

Dear BNN members,

In accordance with the rules of the BNN, it is the duty of the chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, to submit an annual report on the activities of the BNN over the previous year to the other members of the BNN. Due to the cancellation of the ISFNR congress where the meeting of the Committee was supposed to take place, and a new chair, and possibly also some new members, were expected to be elected, the election of the new chair and members of the BNN Committee has been postponed to the next ISFNR congress. This means that the old team will continue to serve on the board for one more year, until the next ISFNR congress.

The following is the report for 2019-2020. I would particularly like to draw your attention to several novelties that have been initiated over the year – firstly, in spring, during the pandemic, we launched a BNN Facebook account to gather folklore on corona virus (see no. 7), and second, we have organised a new series of monthly online lectures on the topic of belief narratives which will start in September (see no. 8).

1. Membership

Two new members joined the BNN this year. The small increase in the number of new members, compared with previous years, is probably due to the pandemic and its consequences, that is, those cancelled activities where people interested in belief narratives could get to know about our activities and join. Altogether there are now *133 members* in our network. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to welcome both our new members!

2. Publications

The publication of proceedings from the joint BNN and Charms, Charmers and Charming Committees' conference on *Verbal Charms and Narrative Genres* which took place in Budapest, 8-10 December 2017, was published in *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 64 (2) in December 2019. The guest editors of this issue were Maria Palleiro and Éva Pócs and we would like to thank both of them for their valuable work.

Eight papers by BNN members, which were presented at the BNN conference on *Human-Animal Relationships in Belief Narratives* (held as part of the ISFNR interim conference in Ragusa, 12-16 June 2018), were published in a special edition of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 77 (Tartu) (general editor, Mare Kõiva; guest editor Mirjam Mencej) in December 2019. The journal is available online at: <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol77/>

In addition to this, 27 papers presented at the BNN conference on *Belief Narratives in Folklore Studies: Narrating the Supernatural*, which was run by the Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture in Guwahati and the BNN, and held in Guwahati, Assam, India, on 6-8 February 2019, are being prepared for publication in 2020. We would like to thank Dilip Kumar Kalita for all his work with this collection.

3. BNN Conferences

The BNN conference on *Fear of the Other*, which was supposed to be held within the framework of the 18th ISFNR congress in Zagreb, Croatia, on 21-26 June 2020, was cancelled due to the pandemic. The congress, and with it the BNN conference, has now been postponed until September 2021. It is assumed that the new Call for Papers will be issued by the ISFNR congress organisers again in the fall of 2020 and that all relevant information will follow shortly. Please, do not forget to submit your abstract (once again), if you plan to participate in the conference!

Earlier this year, BNN Committee Members were also actively involved in planning the venue of the next BNN conference. Due to the postponement of the BNN conference within the ISFNR congress, the next BNN conference will have to be postponed too. The probability is that it will take place in June 2022. Tommy Kuusela has kindly offered to organize this conference in the Folklore Archives in Uppsala. We are very grateful to Tommy for his willingness to take over the organization! A Call for Papers for the conference will be issued in due course, presumably in late spring /early fall 2021.

4. The BNN e-Newsletter (see no. 5 at: <http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>)

At the BNN Committee meeting in Guwahati, we decided to launch a special section of the BNN Newsletter which will be dedicated to belief narrative research in particular countries. In

the previous BNN newsletters, you have thus been able to read about state of belief narrative scholarship in Meghalaya (India), Belarus and Assam. As before, we encourage all of you to send in contributions on the state-of-the-art in belief narrative scholarship in your own country.

As before, we would also like to encourage everyone to send us information on their personal research, new publications, calls for papers, conferences and other events (also local!) related to belief narratives, as well as any other news that might be of interest to belief narrative scholars. As always, we would also like to express our thanks to Kristel Kivari who is kindly taking care of the distribution of the Newsletter, and to Nidhi Mathur for promptly uploading it to the ISFNR website! Information should be sent in good time to Kristel (kristel.kivari@ut.ee; kristelkivari@hotmail.com)

5. The Student Award for the Best Paper in the Field of Belief Narratives

In 2018, the Committee decided to make some slight changes to the rules for the next competition for the best student paper award. Every second year (at the ISFNR congress and at the ISFNR interim conference) two awards (rather than one) will now be granted: one for the best paper written by a PhD student, and one for the best paper written by an undergraduate (BA) or graduate (MA) student. Due to the postponement of the ISFNR congress, the deadline for submissions has also been postponed to 15 December 2020. The next awards will be presented at the next ISFNR congress in Zagreb in 2021 but contestants will be notified about the results beforehand, in January 2021. The Call for Applications, along with details about the award (that is, regarding the requirements, criteria, profile of the students involved, the nature of the award, and so on) can be found at the ISFNR/BNN website, under no. 4: (<http://www.isfnr.org/files/beliefnarrativenetwork.html>).

6. The BNN Web Site (<http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>)

As always, we encourage all those who still have not yet sent in data to send us their CVs (including names and surnames; degrees; present professional status and affiliations; e-mail addresses and contact details – as long as you are happy for these to be published on the Internet), along with *a list of main research interests* (in the form of key words – please add such information at the end of your CV) and a *personal bibliography*, including works related

to belief narratives (that is books written in one of the major languages or with a summary in one of these languages; and papers written in one of the major languages). The information should be sent to Kaarina Koski (kaakos@utu.fi) before the end of October for her to send it to the ISFNR admin Nidhi Mathur to put it on the website later this year (see no. 10 at: <http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>). Kaarina up-dates the list of belief narrative scholars' CVs annually. We would once again like to thank Nidhi Mathur for her assistance in this matter, and Sadhana Naithani for her support.

7. BNN Facebook group

During the first wave of pandemic, the BNN Committee decided to open a BNN Facebook account which Tommy Kuusela has kindly offered to make and administer. The Committee would like to express their thanks to Tommy for his work with regard to the new account! Bearing the situation in mind, the aim of BNN Facebook account was, and continues to be, to gather and share Corona/ Covid folklore of all kinds (jokes, memes, conspiracy theories, “myths” about wonder cures, (personal) experience narratives and so on). Any contextual information, observations (for instance, on attitudes towards foreigners on the streets), photos and more are all much appreciated, as are links to other Facebook accounts, conferences or relevant web sites dealing with the same topic. As we know, many people all around the world are already collecting such folklore. Our hope is that our Facebook page can become a hub for all this international material, allowing comparison and further research. Everyone is welcome to use the data that is available here as a form of archival base for their own research. Indeed, it may even become the heart of a future project. Beginning in 2021 or 2022, we anticipate pulling together some of the diverse global data that has been collected on this subject, examining it from what we hope will then be a historical perspective. We encourage members who are researching this subject to engage with each other on our Facebook page for the purposes of organizing our future response, posting links and the like, and also to begin thinking about and discussing what forms this project might take. The next BNN Newsletter will contain an invitation to all those of you who are interested in this topic, inviting you to join a working group the main activity of which will be to note and present various themes relating to to the pandemic.

When the pandemic is over, we hope that the Facebook page can continue to be a site where immediate exchange can take place among the BNN scholars on other subjects as well.

Everyone is most welcome to actively participate in the discussions, and also in uploading and

sharing any information that might be of interest to belief narratives scholars. If you would like to be connected to this Facebook account in order to upload information or simply follow what is going on, please visit – and join – the following page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/625573241323757/about/>

8. ISFNR Belief Narrative Network Online Lectures

The ISFNR Belief Narrative Network Committee has decided to launch a new series of monthly events: online presentations entitled the “ISFNR Belief Narrative Network Online Lectures”. On the first Friday of each month at 5 p.m. CET (except in July and August), members will be able to watch a pre-recorded 20-30 minute lecture by a scholar working in the field of belief narratives, dealing with her or his research. This will be followed by a live on-line discussion with the lecturer in which members can take part, ask questions and discuss various aspects of the talk. Members will be sent an email with an invitation to listen to the lecture and take part in the discussion on Zoom, the letter being sent about a week before each lecture is going to take place. The first online lecture will be given on Friday, September 4th by Prof. Timothy Tangherlini of UC Berkeley who will be talking about *Conspiracy in the time of Corona*. The Committee would like to express their gratitude to Eva Þórdís Ebenezersdóttir for kindly offering to assist us with technical issues. All lectures will be later available on the ISFNR/BNN website: <http://www.isfnr.org/belief-narrative-network.php>. We would like to thank Nidhi Mathur and Sadhana Naithani for their support in arranging this too.

Should any of you would be interested in giving a lecture in the future, or have a promising student who you would like to suggest, please send the Committee a title and a short abstract of the lecture for evaluation to the following address: mirjam.mencej@guest.arnes.si. We hope you find this new feature of BNN of interest (to you and your students), and encourage you all to participate in the online discussions!

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As usual, we encourage all members to continue sharing information about the BNN with their colleagues. Everyone interested in belief narratives of any kind is welcome to join the Network! If you are aware of any scholar who is interested in belief narratives and wishes to become a member of BNN, please remind them that all they need to do is contact the

chairperson (mirjam.mencej@guest.arnes.si) in order to receive information about all future BNN activities. Potential members should nonetheless be informed that they need to join both the ISFNR and the BNN. If any of you has not yet become a member of the ISFNR, please bear in mind that, in accordance with our statute, the BNN forms part of the ISFNR and that official membership is only open and free to those who are members of the ISFNR. If you are not yet a member of ISFNR, you can nonetheless receive information about our activities, and participate in our conferences and meetings. However, you will not have the right to vote for members of the BNN Committee or be able to become a BNN Committee member yourself. Everyone is therefore encouraged to join the ISFNR (see: <http://www.isfnr.org/becoming-a-member.php>; <http://www.isfnr.org/ISFNR-membership.php>); please contact the Chairperson of the Membership Committee, Prof. Kimberly J. Lau (lau@ucsc.edu), if you have any questions regarding the ISFNR membership. Should anyone wish to cease being a BNN member, and receive no further information about our activities, please let us know and we will delete you from our list.

As always, all BNN members are also most welcome to suggest their own ideas about the future activities of the BNN and to comment on the decisions taken by the BNN Committee members. We will be happy to hear from you!

Keep safe in these strange times.

Best wishes,

Mirjam, on behalf of the BNN Committee (2016-2021):

Willem de Blécourt, Terry Gunnell, Anders Gustavsson, Desmond Kharmawphlang, Fumihiko Kobayashi, Mare Kõiva, Kaarina Koski, Dilip Kumar Kalita, Mirjam Mencej (*chair*), Maria Ines Palleiro, Tok Thompson and Ülo Valk.