



BNN Newsletter, July 2019.

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Sincerely,
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On behalf of the BNN Committee:

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17th Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) “Religion – Continuations and Disruptions” Tartu, June 25–29, 2019



<https://easr2019.org/>

Kristel Kivari, Ülo Valk

On June 25-29 University of Tartu hosted annual conference of European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR). Around 700 participants, five days, six parallel sessions, five keynote lectures by leading scholars of religion, folklore studies, anthropology and archaeology created an impressive academical forum that addressed directly or indirectly the broad theme of continuations or disruptions in religious ideas, practices and traditions. From this overview you can get some impressions from the keynote lectures and from the panel “Insecurities and Uncertainties at the Margins of Institutionalised Religions: Ghosts, Monsters, Witchcraft and Other Dangerous Matters”.

Perhaps it was the academical background of the organising committee from Estonian Association for the Study of Religion who’s choice represented the scholars of culture who’s work focuses on the grassroot or vernacular level of makers of this cultural decisions. And perhaps it is the contemporary polarised situation in the political and mental climate in the world, where such ethnographic work gets the meaning and importance which exceeds the borders of academia.

The conference was opened by the speech by EASR president prof. **Einar Thomassen**, who brought out the viewpoint of cultural studies, which instead of the processes, highlights the people making choices and therefore creating and accommodating the continuations and disruptions of several traditions.

Professor **Michael Strausberg** (University of Bergen, Norway) addressed the theme of continuations and disruptions by the topical fear of depletion and unvariation of species, languages, cultural traditions as well as religious expressions. Dr. **Zvi Bekerman** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel) held a lecture with the title “Identity and Cultural Negotiations in Conflict Ridden Societies: Anthropological Insights” and started with the critical examination of the theoretical concepts such as scientific objectivity, self, identity contrasting them to the ever changing, situated and communicative practices which guide the identities to be seen as products and performances. Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools were once founded by the aspiration to promote social equality and justice to diminish the tensions between two communities. By now serving up to 2500 children in 8 different schools have been the research sites for the presenter. He concluded that even if children feel free to play and cross their identity borders, the schools face difficulties in finding the ways how to balance the religious-historical connections of the calendar, parent’s expectations, personal and cultural levels of identities. As an anthropologist of education he concluded with the call to address the children’s subculture and ways to overcome the identity borders given by their communities and start from these findings how to reflect this on the respected curricula.

Prof. **David Thurffjell’s** (Södertörn University, Sweden) lecture “On Secularity, Muslim Immigrants and the Post-Lutheran Mindset” discussed his own society, Sweden, which is described as most secular and most multi-religious country in Europe, where the demographic expectations see the “Muslim” proportion of the population growing up to 20% by 2050. Based on the ethnographic and sociological survey he challenged the popular categories such as “secular” and “Muslim”. The survey provided nuanced picture of the minority where none of the political assumptions apply as such. The research project suggests two definitions, where the narrower refers to those who consider themselves as Muslims and hold the Muslim belief, including converts and Swedes by nationality. The wider definition would be a Muslim culture in Sweden which refers to the category of discourse and practice where people with different identities, beliefs and family heritage come and go and which is similar to the subculture of soccer, gardening or academic life.

In her lecture “Vernacular Mythic Imagination – Representing Emergent and Other Worlds in Finnic Oral Poetry” prof. **Lotte Tarkka** (University of Helsinki, Finland) stressed the importance of undertheorised concept of imagination which by its communicative nature is able to change the social reality as well as materialise as objects. Metaphoric processes that radically create new meanings should not only be seen in their traditional mythic and otherworldly context, but also in various contexts such as everyday lifeworld, -histories, war, widowhood. Lotte Tarkka illustrated this idea by analysing the Kalevala-metric songs from Viena Karelia.

Prof. **Sonja Luehrmann** (Simon Fraser University, Canada) with her lecture “Institutional Rupture and Personal Continuity: Defining the "Post" in Post-Soviet Religion” took the audience to Russia, to the places which she called “refuge spaces”, marginal places where she has met people who introduced her what it means to practice religion after 70 years of secular-atheist state politics. Her analysis, grounded in fieldwork, summarised the religious field in 21. century Russia as one choice among other cultural choices, but also the field where inter-generational relationships are played out. From the viewpoint on continuations and disruptions, Sonja Luehrmann also touched upon the religious concerns of orthodox family values activists and the ways the religious aspirations are transmitted through space.

Prof. **Timothy Insoll** (University of Exeter, United Kingdom) approached the theme as a field archaeologist of religion. Shrines are a focus of religious beliefs and ritual practices in northern Ghana. Archaeology indicates that some can have continuous trajectories of use lasting over several centuries but this may also be punctured by disruption, the vicissitudes of warfare, politics, famine, disease,

and frequently difficult to assess where historical sources are limited or non-existent, but also disruption caused by materiality, through encounters with new objects, materials, and substances that have to be incorporated into existing religious beliefs and ritual practices - via reactive materiality.

Keynotes of the conference can be seen via UTTV: <https://www.uttv.ee/esileht?keel=eng>

The panel “Insecurities and Uncertainties at the Margins of Institutionalised Religions: Ghosts, Monsters, Witchcraft and Other Dangerous Matters” was convened by Lidia Julianna Guzy (University College Cork) and Ülo Valk (University of Tartu). Its focus was on beliefs, narratives and ritual practices that lack a comprehensive doctrinal foundation and cannot be controlled by religious authorities – the realm that has often been overlooked by scholars as “folk religion”, “little tradition” or a set of residual beliefs and irrational superstitions. Several papers in the panel discussed tensions between the institutionally prescribed norms and “lived” aspects of religion that reveal the incongruities and gaps in religious traditions. The belief related storyrealm with its dangerous and incomprehensible powers – of ghosts, spirits, demonic deities, witches and other perilous agents – appeared both as a source of insecurity and as an interpretive framework for conceptualising uncertainties, life crises and traumas. The panel also examined contacts and conflicts between institutional and indigenous religions, and different ontologies as templates of religious worldviews.

The panel lasted for five days (June 25–29, 2019), addressing religious traditions in Asia, Latin and North America, Europe and other regions. Lidia J Guzy discussed narratives and ritual practices around El Tio – the God of the Underworld of indigenous Bolivian miners. Federica Rainelli analysed Mexican beliefs about nahual – the sorcerers who can transform themselves into animals. Jonathon O’Donnell’s focus was on the demonologies of conservative neo-charismatics in USA. Meelis Friedenthal introduced academic discourses of ghosts and the related philosophical disputes in early modern Europe. Marja-Liisa Keinänen studied witch trial materials from 17th and 18th century Sweden with focus on the origin of healers’ powers and attempts of the Lutheran Church to establish religious norms of faith and conduct. Siria Emilia Kohonen analysed illness agents and incantation rituals in 20th century rural Karelia. Helena Karolina Kouvola discussed the beliefs of the Swedish speaking minority in Western Finland regarding supernatural threats to the community.

The panel included 25 presentations – far too many to discuss in this short summary. So I mention here only a few other papers that show the dimensions of the topics discussed and the wide cultural and historical scope of the panel. Hagai Dogan shed light on the rich traditions of Jewish demonology in rabbinic and kabalistic literature. Frantisek Novotny analysed learned and popular imagination in narratives about demonic encounters in *Dialogus Miraculorum*, a 13th century collection of exempla by Cesarius Heisterbach. Several papers addressed South Asian traditions. Gregory D. Alles talked about changing beliefs and practices relating to the dead among the indigenous Rathva people in Gujarat. Uwe Skoda analysed post-mortem photography as a cross-cultural phenomenon that takes different visual forms of expression in relationship to the understanding of death in Hinduism. Stefano Beggiora reflected upon the shamanistic beliefs among the Kuttia Kondh indigenous tribe in Odisha and their relationship with the endangered natural environment. Svetlana Ryzhakova examined the worship of Manasha as a marginal goddess and the epic tradition around her in North Bengal and Assam.

Other papers addressed witchcraft and healing in Russia today (Olga Khristoforova), supernatural experience stories among Estonian schoolchildren (Reet Hiimäe), masking in contemporary European winter festivals (Alessandro Tessa), beliefs about restless dead and death rituals among a

marginal Tibetan community in China (Valentina Punzi), Nepalese ghost stories past and present (Davide Torri), demonic poison deities in Sikkim and the related experience narratives (Kikee D. Bhutia), and other topics. The panel was to a great extent based on fieldwork and shed light on belief related phenomena and storytelling that has often been neglected as trivial or primitive from the point of view of institutionalized religions. Several papers introduced folkloristics of religion as a distinctive approach with an orientation towards fieldwork and focus on vernacular expressivity in its wide discursive variety.

You can see the photos of the conference from <https://www.facebook.com/usundilooselts/>

Narrative Culture in Local Places, International scientific conference in Slovenska Bistrica (Slovenia), June 10 – 11, 2019

Monika Kropelj Telban, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology and Slovenska Bistrica Development and Information Centre have organised an international scientific conference entitled Narrative Culture in Local Places, which was organised in the framework of the Interreg project V-A Slovenia – Croatia Living Magic.

The emphasis of the conference was on theoretical reflections about modern forms of verbal folklore in everyday life and social environment, as well as on transmission of folk narrative culture into contemporary contexts. The researchers have shed light on these approaches from different viewpoints, and presented theoretical and practical concepts of including intangible cultural heritage into a specific local environment.



Narratives of Identity. Spirituality in the Modern World. A Research Project.



NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY

SPIRITUALITY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Dr Clive Baldwin

Dr Clive Baldwin and Lauren Ripley of St Thomas University, Fredericton, NB, Canada are engaged on a project exploring the spiritual identity and spiritual journeys of individuals in the modern world. It focuses on how we *experience* the spiritual. Whatever pathway we take and wherever we are on that journey, we create an identity that integrates a spiritual component.

Clive and Lauren have recently been exploring other-than-human spiritual identities, and are now working on the broad spectrum of 'Earth religions' – Pagans, Witches, Wicca, Heathens, Druids, Asatru, and so on. Details of the project can be found at www.narrativesofidentity.org Clive can be contacted on baldwin@stu.ca or +1 506 452 9596

(Ir) relevance of Classical Folkloristics in the 21st Century. 9th International Conference of Young Folklorists, September 18-20, 2019, Vilnius, Lithuania

**(Ir)relevance of
Classical Folkloristics
in the 21st Century**



9th International Conference of Young Folklorists
September 18-20, 2019, Vilnius, Lithuania

Lina Būgienė, Asta Skujytė-Razmienė

In September 18-20, 2019, the 9th International Conference of Young Folklorists is going to take place in the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius (Lithuania). This conference is an international academic event, which annually brings together advanced students and young researchers from different countries to come to Estonia, Lithuania or Latvia and gives them an opportunity to present their research to an international audience. The conference aims at fostering academic communication, collaboration and research in the field of folklore.

The 9th conference “(Ir)relevance of Classical Folkloristics in 21st Century” aims to investigate the current stage of folkloristics. Although researchers have raised this issue for several decades already, it is still relevant. Different local tendencies or research traditions enrich and widen the scope of the discipline. We do not question the necessity of folkloristics and its research methods in the 21st century; however, constant emphasizing of interdisciplinarity and marginalities leaves one pondering about the situation at the core of the discipline. What is the focus of folkloristics today? Are classifications and genres still relevant, or are we already dealing with completely new cultural phenomena that do not necessarily comply with the classical approach? How can balance between classical and innovative research methods help us understand the human ways? What problems or destinations can we gain from interdisciplinary research practices? Is it possible already to define old and new schools in folklore research? These and other questions are going to be addressed during this conference.

http://www.ilti.lt/en/ir_relevance_of_classical_folkloristics_in_the_21st_century/?fbclid=IwAR2dKmOokeXD-7X0gvTKWgxmQ1BqfeMiP-CcfJQkU-Amy0Umb2t4r7G96JE

Posthuman folklore. A New Book by Tok Thompson

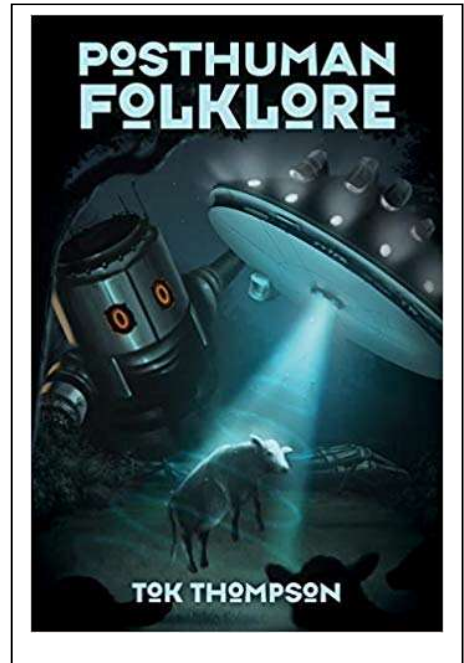
Can a monkey own a selfie? Can a chimp use habeas corpus to sue for freedom? Can androids be citizens? Increasingly, such difficult questions have moved from the realm of science fiction into the realm of everyday life, and scholars and laypeople alike are struggling to find ways to grasp new notions of personhood.

Posthuman Folklore is the first work of its kind: both an overview of posthumanism as it applies to folklore studies and an investigation of “vernacular posthumanisms”—the ways in which people are increasingly performing the posthuman. Posthumanism calls for a close investigation of what is meant by the term “human” and a rethinking of this, our most basic ontological category. What, exactly, is human? What, exactly, am I?

There are two main threads of posthumanism: the first dealing with the increasingly slippery slope between “human” and “animal,” and the second dealing with artificial intelligences and the growing cyborg quality of human culture. This work deals with both these threads, seeking to understand the cultural roles of this shifting notion of “human” by centering its investigation into the performances of everyday life.

From funerals for AIBOs, to furies, to ghost stories told by Alexa, people are increasingly engaging with the posthuman in myriad everyday practices, setting the stage for a wholesale rethinking of our humanity. In *Posthuman Folklore*, author Tok Thompson traces both the philosophies behind these shifts, and the ways in which people increasingly are enacting such ideas to better understand the posthuman experience of contemporary life.

The book will be published by October, 15
<https://www.amazon.com/Posthuman-Folklore-Tok-Thompson/dp/149682508X>



Special issue of Journal of Ethnology and Folklore: Experiences, Theories and Politics of Paranormal. A Call for Contributions.

Paranormal is an ambiguous and open category for contemporary discussion on the supernatural. Despite parallel and overlapping concepts, the category of paranormal contrasts to the normal, natural and known level of reality. Various encounters with poltergeists, UFOs, ghosts and anomalous natural phenomena are woven into the web of arguments which, in active meaning-making processes, aim to form the critical and political agenda in the secular-scientific intellectual field.

Rooted in the research into psychic phenomena, ufology, dowsing and spiritualism, the paranormal bears the ideals of a scientific pursuit within cultural and religious field.

In these discussions the human experience has been brought to the centre, because other folkloric notions about the supernatural encounters in the individual’s life could give an additional source of authority, validation or further enquiry. In discussion of the paranormal individual experience works as the problem, as the source and as the active means of participation at three levels: 1) the supernatural experience in the naturalistic worldview; 2) the supernatural experience as the source of existential meaning-making; 3) the supernatural experience as means of participation and communication. Examining and theorising the places



of supernatural encounters unites the participants into a web of communication between different stories, places, practices and authorities.

We welcome articles discussing various aspects of paranormal in experiences, authors, media or other settings of contemporary culture.

Deadline of submission: November, 1., 2019.

For more information, please write kristel.kivari@ut.ee

Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics (JEF) is a multidisciplinary scholarly forum covering the research areas of ethnology, folklore studies, museology, cultural and social anthropology. JEF is an Open Access journal that accepts contributions from scholars all over the world. All research articles in JEF are peer-reviewed.

JEF is indexed in 30 databases, among the others Elsevier – Scopus, Anthropological Index Online, ERIH PLUS, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography, Open Folklore Project.

JEF is a joint publication of the University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literary Museum. JEF is published in partnership with Sciendo (De Gruyter Open), the world's second largest publisher of Open Access academic content, and a part of the De Gruyter group, which has 260 years of publishing history.

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You can download the call from HERE: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CPtb7aW_-6hK1UPmSI34wxtF490kJGDJ

List of Argentinean Works in Belief Narratives from the Years 2018-2019

Maria Ines Palleiro

Books containing proceedings of Conferences

1) **Dupey, Ana María (2018) *Cosechando todas las voces: folklore, identidades y territorios (Harvesting all the voices: folklore, identities and territories)* Choele-Choel, Río Negro: Ana María Dupey editora.**

Key words: Folklore-Identity- Culture.

This book, containing the “Proceedings of the Conference: “Folklore and Identity of Río Negro”, includes a theoretical introduction dealing with Folklore and local identities by Ana María Dupey, a contribution dealing with Folklore and interculturality by Fernando Fischman, another contribution dealing with beliefs in the supernatural located in *Bajo del Gualicho* by M. A. Gualmes, several contributions dealing with folk music, and a contribution dealing with embodiment and belief

narratives by Maria Palleiro, and other contributions dealing with local folk music, folk dances, and Folklore and education.

2) **Giusto, Victor ed. (2018) *Folklore latinoamericano XVIII (Latin American Folklore XVIII)*. Buenos Aires: Área Transdepartamental de Folklore de la Universidad Nacional de las Artes.**

Key words: Folklore- Folk dancing-Textile art.

This book containing the proceedings of the XVIII Latin American Conference in Folklore includes one contribution dealing with belief narrative, dealing with popular saints, by Teresa Norzagaray, Evita Morales and Patricia Blum.

Individual or collective books dealing with Folklore and Belief Narratives

1) **Palleiro, María Inés (2018) *La dama fantasma. Los laberintos de la memoria en el relato folklórico. (The lady ghost. Labyrinths of memory in folk narrative)*. Buenos Aires: La Bicileta ediciones..**

Key words: Lady ghost-Belief narrative- Vanishing Hitchhiker- Argentina .

This book contains both oral, written and virtual versions of the folk narrative matrix. “The lady ghost”, that shares some common thematic features with Thompson’s motif E 332.3.3.1 “The Vanishing Hitchhiker”. It proposes a narrative analysis of the different itineraries of this “matrix, characterized as a set of thematic, structural and stylistic features identified by intertextual comparison of different versions, collected both in rural and urban Argentinean and European contexts. The analytical approach is oriented to underline the flexible boundaries between different folklore genres -such as folktale, legend and memorate- considered as belief narratives. It compares as well the flexible structure of the folktale with the flexible structure of virtual hypertexts, whose flexible links are similar to the disseminative itineraries of memory.

2) **Romero, Juan Pablo (2018) *El poder de su santo*. Buenos Aires: Spegazzini editor.**

Key words: *San La Muerte*- Popular devotions –Belief narratives-Argentina

This book by the native author Juan Pablo Romero contains a comparative analysis of the ways of worshipping a local saint, called *San La Muerte (Saint The Death, literally)* in two Argentinian communities: the local community of *Empedrado, Corrientes*, and the local community of *Villa Fiorito* in Buenos Aires province. The analytical approach refers as well to the stigmatization of the devotees and addresses the dynamics between popular devotion and institutional religion. It contains an introduction by Maria Ines Palleiro dealing with the relevance of the study of local belief narratives as expressions of vernacular identities.

3) **Palleiro, María (2019) *Memorias de “la décima” división de primer año, Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires (1971-1976). Una microhistoria compartida. (Memories of the “tenth class” of the First Year of High School, Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires (1971-1976). A shared microhistory)*. El Palomar: Casa de Papel.**

Key words: Collective Memories- Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires-*Desaparecidos*- Argentina

This book collects narratives dealing with the memories of the times of my high school spent in the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires*, in a polyphonic interweaving with the voices and rememberings

of my schoolmates, reconstructed forty years later. Such memories combine oral and written testimonies with the aim of reconstructing our collective identity through the memories of our school time, spent during the last Argentinean military dictatorship. Such memories are especially relevant, since many of our schoolmates have disappeared as a result of political persecutions, and have been the so-called “*desaparecidos*”..With a polyphonic framework, this collection of testimonies tends to reconstruct our “microhistory” grounded in the Argentinean history of the last military government, between 1971 and 1976. Such evocation is oriented to give a healing sense to tragic experiences and to build a tradition, which resemantizes the past from the present, with a warning message for the future generations, dealing with the danger of not respecting political and cultural diversity.

4) Palleiro, María Inés (2019) *Cuerpos que danzan. Hacia una teoría del discurso dancístico (Dancing bodies. Towards a theory of dancing discourse)* El Palomar: Casa de Papel ediciones.

Key words: Embodiment-Dancing discourse- Narrativity-Social Beliefs

This book proposes an approach to dancing from a communicative perspective, focused in the study of the embodiment process of social signs and social beliefs.. From this standpoint, dance is considered as a multisemiotic message, whose signs are displayed by the movements of dancers in a contextual space. Such message is the result of an embodiment process dealing with rhetoric of corporality. The corporal signs displayed by the dancer show a sequential organization in choreographic units, which reveals the narrative dimension of dancing..One of the chapters deals specifically with oral versions and the choreographic transposition of the folk narrative matrix “Godfather Death” (ATU.332)

Articles and chapters of collective books

1)Palleiro, María Inés (2018) “Retóricas de la corporalidad en un archivo de relatos orales argentinos” (“Rhetoric of corporality in an Argentinean folk narrative archive”), *Revista del Museo de Antropología de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, 11, No. 1 (2018): 2-24.

Key words: folk narrative- rhetoric-female corporality- Argentina-ATU 706

The aim of this article is to analyze the rhetoric construction of a group of Argentinean versions of ATU 706, “The girl without hands”, whose distinctive feature is the dynamics between the synechdotic fragmentation and the metaphoric condensation of vernacular beliefs dealing with female corporality..

2) Palleiro, María Inés (2018) “Migrazione irlandese ed italiana in Argentina: testis e contesti dello sradicamento”, *Testi e linguaggi I*, No. 12 (2018): 167-180.

Key words: oral narrative- migration – social beliefs. Ireland- Italy-Argentina

This article proposes an approach to migration processes of Irish and Italian groups in Argentina, through narrative analysis of oral testimonies of three generations of migrants, their sons and grandsons. This analysis includes the consideration of the role of social beliefs of these migrant groups that influenced both the choice of the place in which they settled down and the way in which they interacted between them and with the local society. It includes as well a comparison between Irish and Italian migrant cultures, and a reference to local and global celebrations such as St. Patrick’s day in Argentina.

3) Palleiro, María Inés (2018) “La fragmentación corporal y su retórica. Del discurso folklórico al discurso dancístico” (“Rhetoric of fragmentation in folk narrative and folk dance”), *Homenaje a Elvira Arnoux. Estudios de análisis del discurso, glotopolítica y pedagogía de la lectura y la escritura* ed by R. Bein, Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Key words: corporality-rhetoric-folk narrative-folk dance-Argentina- Sleeping Beauty

In this chapter of a book dealing with discourse analysis, I propose an approach to the rhetoric construction of corporal fragmentation both in oral versions and dancistic expressions of tale type Sleeping Beauty (ATU 410). I focus the attention in metaphoric and metonymic processes dealing with rhetoric of corporality in verbal and in corporal discourse, dealing with kinesic and proxemic strategies.

State of Art in Research into Belief Narratives in North East Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya

Desmond W. Kharmawphlang

Bratakatha: A Ritualistic Endeavour to Construct Bengali Chaste Women

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Chastity of women had always been a matter of great concern when it comes to the ethos of the patriarchal society. Defining and constructing the specific roles that a woman must play is always presented as a guideline by the andocentric society. During the nineteenth century, England categorised women into ‘the angel of the house’ and ‘the devil in the flesh’. These images present women in extremities. There is no in-between position for her, either she is the Devil Queen or she is the Virgin Beauty Snow White. Interestingly, the structure of the female self is analysed by the famous quote of Simone de Beauvoir which says that ‘one is not born a woman, but becomes one’. The Indian society which is mostly dominated by the patriarchy castigates women who are impure. From a very tender age, young girls are educated to modify their behaviour as chaste wives and virgin daughters. Special legends and incidents from epics are narrated which specially emphasises on chastity.

Bratakatha is mostly Hindu tales which are recited by the women folk to make them more conscious about their roles as wives and daughters as a form of chastisement. Apart from the Goddess Laxmi Bratakatha, the Savitri Satyaban Bratakatha is also a very popular ritual which is practised by Hindu Bengali women across different parts of India. Meghalaya is a north-eastern state of India which has a considerable number of Bengali population. Being a part of this state, the Bengali women religiously follow this ritual and try to internalise them. This ritual is also known as Savitri puja which

is performed for the longevity of the husbands. According to the legend, Savitri who is the emblem of purity and chastity saved her husband from the impending death by pleasing Gods. Her strict obsequiousness is rewarded by granting the life of her husband.

Women observing this myth pray for the betterment of the lives of their husbands. Interestingly, the Savitri myth voices one basic patriarchal denomination, that is, the whole life of a woman encircles around the life of her husband. Their relationships with their husbands become similar to the relationship between the self and the other. The ‘otherisation’ of women is presented by their self effacing roles, which usually presents a gender specific study in relation to this particular ritual, manifesting them as subalterns. Bratakatha is a popular form of belief narrative, especially in Bengali speaking areas. The socio-economic dynamic of any form of verbal art concentrates on the inextricable relationship between the individual and the society. The performance becomes more culture specific as it reflects or mirrors the tradition bound performance. Belief as a comprehensive category can be analysed, interpreted and evaluated under differing variations. It can be a mentally constructed thought or a firmly opinionated aspect that can give rise to radical contexts. The exclusive performance of Bratakatha takes the form of a belief narrative when it leads to an empirical form of approach. Through this kind of folkloric conviction, people try to deduce some form of accepted truth and narrativise them through the medium of Performativity or Performance Art.

The Lore of Ka Bleilawpaw in Meghalaya

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The Lore of Ka Bleilawpaw is rooted at Iawpaw Hill (U Lum Ka Iawpaw), situated in adjacent to Nongnah village, South West Khasi Hills District. It is revered and honoured by the people of Nongnah up to this day. Ka Iawpaw to the people of Nongnah is known to be the protector, guardian, healer while over and above all a Goddess in totality. Also, Ka Iawpaw’s legendary status stretches beyond Nongnah across the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. Her status varies significantly across regions such as the goddess of the dead, the goddess invoked to stop the rain, the guardian of certain clans and so on. It can also be speculated that Ka Iawpaw may be the ‘Ancestral Mother Goddess’ of the ‘U Hynniewtrep-Hynniewskum’ since she is also the only Goddess associated or whose dwelling place is in a hill; where hills are usually home to personal gods only. *Ka Bleilawpaw* provides glimpses for a deeper insight into the divinity of women in Khasi society. Preliminary inquiries also exhibit correspondence to various other roles, functions, characteristics and traits recognised through invocation and propitiation; comparable to *Ki Ryngkew Ki Basa* (closely understood as tutelary deities of the village; if invoked). For my PhD thesis, investigation will be undertaken for a comprehensive understanding and analysis on the stature of *Ka Bleilawpaw* as the only female divine being known thus far among the Khasis, in relation to *Ki Ryngkew Ki Basa* who are usually addressed as male entities. While there are many female divine beings among the Khasis; *Ka Bleilawpaw*, on the basis of unique roles and functions in contrast to these other female divine beings; holds a particular stature on its own.

Wan kyrteiñ

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Wan kyrteiñ is a belief on the incarnation/embodiment of the spirit of deceased clan members into a newborn baby (or young children/teenager) and is widely practiced by the *Bhoi* (Khasis living in the northern part of Khasi hills). “*Wan*” means “comes or coming back or returns” and “*kyrteiñ*” refers to “the name or a person”. This belief is widely practiced in *Raid Nongtluh* (a political unit of the Khasis) and *Hima Khadar-lyngdoh* of Ri Bhoi district.

When a new-born baby or a child shows a sign of illness/un-healthiness and even after multiple treatment there is no sign of recovery (since the cause of the illness is not known), the family members take the baby to *u Jha*, a person who is known of having the knowledge of divination. Through divination, it is ascertained that the child’s illness/un-healthiness is because a deceased family member shows a sign that he/she wants to *wan kyrteiñ* to the child. So, to lift the child’s sickness, the family members have to accept *ka wan kyrteiñ* of their deceased family member to the child (for if they do not acknowledge *wan kyrteiñ*, the condition of the child will continue to worsen). Thus, the nearest family members of the deceased person will buy a new cloth on behalf of the deceased (it can be a shawl, or turban or a shirt) for the child and make-peace with the deceased person by uttering some words of welcoming and remembering their deceased family member.

Belief narratives and the War-Khasi

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Belief narratives in the southern part of Meghalaya also known as ‘Ka Ri War’, inhabited dominantly by the War-Khasi community, consist of a great aspect of living experiences in the forms of religious rituals and practices that have remained largely undocumented for a very long time when considered from an academic or a cultural standpoint. My research on various belief narratives existing in various War-Khasi ‘himas’ – traditional Khasi kingdoms, is revealing that the huge body of folk narratives, that the field has to offer, will contribute widely to existing notions and thought of Khasi belief on a whole in the coming years.

My research, dealing primarily with religious rituals of the War-Khasi people, pertaining mainly to the kingdom or the community’s well-being, articulation, transmission, association, continuity and change through folklore and specifically belief narratives will add significantly to existing body of knowledge on the Khasi cultural context. The War-Khasi believes in the significance of various kingdoms-village deities and guardian patrons are recounted to have their

roots in the foundation of these very kingdoms and villages themselves. The Khasi belief in the binding word of the founding fathers and the spirits of the land, narrated through folklore, is what brought about the shaping of various narratives that continue to live on as practises and rituals today. Some of these narratives reveal an evolution in ideas and conveyance while some remain youthful, in the face of the changes of the times, owing to contemporary additions to existing belief narratives of old, which is another aspect of the investigation in the ongoing study.

‘The Spirit’s Untrodden Path’

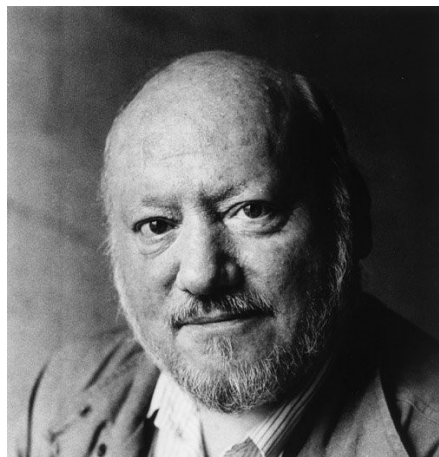
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Like other tribes of North-East India, now popularly known as seven sisters, the Garo tribe in the state of Meghalaya inherited various songs which were sung in different occasions. One of the songs is the path shown to the spirit which is sung by mourners during the post funeral ceremony. **‘The spirit’s untrodden path’** is about the path where spirit never steps into it. It is believed that the spirit may not be able to reach its final destination if the path is not shown. The *delang* or shrine which is constructed for dead persons in front of the house is the house of the spirit. The story is that the path leading towards the house of spirit became thickly wooded with full of *Noriprang-Nokorang* (the progenitor of leeches), the leeches infesting all sides of the footpath. For this reason, the priest performs *grika*, the war dance of the Garos by grasping in one hand the *mil’am* the double edge sword and *spi* the rectangular shield.

To come home, the path which is supposed to be crossed by the spirit is thickly-wooded and full of leeches. In such a situation, the spirit is frightened to go home and look around by hesitating on top of the village. Just after the performance of this song and dance, the path is cleared and now the spirit will be able to see the path which is leading to the house and will know which way to go. Around midnight, the priest blows the horn once in the courtyard before he buries the bone of the deceased. The meaning of blowing the horn is to chase away the spirits. At this time a bull is also slaughtered to accompany the soul of the deceased on its way to the final destination. *Grengdik* or the calcine bones of the deceased is buried near the steps of the house and the bull is also slaughtered near where *grengdik* was buried.

Obituary: Prof. Zmago Šmitek 1949-2018

Mirjam Mencej



Dr. Zmago Šmitek, a retired professor emeritus from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at The University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, passed away on 15 September, 2018, 68 years old. Until his retirement in 2011 he taught Anthropology of Religion and Ethnology of Asia. He wrote extensively on historical contacts of Slovenes with Asia and Asian religions. In the last twenty years of his life he mainly focused on mythology, having published several books (in Slovene) and numerous articles on Slovene mythical notions in the context of comparative Indo-European mythology. Altogether he (co)authored and (co)edited nearly 30 books and published more than 130 papers. Just before his death he finished his last book *Šeest divjine: Zeleno dno našega kozmosa* (Rustle of the wilderness: The green bottom of our cosmos) which has recently been published. In recognition of his services he received the life achievement award by Slovene Ethnological Society as well as the highest award of The University of Ljubljana. He will be sorely missed by his colleagues and friends.