural areas.

As for research in the post-COVID-19 landscape, I think it will be even more crucial to develop partnerships with local researchers and local governments in developing research programs. The continued cultivation of long-standing relationships will be even more crucial, especially in situations where communication may have been cut off for some time. Technology will also have an increasing role to play in making and maintaining relationships, which may extend across generations, and which may be stressed by lack of access due to cut-backs in transportation and live access.

Mark Bender is a professor at Ohio State since 1997. He specializes in traditional performance and performance-connected literature of China, including local Han and ethnic minority cultures, and contemporary ethnic minority poetry in China and bordering countries. His books include *Plum and Bamboo: China's Suzhou Chantefable Tradition* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), and *Butterfly Mother: Miao (Hmong) Creation Epics from Guizhou Province, China* (Hackett Publishing, 2006). Recent works are *The Borderlands of Asia: Culture, Place, Poetry*, which features poems by 49 poets in North East India, Myanmar, China, and Mongolia (Cambria Press, 2017), and *The Nuosu Book of Origins: A Creation Epic from Southwest China* (University of Washington Press, 2019), with Aku Wuwu and Jjivot Zopqu.


Launched in May 2020, Washidi is a social media account that posts textual and audio-visual content on all things folklore-related, on its Instagram and Facebook handles. As the tagline- 'Digital Capsules of Folklore' suggests, the concept behind Washidi is to share little narratives, visuals, and sounds sourced/curated from different folkloric contexts across the world. The page has its primary origins from the geographical/cultural context of Northeast India, but the content is not limited to/from this region.


Washidi is the verb form of the Ao Mongsen word *Washi* which stands for the ululating tribal cries/sounds yelled in unison by men/women, and performed during dances, funerals and other ritual ceremonies of the Ao Naga community. It means, 'let us vocalize the *Washi* yell together,' a visceral expression of myriad range of human emotions from joy to pain, and multiple shades in between.

As our world increasingly moves towards digital interfaces, Washidi is a platform to connect, and create a community of people who participate in, share and are interested, in all things *folklore*.

We share our stories through captions, pictures and videos, and we also post about events related to folk narrative research and indigeneity.

Find us on

 @washidi

 @washidi

OBITUARIES

MARLENE MIFSUD CHIRCOP (1950-2020)



From the town of Mosta in Malta, Marlene was a researcher of Maltese folklore, a teacher, storyteller, and translator. She studied at the University of Malta under the guidance of the eminent folklorist Ġużè Cassar Pullicino and later her late husband anthropological folklorist Ġorġ Mifsud Chircop. As narrator and interpreter she co-organised and took part in several cultural activities locally and abroad as narrator and interpreter. She also presented cultural documentaries for television and radio in Malta. In 2014, together with others, she organized cultural activities in Malta called ‘Grimani min qatlu?’ (‘Who killed Grimani?’ – a Dominican priest murdered in Malta in 1738) for Science in the City. After, together with Mark Montebello, she co-authored a book on the subject in 2016. She presented papers on folklore and Maltese folk singing at conferences in Malta and abroad. In 2015 she completed a second Masters dissertation, The Maltese ballad “l-ghana tal-fatt”, its cultural transition and social element. From 2016 till 2020 she gave a number of public lectures on Oral Traditions hosted by the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta.

HAYA BAR-ITZHAK (1946-2020)

Simon J. Bronner

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Eminent folklorist Haya Bar-Itzhak died at her home on October 25, 2020 in Haifa, Israel. She had an outstanding scholarly career devoted primarily to Jewish and Israeli folklore, folk narrative, and women's folklore. Organizationally, she was involved internationally with the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, Israel Folklore Society, and the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Section of the American Folklore Society. As head of the Israel Folklore Archives, she was a leader in folklore archives work and ways to apply digital technology to their accessibility. Most of her career was at Haifa University and she had numerous visiting professorships that brought her to Europe and the United States.



Bar-Itzhak was born in Berlin, Germany, on August 17, 1946 to Polish Holocaust survivors. After emigration to Israel, she received her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Haifa and finished her Ph.D. in 1987 at Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a dissertation on "The 'Saints' Legend' as a Genre in Jewish Folk Literature" under the supervision of folklore professor Dov Noy. She returned to the University of Haifa as a professor and in 1992, became chair of the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature and in 1994, head of folklore studies and the Israel Folktale Archives. She also held visiting professorships at Indiana University, University of Michigan, Penn State University, University of Pennsylvania, and the University of California-Berkeley. In addition, she was a fellow of the Simon Dubnow Institute in Leipzig. She received numerous grants and awards for her work from organizations such as the Koret Foundation, Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, S.O. Sidore Foundation, and the Council for Higher Education. Her research and publications in English and Hebrew earned her renown globally for work in Jewish folk narrative, history of ethnography in Israel and Europe, ethnopoetics, and women's folklore.

Her authored books in English include *Jewish Poland--Legends of Origin* (Wayne State University Press, 2001), *Israeli Folk Narratives: Settlement, Immigration, Ethnicity* (Wayne State University, 2005), and with Aliza Shenhar, *Jewish Moroccan Folk Narratives from Israel* (Wayne State University Press, 1993). Her edited books include *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, 2 vols. (M.E. Sharpe, 2013), *Pioneers of Jewish Ethnography and Folkloristics in Eastern Europe* (Scientific Research Center of the Academy of Science and Arts, 2010), and with Idit Pintel-Ginsberg, *The Power of A Tale: Stories from the Israel Folktale Archives* (Wayne State University Press, 2019). In Hebrew, she edited *Folklore and Ideology: Studies Dedicated to Prof. Aliza Shenhar* (University of Haifa, 2014), *Legends of Poland: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles* (Sifriyat Poalim, 1996), and with Aliza Shenhar, *Folktales from Beth-She'an* (University of Haifa, 1981). She also was the editor of the journals *Chuliyot: Journal of Yiddish Culture and Dappim: Journal of Literary Research*. She served on the editorial boards of the Jewish Cultural Studies book series (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), *Cultural Analysis*, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore*, *Raphael Patai Series in Folklore and Anthropology*, and the *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*. She was also chair of the Board of Directors of the Haifa Museums, member of the Publication Committee of the National Authority of Yiddish, and a member of the Board of Governors of the Max Stern Yezreel Valley College in Israel. Among her honors is selection as an International Fellow of the American Folklore Society, Lerner Foundation for Yiddish Culture Award, and National Jewish Book Award (for *Jewish Poland--Legends of Origin*).

She helped shape the field of folk narrative research globally with her organization of more than a dozen international conferences and supervision of more than 30 theses and dissertations in Israel and many more reviews of dissertations for universities in the United States and Poland. Her influence is evident in numerous books dedicated to her, including my own *Jewish Cultural Studies* (Wayne State University Press, 2021). In 2020, her students, colleagues, and admirers presented her with a bilingual festschrift in her honor *Masoret Haya [Living Tradition]*, edited by Tsafi Sebba-Elran, Haya Milo, and Idit Pintel-Ginsberg (Pardes Publishing, 2020). At a session dedicated in her honor of the 2020 American Folklore Society annual meeting, she was remembered as a brilliant, energetic scholar, a great organizer who spread her passion for folk narrative work around the world, an incredibly generous, kind soul who formed a community wherever she went.

**IN
MEMORIAM
SINCE 2016**

Haya Bar-Itzhak	1946–2020
Marlene Mifsud-Chircop	1950–2020
Barbro Klein	1938–2018
Isidor Levin	1919–2018
Arvo Krikmann	1939–2017

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The executive committee of the ISFNR is elected by the General Assembly and consists of the President, Vice Presidents representing three continents, Treasurer and three ordinary members. Along with the President the Vice Presidents form the Membership Committee of the Society, under a chair to be elected from their own number.

Current members of the Executive Committee:

Sadhana Naithani

President
Centre of German Studies
School of Language, Literature and
Cultural Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi 110067, India
+91-11-26704204, 26704856
✉ sadhanan@mail.jnu.ac.in

Sinseignon Germain Sagbo

Vice President, representing Africa
University of Abomey-Calavi
Faculty of Humanities
Department of German Studies
Postal Address: 09 BP 149 Cotonou
Benin Republic/West Africa
✉ germainsinseignon@yahoo.fr

Kimberly J. Lau

Vice-President representing North
America, Chairperson of the Mem-
bership Committee, Humanities
Division O'ce-239, Humanities 1
Literature Department
University of California, Santa Cruz
831-459-5145
✉ lau@ucsc.edu

Mehri Bagheri

Vice President, representing Asia
Tabriz University, Faculty of Letters
Department of Culture Tabriz
Iran
✉ mehribagheri@yahoo.com

Reneta Jambresic-Kirin

Vice President, representing Europe
Institute of Ethnology and
Folklore Research Subiceva 42
HR-10000 Zagreb Croatia
✉ renata@ief.hr

Maria Inés Palleiro

Vice President, representing Latin
America
Department of Hispanic Philology
Bueno Aires University
National council for scientific Re-
search
(CONICET) Argentia Aguilar,
2118(1426)
✉ marinespalleiro@gmail.com

Ülo Valk

Vice President
Department of Estonian and
Comparative Folklore, University of
Tartu
Ülikooli 16-208, 51003
Tartu, Estonia
✉ ulo.valk@ut.ee

Mirjam Mencej

Member
Department of Ethnology and
Cultural Anthropology Faculty of
Arts, University of Ljubljana
Zavetiska 5 1000, Ljubljana
Slovenia
✉ mirjam.mencej@guest.arnes.si

Frog

Member
Folklore Studies
PL 58 (Unioninkatu 38 D230) 00014
University of Helsinki
Finland
✉ misterfrogfrog@yahoo.de

Marilena Papachristophorou

Member
University of Ioannina
School of Philosophy
Department of History and Archaeol-
ogy
Folklore Section 451 10
Ioannina, Greece
✉ mpapach@cc.uoi.gr

Ave Goršič

Treasurer
Estonian Folklore Archives
Estonian Literary Museum
Vanemuise 42
51003, Tartu, Estonia
✉ avegorsic@folklore.ee

Nidhi Mathur

Secretary, Research Scholar
Centre of German Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi 110067 India
✉ nisfnr@gmail.com