



Living Lament

Explorations in Shifting Ideologies

Edited by
Viliina Silvonen and Eila Stepanova

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica 26

THE FINNISH LITERATURE SOCIETY (SKS) was founded in 1831 and began publishing books in 1834. Now, the society publishes scholarly literature on ethnology and folkloristics, linguistics, literary studies, and history.

The first volume in the *Studia Fennica* series was published in 1933.

Studia Fennica consists of six subseries: (since 1992) *Ethnologica*, *Folkloristica*, *Linguistica*, (since 2002) *Historica*, *Litteraria*, and (since 2007) *Anthropologica*.

In addition to publishing, the Finnish Literature Society conducts research, maintains a research library and an archive containing folklore and literary collections, and promotes Finnish literature abroad.

SERIES EDITOR FOR THIS VOLUME

Karina Lukin

STUDIA FENNICA EDITORIAL BOARD

SF ANTHROPOLOGICA

Timo Kallinen, Professor, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Kenneth Sillander, Title of Docent, University of Helsinki, Finland

SF ETHNOLOGICA

Arja Turunen, Title of Docent, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Anna Rauhala, PhD, University of Helsinki, Finland

SF FOLKLORISTICA

Karina Lukin, Title of Docent, University of Helsinki, Finland

Kaarina Koski, Title of Docent, University of Helsinki, Finland

SF HISTORICA

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Professor, University of Turku, Finland

Heini Hakosalo, Title of Docent, University of Oulu, Finland

SF LINGUISTICA

Salla Kurhila, Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

Suvi Honkanen, PhD, University Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland

SF LITTERARIA

Viola Parente-Čapková, Professor, University of Turku, Finland

Kati Mikkola, Secretary General, Title of Docent, Finnish Literature Society, Finland

Kirsi Keravuori, Director of Scholarly Publishing, PhD, Finnish Literature Society, Finland

Maija Yli-Kätkä, Secretary of the Board, Finnish Literature Society, Finland

oa.finlit.fi

EDITORIAL OFFICE

SKS

P.O. Box 259

FI-00171 Helsinki

tiedeutkirjat@finlit.fi

Living Lament

Explorations in Shifting Ideologies

Edited by

Vilina Silvonen and Eila Stepanova



The publication has undergone a peer review.

The collection of archived publications of the Finnish Literature Society is included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

STUDIA FENNICA FOLKLORISTICA 26

© 2026 Viliina Silvonen, Eila Stepanova, and SKS

Cover: Eija Hukka | Series Cover Design: Timo Numminen
Layout: Jaana Tarsa | Series Layout Design: Markus Itkonen
EPUB: Tero Salmén

ISBN 978-951-858-832-3 (Print)
ISBN 978-951-858-833-0 (EPUB)
ISBN 978-951-858-834-7 (PDF)

ISSN 0085-6835 (Studia Fennica. Print)
ISSN 2669-9605 (Studia Fennica. Online)
ISSN 1235-1946 (Studia Fennica Folkloristica. Print)
ISSN 2669-9583 (Studia Fennica Folkloristica. Online)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.21435/sff.26>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License, unless otherwise specified.
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)



A free open access version of the book with full-colour versions of all the figures is available at <https://doi.org/10.21435/sff.26> or by scanning this QR code with your mobile device.

BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt, Germany 2026

Table of Contents

FROG AND VILIINA SILVONEN, IN COLLABORATION WITH EILA STEPANOVA	
Navigating Laments and Ideologies	7
<i>An Introduction</i>	
CHARLES L. BRIGGS	
Incommunicability	22
<i>How Lamentation Pushes Us to Rethink Colonial Models of Poetics, Performance, and Communication</i>	
FROG	
Scandinavian Laments in Modern Times	42
<i>Evidence versus Invisibility</i>	
MADIS ARUKASK	
The Changing Corporeality in the Twentieth-Century Seto Burial Laments	62
AUŠRA ŽIČKIENĖ	
Motifs of ‘Souls’ as Signs of Mythical Thinking and Folklore Practice	82
<i>From Traditional Lithuanian Laments to Popular Discourse</i>	
HANNAH KAARINA YOKEN AND ARJA TURUNEN	
Feminist Lamenting	99
<i>Women for Peace and the Finnish Itkijänaiset</i>	
VILIINA SILVONEN	
Affective Arrangements in Laments	117
<i>Emotions as a Connecting Feature and a Separator in the Contentious Field of Lament in Finland in the 2020s</i>	
LARISSA MULDER	
Lamenting Through Time	141
<i>Unravelling the Metacultural Evolution of Irish Mourning</i>	
Authors	157
Abstract	159
Index of Persons and Places	160
General Index	163

Navigating Laments and Ideologies

An Introduction

FROG

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5967-6281>

VILIINA SILVONEN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7191-4956>

in collaboration with

EILA STEPANOVA

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0704-6362>

W*hat is lament?* This question is deceptive because the answer may appear self-evident, yet ‘lament’ and its counterpart, ‘lamentation’, are used in a variety of ways with overlapping but sometimes quite different meanings. These range from a visible enactment of sadness to a piece of writing about loss, and from a sad or longing tune to a protesting complaint. In folkloristics and related fields, lament is approached as a socially communicated, practice-based genre of verbal art or ritual wailing. However, this is only a single and quite particular form amid the variety of categories that can be called lament, from the Bible’s Book of Lamentations and literary works to the myriad uses of the word currently surrounding Donald Trump in his second presidency, where they can be poignant, jocular, or derisive. The different frames of meaning can also be deeply entangled with powerful connotations and associations that may confer value or undermine significance. The potential for the words ‘lament’ and ‘lamenting’ to have negative connotations is evident from *The Cambridge English Dictionary* (2025), which describes lamenting with words like ‘sadness’ and ‘complaint’ and gives related words such as ‘gloominess’, ‘bitter’, and ‘wretchedness’, while the characterisation of ‘lamentable’ as linked to a grievous complaint can carry connotations that what is lamented is very bad and deserving of severe criticism (s.vv. ‘lament’, ‘lamentable’). Conversely, identification with the folklore genre can, in contemporary Western societies, confer the value of tradition and connections to the past. The respective verbal art becomes receivable as literature, many people considering it beautiful poetry, even if it might be heart-wrenching. The diversity of values, interpretations, and associations reflects the embeddedness of people’s views, understandings, and associations in ideologies. Indeed, the respective values, interpretations, and associations are nested in networks of ideologies linked to people’s positions and experiences, whether they valorise lament as a powerful instrument for personal expression or stigmatise it as a troubling or embarrassing display of emotions. This nexus of lament and ideology forms the centre of the present volume.

This book is centred around cultural research on lament and what happens to lament, including how it may be mobilised in modernised societies, from the nineteenth century through to the boom of social media. The volume is not developed to advocate for a particular definition of lament or concept of ideology. The authors of the individual chapters approach these from diverse perspectives arising from differences in the frameworks they use in combination with the cases they discuss. The objective is

to explore the potential interconnections between lament traditions and ideologies, which enables advancements in methodologies and the knowledge of domains that emerge at this intersection, while the present introduction is intended to orient the reader to these explorations.

The majority of contributions to this collection approach lament as a type of verbal art that expresses strong emotions, especially of grief. Many connect with genres of what were commonly called ‘folk’ traditions throughout much of the twentieth century, but the predominant orientation of this book is to address traditions, practices, and uses of lament in modernised societies. Tensions have surrounded whether all of these should be viewed as ‘lament’, what qualifies as ‘the same’ tradition, or whether different practices should all be considered lament in the same way. Opening these tensions and their backgrounds provides a relevant entry point into the intersections and entanglements of lament and ideology that are explored through the diverse contributions of this book.

Laments Lost or Alive and Well

Historically, the most central and often iconic situation of lament performance is at the boundary between life and death. It is therefore ironic that the history of lament research has tended to build an image of lament traditions as things belonging to the past, as dead or dying within ‘a larger tale about modernity as loss’ (Wilce 2009, 3). An underlying thematic concern of this volume is the life and death of laments in different cultures and societal contexts. What James M. Wilce calls the ‘exaggerated death of lament’ (ibid.) is confronted here as rooted in ideologies of modernity. Stepping back from the idea of lament as non-modern and necessarily excluded from modernised societies, the chapters of this book illustrate that lament is alive and well, with relevance in current Western societies. They also further deconstruct the ways lament has been engaged from positions of modernity.

The waning or even disappearance of certain traditions, including lament, has been an ongoing topic in the field of cultural studies dating back to when interest in traditional cultures first arose in Europe in the late eighteenth century. Describing such disappearances as ‘death’ or ‘extinction’ reflects an evaluative encoding through the use of biological metaphors (Hafstein 2001). The whole discourse developed through National-Romantic ideologies of folklore as opposed to modernity, which would corrupt and destroy the traditions (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Anttonen 2005). The imagination of authenticity as found only in illiterate ‘peasants and primitives’ (ibid.; see also Bendix 1997) was integrated in a system of polarised contrasts (cf. Gal and Irvine 2019) such as literate/illiterate (oral), institutionally educated/uneducated, scientific/superstitious, and so on. These included an opposition of dynamic/static, which denied traditional culture the possibility to change and develop without losing value. The static traditions identified with the past were implicitly contrasted with modernity, in which progress was considered inherently valuable. Within this ideological environment, it was logical that the most ‘authentic’ traditions were found in the places most remote from modernisation, such as regions discussed in several cases in this book. The texts of such folklore genres could be commodified by modernity, but the progress of peasant culture into modernity’s industrial workforce was the slayer of ‘authentic’ traditions.

Within this type of ideological milieu, the position of lament could be rather precarious. This women's genre of outpouring emotion was characterised by loud displays in which melody could easily seem secondary to the vocal performances of grief. Historically, local traditions were usually documented and described by educated men who tended to marginalise women's practices and for whom grief was an emotion that should not be publicly displayed (Wilce 2009). Lament was sometimes seen as savage and primitive, even shameful, which placed it at odds with the National-Romantic movement's drive to elevate traditional culture as heritage within nation-building projects (Frog, this volume). These factors sometimes limited the documentation of laments or shaped the image of the tradition that was produced.

The discourse on the 'death' of traditions was reimagined at the end of the twentieth century in terms of a transition from one life to the next. The turn to performance involved a transformation in the conception of folklore from idealised static texts to dynamic practices in which variation both in relation to specific situations and over time was fundamental (Abraham 1968; Bauman 1975; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975). Reimagining traditions as in ongoing transformation went hand-in-hand with challenging the earlier view that folklore was exclusive to non-modern milieux (Dundes 1977), later followed by deconstructions of the concept of authenticity (e.g. Bendix 1997), and the deconstruction of the concept of folklore itself in relation to modernity (Bauman and Briggs 2003). Lauri Honko ([1991] 2013) proposed that the life in pre-modern culture was only the 'first life' of folklore, which was followed by a 'second life' dislocated from that environment as it is 'resurrected' from archives. The metaphorical transition from one life to the next is particularly resonant with the use of lament for a person's transition to a life in the otherworld (Honko [1978] 2013), and Anna-Liisa Tenhunen (2006) extended this model to a 'third life' in her study of the reinvention of the Karelian lament tradition in Finland. Thinking of traditions as having different 'lives' provides a fruitful lens for thinking about sameness and difference through their transformations without devaluing younger generations as merely derivative of older ones any more than children are merely derivative of their parents. The central hazard of this type of thinking is the risk of inferring that a new life of a tradition involves the death of the old one. In reality, traditions may have multiple, simultaneous lives. Thus, in parallel with the emergence of the third life of Karelian lament in Finland, its second life continued in the archives (Stepanova 2014; Silvonon 2022), as did its first life in Russian Karelia, where, for example, a news crew accidentally recorded a performance of a lament in 2021 (Stepanova 2023).

Despite the numerous attempts to break free from the dichotomy between lament traditions inside and outside of modernity, modernity's ideologies of non-modern traditions and 'authenticity' persist in both the minds of researchers and in popular thought (see also Bendix 1997, 219). In this volume, Madis Arukask, Larissa Mulder, Viliina Silvonon, and Aušra Žičkienė open comparisons between the non-modernised lament practices collected in archives and their adaptations and transformations in current Western societies. The loss of lament has been an ongoing topic of discussion in research and to some degree in the public sphere, and the question of authenticity is also discussed among present-day lamenters. Some have focused on the distinctions between their own laments and those of a non-modernised tradition, while others have sought to establish a link between these. The fact that the so-called third life of Karelian lament in Finland sparked public debate, including questions of cultural

appropriation (Silvonen and Kallio 2023), demonstrates that these themes are current and important. Although lament traditions are still often imagined as dead and belonging to the past, this is mainly attributable to the dominant ideologies that have rendered invisible their various manifestations in the present.

Navigating Ideologies

The development and use of the categories above are deeply entangled with ideologies, but ideology is no less slippery as a concept than lament. Nevertheless, variations in the concept of ideology remain tightly tethered to ‘ideas’, whether synonymous with ‘beliefs’ or imagined in terms of values and concerns. Ideologies are known through discourse, whether they are consciously reflected on, or people are completely naturalised to them as an organic part of their worldview, whereby the culture of everyday life is seen as no less natural than gravity. Ideologies provide a lens of good and bad, right and wrong, and they determine the relative value of, for example, a lament versus an epic or a lullaby, or even whether a lament can be recognised for consideration at all (see Gal and Irvine 2019). Whatever the case, ideologies are always centred as ‘ideologies-of’ something as opposed to something else, whether this is a cultural era like the Enlightenment or modernity, a phenomenon of nature like death, a phenomenon of culture as broad as colonisation (Briggs, this volume), as specific as a Seto burial lament (Arukask, this volume), or a phenomenon like emotion that is at the intersection of nature and culture.

An important dimension of ideologies is that the understandings and interpretations that they entail are also ‘ideologies-of’ in the sense that they are embedded in the aims and values of some group and bound up with the respective social position, relationships to other groups (perhaps including in the past or inhabitants of unseen worlds), to the environment, and so on (van Dijk 2012; Rehman 2013; Rehman and Ampuja 2023). Ideologies provide both unconscious and conscious models of thinking that affect people’s behaviour in everyday life. They shape people’s approaches to laments as well as how they practise, conceptualise, and talk about lamenting. They underlie the differences between how laments were understood by folklore collectors and their informants, and also by other cultural insiders and outsiders. This social dimension of ideologies is prominent in the chapters of the present volume, where the dominant ideologies (Kroskrity 2001, 203) emblematic of a culture, nation, or the Global North are at odds with ideologies of societies or groups that are seen as outside of or subordinate to it. The connection between ideology, people’s positionality, and their relative evaluations makes it a flexible tool for examining the various lament traditions and the uses of lamenting in society.

The Roots of Tension around Defining Laments

Discussions around the question *What is a lament?* have caused tension between researchers and lamenters, and also among lamenters themselves (see Fenigsen and Wilce 2012; Silvonen and Kallio 2023). Some of the issues pertain to the question of what practices can be designated as laments, on what terms, and by whom lament

is defined. This issue is entangled with the historical approach to 'folk' traditions as something outside of modernity, creating an imagination of lamenters and lament traditions that excludes them from a modernised society.

The very word 'folk' carries the ideological baggage of having been taken up in especially the nineteenth century to refer to populations – 'peasants and primitives' – that had not yet transitioned into modernity (Bauman and Briggs 2003). This use of 'folk' became seen as artificial (Dundes 1977) and was devalued (although see Bronner 2022). In this volume, individual authors each use their own preferred terminology where they address such traditions. Above, we have used 'non-modernised', which is a clumsy expression. This is because, if a tradition is called 'non-modern', this still carries the implication that the tradition is excluded from modernity, even though it is found, for example, among people who are literate, institutionally educated, and use mobile phones. This again reproduces an ideology related to the old usage of 'folk', according to which such traditions are excluded from modern societies.

Early folklore research emerged around the study of non-modernised traditions with a comparative orientation. The identification of something as a lament or as lamenting is an outcome of researchers' analysing the respective practices. Inevitably, they would situate those practices as a category in relation to similar ones seen in other cultures. Such categories are today described and theorised in terms of genres, but they were initially mostly intuitive. Determining the features that characterised them and formulating definitions for them was a gradual process and researchers continue to debate these today; as the frames of reference and focal points of interest change, so does our conception of the category. The formation of a cross-cultural category like lament was at the intersection of comparative interests and the development and negotiation of a vocabulary for talking about types of traditions found among non-modernised populations (Frog et al. 2016). When looking at what is called lament in modernised practices, the frames of reference for the category differ in two key respects. First, the earlier concept of being non-modernised does not apply. Second, the identification as lament, however defined, can be the practitioner's own classification rather than one unilaterally determined by the researcher. Neither approach is inherently wrong, but the identification as lament works differently for people in divergent positions with a broad variety of perspectives, emphases, and needs (see, e.g., Silvonen and Kallio 2023).

In research, most definitions of lament have developed exclusively to describe a genre of folklore rooted outside of modernity (although see, e.g., Wilce 2009, 2). This tendency has continued through folklore research's turn from traditions as verbal texts to performance and practice (Abraham 1968; Bauman 1975; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975; see also Honko 2000), the rise of gender studies (e.g., *Feminist Studies* 1970–present; see also Nenola-Kallio 1982; Bourke 1988), and the critical reconceptualisation of folklore as not something exclusively non-modern (Dundes 1977). Lament traditions that took shape in modernised societies seem to have only gained attention following the turn to emotions that began at the end of the twentieth century as affective and corporeal aspects of performance came into research focus (Lemmings and Brooks 2014; cf. Tolbert 1990; Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2009). The durability of the view that has excluded lament as a tradition from modernity is that the understanding of the category was built on the often-implicit presumption that it is a non-modernised genre of folklore. That premise required that the tradition was transmitted intergenerationally through exposure to and participation in local practices in an immersive

way – which is what was seen as making it a collective tradition of a ‘folk’. This type of lament tradition is normally distinguished by a combination of the embodied performance of grief with some form of verbal art, although the development of the rubric ‘lament’ as encompassing such folklore practices from around the globe and from all eras of history makes it challenging to define more narrowly (see e.g. Böckel 1913; Honko 1974; McLaren 2008; Stepanova 2015). The whole concept of folklore emerged through ideologies of the ‘folk’ as representing the past of modernised societies, and thus that their traditions were the heritage of the latter (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Anttonen 2005; Frog 2022). This conferred value on the particular traditions as important and positive (Anttonen 2005). At the same time, it also produced polarised views about authenticity for what qualified as a source for this type of tradition (e.g., Dorson 1969; Bendix 1997) – problematic views that are still encountered today.

Within that approach, understanding the tradition as a social and collective phenomenon was paramount. This collective quality was interpreted through different ideological lenses over time, which gave the respective traditions value in relation to current interests. In early research, the folklore presented by ‘folk’ was considered incidental to the people themselves, while its collective quality enabled the historical reconstruction of a tradition and was the foundation of its value as national heritage (e.g., Krohn 1926). In contrast, since especially the 1990s, the same factor has been foundational to the study of the dynamics of meanings, variation, and ideologies governing a tradition (e.g., Foley 2002). However, the factor being distinguished was ultimately rooted in the criterion of how the tradition was transmitted in order to qualify as folklore. The tensions and disputes that surround traditions in modernised societies are nested in the endurance of these deep-rooted and often implicit features, and it requires work to get past these, not only individually, but at a social level of understanding. The concept of folklore has been deconstructed and rebuilt again and again for over half a century, which now makes it easy to accept that folklore is also ubiquitous in modernised societies rather than being something only found outside them. In contrast, the critical deconstruction of the category ‘lament’ only began quite recently (e.g., Wilce 2009), and it is still commonly imagined through the category of a century ago, and it carries the baggage of the dominant ideologies of that time.

Continuities, Transformations, and Locating the Identity of ‘Lament’

Early research imagined traditions as having ideal forms that were either static or could be reconstructed, whereas today, traditions are recognised as continuously being varied and evolved by people in society in relation to changes in their worldviews and individual and social needs. This is illustrated in the present volume by Arukask’s study on the Seto lament tradition of southeast Estonia. Arukask shows how performers adapted to the discord between the language and motifs of the inherited tradition on the one hand and changes in conceptions of the human body and what happens to it on the other. The same process is addressed from another angle in the case of Karelian laments in Finland by Silvonen in this volume. In this case, people in modernised milieux adapt and transform laments based mainly on recordings, photos, and transcriptions, infusing them with new meanings and significance that have given lament a place in their society. The combination of continuities and transformations characterises the evolu-

tion of traditions over time, yet it is precisely the impacts of modernisation and the transmission of information or knowledge through media associated with modernity that have been contentious in whether or not something is 'really' lament.

It is worth noting here that there is a paradox in the tensions and disagreements about the category of lament. The same framework of ideologies that excluded lament from modernised milieux and excluded impacts of modernity from a tradition's authenticity simultaneously constructed its value for those milieux. The value that was created for the tradition was for the people in modernised societies, making both the traditions themselves and imaginations of authenticity important, but it did so by imagining a tradition like lament as belonging to the past, not to the present. Consequently, the same ideologies that make some people feel it is very important to identify current practices as lament or as 'the same' tradition also make other people oppose this, despite the variety of things called laments in their own societies (see also Fenigsen and Wilce 2012).

When considering continuity and change in traditions, how a tradition is learned has an impact and should not simply be dismissed. However, it is a mistake to imagine a black-and-white contrast between internalisation through immersion in a society's living practices and approaching them from the outside. The difference should not be confused with a qualification as 'lament' that would only reflect the authenticity judgements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of Seto lament discussed by Arukask, the transmission of verbal art is socially embedded. As a tradition of verbal art, the transmission process integrates language, poetics, rhetoric, music, and embodied performance. The variations and adaptations in individuals' performances are then produced and received in relation to collective perspectives. When a tradition is internalised through documents and recordings, the individual learning them selects what they consider emblematic or significant and interprets it according to their personal views and needs, whether the aim is to hold tightly to the documented practice or done quite freely (see Wilce and Fenigsen 2015). The difference between these can be approached as a criterion of classification, as discussed above, but the difference and its consequences get interpreted in alternative ways according to presumptions about what qualifies as lament to start with.

The transmission process has general implications as a principle but can be very ambiguous in practice, because a highly idiosyncratic understanding of a tradition may be rooted in transmission through first-hand experience (e.g., the lamenter Valentina Jevsejeva: see Stepanova and Matveinen 2017, 27–30), while a sophisticated understanding without first-hand transmission may be much more in alignment with the tradition's conventions (e.g., the lamenter Emmi Kuittinen: see Silvonen and Kuittinen 2024). The ideology of authenticity based on the transmission process has tended to erase that researchers themselves develop competence in the traditions they study, whether through immersion in the culture or through the sources from its documentation (e.g. on medieval traditions, Clunies Ross 1994, 26). Indeed, such competence was foundational to researchers' authenticity evaluations in early collection, in which some folklore collectors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries show a profoundly subtle and nuanced understanding of the respective tradition, even if their priorities and value judgements are viewed quite critically today. Even in these cases, denying the respective competence is like denying that they have competence in a language because they learned it at a university, and denying that a performance based on such competence is lamenting is like denying that they are speaking that language when they talk to you.

It might be tempting to criticise the injustice of the ideologies in which these judgements and biases are rooted. However, here, too, is a paradox. The ideologies that built up these imaginations of authenticity and their polarised evaluation also drove the documentation of the respective tradition. In cases where the tradition has disappeared or is difficult to encounter in the present, that documentation is the only accessible gateway to the tradition. Without those ideologies and their biases, there might be nothing to take up and make relevant to people today. In this volume, Frog shows that Scandinavian research tended to use ‘lament’ for expressions of grief generally and never brought it into focus as a folklore genre, which would have given it value and relevance for documentation. As a consequence, Scandinavian laments were never studied and not a single transcript of a lament is currently known, despite myriad references to lamenters and their performances. It is important to reflect on and overcome ideologies that produce biases of thinking in black-and-white terms, and it is equally important to reflect on their roles in the past, which have brought us to the present, with all of its complexity.

Lament, Communication, and Tensions with Modernity

Recent research has foregrounded lament as communication (Stepanova 2015). That lament is more than simply crying or wailing as an outpouring of grief has been foundational to conceptions of the category since the outset. This was built into approaches to lament through the lens of non-modernised traditions at the level of definitions: it was commonly defined as a genre characterised by the formal regularity of its verbal art (e.g. Honko 1974; McLaren 2008; Stepanova 2015). This feature is ultimately only a consequence of defining lament through a transmission process, which is presumed to include performers’ internalisation of language, poetics, and other regular performance features. This has been one of the sites of tension and disagreement surrounding some adaptations of traditions, where, for example, the particulars of poetics and even the language of performance may be secondary to emotional expression, communication, and spiritual efficacy (Wilce and Fenigsen 2015, 198–203; see also Silvonen, this volume). However, non-modernised genres are also not necessarily defined through language and poetics: belief legend is defined through what is told rather than in what way; verbal charm is defined through the supernatural effects of uttering it whether it be in poetry or prose, and so on. What is sometimes seen as a marked difference between conceptions of lament evaporates when formal regularity is recognised as linked to only one type of performance practice.

Drawing on approaches to language ideologies (on which, see Kroskrity 2001; Gal and Irvine 2019), in his chapter, Charles Briggs brings into focus a tension between laments and modernity that has generally gone unrecognised. He looks critically at modernity’s conception of ‘communicability’ as salient, unambiguous, and literal language use. Against that backdrop, Briggs argues that laments and their affective potential are characterised by ‘incommunicability’, which makes them a potentially powerful tool in social interaction. This potential is further illustrated in Hannah Kaarina Yoken and Arja Turunen’s chapter, which shows how lament was mobilised for political purposes in a feminist movement of the 1980s that criticised the primacy of language over emotions in communication and political decision making, among other things. The

disjunction between the dominant ideologies of modernity and lament can be utilised to wield lament as an instrument of power.

This volume demonstrates that communication is fundamental to lament. More than that, however, laments serve as a medium through which individuals seek to both comprehend and comment on the world, its prevailing order, and what happens in it. And, in some cases, lament may be directed to impact and transform the lives and situations or people and the societies in which they live.

Explorations

This volume consists of seven chapters that each present a case study about laments and lamenting in different contexts, variously considered from the perspectives of folklore studies, ethnomusicology, history, anthropology and religious studies. Although some of the studies reach the Americas, they are concentrated in northern Europe, where lament traditions have long and complex histories of interaction as well as a developed research history (Frog and Stepanova, forthcoming). The earlier research in the field offers an important backdrop for the discussion of developments and transformations of lament in the respective cultures, while the areal emphasis also supports the cohesion of the book and avoids the exoticisation of lament traditions by elaborating their diversity around the world. Rather than thematic sections, the chapters form a chain-like progression that explores the ground where ideologies and lament traditions meet, a broad territory laced with paths that knit the chapters together into a complex whole.

These explorations are opened by 'Incommunicability: How Lamentation Pushes Us to Rethink Colonial Models of Poetics, Performance, and Communication', in which Charles Briggs argues that lament is fundamentally opposed to modernity's construction of literal and transparent propositional representation as the exclusively valorised ideal of expressive behaviour. Laments are brought into focus for their remarkable expressivity. Karelian lament is used to illustrate how the language and rhetorical devices characteristic of the cross-cultural, non-modernised genre create a heavy filter for the propositional content that itself becomes an empowering mediator of meanings. Briggs establishes lament as a quintessential counterpoint to the dominant ideologies governing Western sensibilities about communication. He considers how those dominant ideologies correlate incommunicability with otherness, making it iconic of an opposed or excluded social position. He then presents a case study of a mysterious outbreak of illness in a Venezuelan rainforest and parents' instrumentalisation of lament and their strategic inhabitation of the position of incommunicability in order to press for a diagnosis of the threat to their children's lives and for justice. Briggs argues that scholars should exchange the intuition to take the dominant ideology of communicability for the conscious engagement of incommunicability as a default in scholarly inquiry, which he advances as a strategy to break from colonial models of communication and their impact on our thinking.

The discussion moves from incommunicability to silence in 'Scandinavian Laments in Modern Times: Evidence versus Invisibility'. In this chapter, Frog introduces Scandinavian lament traditions and the evidence for them in an exploration of why they have gone largely unrecognised and ignored, silencing women's voices. The evidence for these traditions is generally very limited, but German comparativists already gave

it consideration in the early twentieth century while a famous Norwegian author's description of the tradition in his home region was widely circulated, even in schoolbooks. Nevertheless, Scandinavian researchers left the traditions largely unacknowledged, undocumented, and undiscussed. This case is analysed as illustrative of a dominant ideology of modern, educated Lutherans toward public outpourings of grief as a significant factor in the invisibility of the lament, and which dovetailed with the laments not being seen as sufficiently poetic to warrant interest for heritage-construction projects.

Madis Arukask advances from the breakdown of traditions and their erasure from social memory to how they change in the wake of increased outside influence in 'The Changing Corporeality in the Twentieth-Century Seto Burial Laments'. The human body and its location after death are placed at the centre of this study, approached from the perspective of folk religion. Arukask introduces laments and the arrival of impacts of modernity to the region of the Seto of southeast Estonia. He reveals that tensions emerged between the formulaic language and motifs rooted in traditional poetry and the changes in contemporary thinking that challenged these. Arukask explores how performers were compelled to negotiate a compromise between current understandings and collective tradition as contemporary beliefs and inherited practices became disaligned. This exploration of the tensions between a non-modernised lament tradition and modernity offers a bridge to discussions of transformations and reuses of such traditions in modernised societies.

In 'Motifs of "Souls" as Signs of Mythical Thinking and Folklore Practice: From Traditional Lithuanian Laments to Popular Discourse', Aušra Žičkienė explores the ways the Lithuanian lament tradition has been adopted and applied in new forms. Žičkienė shows how some fragments of exceptional laments from the nineteenth century circulated during the 1970s and 1980s and became key points of reference in popular culture for connecting with grieving. These fragments provided resources that were revitalised and produced in new forms of expression that meet current people's needs and interests. Žičkienė illustrates the dynamics of how traditional culture receives value through creative reinterpretations that update its relevance, both for individuals and for forming group identities.

In 'Feminist Lamenting: Women for Peace and the Finnish *Itkijänaiset*', Hannah Kaarina Yoken and Arja Turunen introduce the main activist group that sought to bring emotion into a central position in politics and its subgroup called *Itkijänaiset* (the Lamenting Women) that instrumentalised lament performance as a collective protest strategy. Yoken and Turunen investigate how this group adapted and utilised lamenting in the peace movement. Through archival evidence and oral history, they explore how lament became incorporated into a pacifist-feminist ideology, hybridising associations of the tradition with new meanings in attempts to impact the state. They reveal that this group saw themselves as part of a global peace movement and show that lament was used to further this pacifist-feminist ideology also elsewhere, beyond the borders of Finland. Although they focus on the Finnish activist group, this chapter reveals ways that lament became linked to contemporary ideologies and instrumentalised in political debates internationally.

In 'Affective Arrangements in Laments: Emotions as a Connecting Feature and a Separator in the Contentious Field of Lament in Finland in the 2020s', Viliina Silvonen examines the diverse field of laments in contemporary Finland from the perspective of emotions and seeks a better understanding of the tense and sometimes conflicted

situation surrounding these practices. The field consists of Karelian practices and various neolamenting practices, from the performing arts to healing laments that are mostly based on Karelian lamenting. In the comparative analysis, Silvonen shows that, although emotionality can be seen as the shared element in all these practices, the interpretations and meanings of emotionality vary because of differences in the basic values and ideologies of those who perpetuate the traditions.

Larissa Mulder draws this collection to a close in 'Lamenting Through Time: Unravelling the Metacultural Evolution of Irish Mourning', where she takes up the theme of the death of tradition, exploring the connections of embodied practices with memory. She argues that the breakdown of the contexts of Irish lament has not slain the genre but rather led it to move from funerary contexts to other situations and genres. Mulder takes the reader through a history of oppression and emigration to consider the metamorphoses of lament as it was carried overseas. She explores the tensions between continuities and transformations as lament was born into a new life through metacultural discourse amid ideologies of modernity and globalisation.

A Garden of Intersecting Paths

The progression of chapters offers landmarks for mapping the territory where ideologies and lament traditions intersect. Diverse themes then link the chapters to one another, revealing the paths between coordinates that allow the reader to find alternative routes between them. Modernisation, ideologies of modernity, and changes in tradition pervade these works, linking them in diverse ways. The contributions also continuously circle back to challenge the ideologies of modernity that have shaped scholarship in the past and continue to impact it in the present. Some links are surprising, such as the connection of lament and feminist protests of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the 1980s, which is addressed in both Yoken and Turunen's chapter and that of Mulder. Whereas many chapters emphasise dominant ideologies and their impacts, Arukask and Silvonen each bring lamenters' own ideologies into focus. Among the numerous thematic paths that connect the chapters, two in particular warrant some elaboration.

First, transformations of traditions appear in almost every chapter of the book. Yoken and Turunen, Žičkienė, Silvonen, Mulder, and Arukask all discuss changes and reuses of non-modernised lament traditions in twentieth- and twenty-first-century societies. These studies are all complementary, offering a much more dynamic perspective when read together than when read apart. Arukask focuses on the changes in Seto burial lamenting in the twentieth century, Žičkienė on the application of lament formulas in contemporary Lithuanian condolences, while Yoken and Turunen analyse a case of reuse of lamenting as a pacifist-feminist protest, which resonates with the strategic use of lament in the context of an epidemic discussed by Briggs. The discourse between tradition and modernity is also present in Frog's chapter that shows how the National-Romantic ideologies of heritage construction influenced Scandinavian culture so that lamenters were marginalised and the verbal art of laments became invisible. This situation can be seen as having the twofold consequence of advancing the dissolution of the tradition while preventing lament from developing value and recognisability as heritage that would enable the sorts of reuses explored in other chapters.

The discussions of transformations of traditions also often marginalise the views of laments themselves. This issue is hinted at in the discussion of Briggs and begins to open in the discussion of how changes in ideology are negotiated in the Seto case discussed by Arukask. Silvonen and Mulder bring the perspectives of laments themselves to the question of authenticity, returning the reader to the question *Are laments lost or alive and well?*, and the different ways it might be answered.

Second, emotion is particularly prominent in the volume as a feature commonly considered emblematic of lament. Chapters in this book primarily engage emotion from sociocultural perspectives. For example, both Briggs and Frog explore how ideologies shaped the reception, from the position of modernity, of emotional expressivity and emotional communication. Briggs argues that emotionality is foundational to lament's incommunicability, which can simultaneously be a medium for its empowerment. Yoken and Turunen illustrate precisely this sort of empowerment in the use of lament as a tool in feminist protests against male-dominated politics. Arukask shows that modernity's ideologies of individuality and the authenticity of emotional expression produced a tension with the collective aspects of laments that drove the tradition to evolve. The emblematicity of emotion appears at the foundations of the radical transformations and reinventions of traditions discussed in other chapters of this book. Mulder shows the movement of lament into metaculture, taking on a new life in a discourse of collective trauma and loss in Irish immigration to the United States. Žičkienė shows how lament has resonated with more recent currents in popular culture, giving it new life across different media in Lithuania. Silvonen dives more deeply into the phenomenon of emotion in the field of contemporary lamenting in Finland and how this compares and contrasts with that of Karelian laments. Although the perspectives on emotions differ greatly, emotions are a prominent theme uniting all of the chapters of this book.

The diverse studies gathered in this volume explore and illustrate how ideologies may valorise and elevate laments or subjugate and even erase them. They also show that ideologies form the lens that exoticises laments, stigmatises them, or surrounds them with a rosy aura of nostalgia. The role of ideologies becomes particularly visible in processes of de- and recontextualisation where laments are detached from their original communicative context and become prone to new interpretations and new meanings. Through the case of Irish lament, Mulder brings into focus how a tradition could be reinvented by being repurposed within a modernised milieu where the inherited tradition no longer had a place. Žičkienė explores a similar process that occurred with Lithuanian laments, which became resources for people's current needs and became popular in new media, while Silvonen examines how the reinvention of lamenting practices in Finland compares with the Karelian traditions at their foundations. These and other chapters also show that ideologies do not operate in isolation; rather, they complement, compete, and contrast with one another. Lament emerges at the nexus of a densely entangled network of ideologies as a broad territory of innumerable intersecting paths, the explorations of which open onto new methodological insights, domains, and research that are complementary when the chapters of this collection are read together. The coordinates they offer for exploring the territory where ideologies and lament meet are interconnected by countless pathways that can be followed between the different studies and then pursued beyond these pages, opening new routes of enquiry in both past and future research.

References

Literature

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1968. "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore." *Journal of American Folklore* 81(320): 143–158. <https://doi.org/10.2307/537664>
- Anttonen, Pertti. 2005. *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Bauman, Richard. 1975. "Verbal Art as Performance." *American Anthropologist*, New Series 77(2): 290–311. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1975.77.2.02a00030>
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs 2003. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486647>
- Ben-Amos, Dan, and Kenneth Goldstein, eds. 1975. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague: Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110880229>
- Bendix, Regina. 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bourke, Angela. 1988. "Working and Weeping: Women's Oral Poetry in Irish and Scottish Gaelic." Women and Gender Studies Series. Dublin: School of Social Justice, University College Dublin. <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/5715>
- Bronner, Simon J. 2022. "Inspirational Insights: The Problematic of the Vernacular." *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 16(2): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jef-2022-0010>
- Böckel, Otto. 1913. *Psychologie der Volksdichtung*. 2nd edition. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner.
- The Cambridge English Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>. References based on entries in 2025.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1994. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society Volume 1: The Myths*. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 7. Odense: Odense University Press.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 2012. *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Barcelona: [van Dijk]. <https://discourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Teun-A.-van-Dijk-2012-Ideology-And-Discourse.pdf>
- Dorson, Richard M. 1969 "Fakelore." *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 65: 56–64.
- Dundes, Alan. 1977. "Who Are the Folk?" In *Frontiers of Folklore*, edited by William R. Bascom, 17–35. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429050756-2>
- Feminist Studies* 1970–present. Washington, DC: Feminist Studies, Inc.
- Fenigsen, Janina, and James M. Wilce. 2012. "Authenticities: A Semiotic Exploration." *Semiotic Inquiry* 32(1–3): 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027774ar>
- Foley, John Miles. 2002. *How to Read an Oral Poem?* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Frog. 2022. "Diverse Conceptions of 'Folklore'" *FF Network* 56: 4–11. Accessed June 23, 2025. <https://www.folklorefellows.fi/wp-content/uploads/ART-Frog.pdf>
- Frog, Kaarina Koski and Ulla Savolainen. 2016. "At the Intersection of Text and Interpretation: An Introduction to Genre." In *Genre – Text – Interpretation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Folklore and Beyond*, edited by Kaarina Koski and Frog, with Ulla Savolainen, 17–43. *Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 22. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.21435/sff.22>

- Frog and Eila Stepanova. Forthcoming (2026). "Lamenters, Mythic Knowledge and Ritual Practice: The Question of Traditions in Late Iron Age and Medieval Scandinavia." In *Women and Goddesses in Old Norse Religion*, edited by Tommy Kuusela and Ingunn Ásdísardóttir. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Gal, Susan, and Judith T. Irvine. 2019. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108649209>
- Hafstein, Valdemar. 2001. "Biological Metaphors in Folklore Theory: An Essay in the History of Ideas." *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 57: 7–32.
- Honko, Lauri. 1974. "Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry." In *Finnish Folkloristics I*, edited by Pentti Leino with Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Urpo Vento, 9–61. *Studia Fennica* 17. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- (1978) 2013. "The Ingrian Lament as Psychopomp." In *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, edited by Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, 282–299. *FF Communications* 304. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- (1991) 2013. "The Folklore Process." In *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*. edited by Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, 29–54. *FF Communications* 304. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- 2000. "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation: An Introduction." In *Thick Corpus, Organic Variation and Textuality in Oral Tradition*, edited by Lauri Honko, 3–28. *Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 7. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Krohn, Kaarle. 1926. *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode: Begründet von Julius Krohn und weitergeführt von nordischen Forschern*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Kroskirty, Paul V. 2001. "Language Ideologies." In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 496–517. Malden: Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996522.ch22>
- Lemmings, David, and Ann Brooks. 2014. *Emotions and Social Change: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203728277>
- McLaren, Anne E. 2008. *Performing Grief. Bridal Laments in Rural China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824832322.001.0001>
- Nenola-Kallio, Aili. 1982. *Studies in Ingrian Laments*. *FF Communications* 234. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Rehmann, Jan. 2013. *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004252318>
- Rehmann, Jan, and Marko Ampuja. 2023. "Ideologiakritiikin ja -teorian perustat ja merkitys nykyisissä kamppailuissa." *Tutkimus & kritiikki* 3(1):138–59. <https://doi.org/10.55294/tk.127795>
- Silvonen, Viliina. 2022. *Apeus arkistoäänitteellä: Äänellä itkeminen performanssina ja affektiivisena käytäntönä Aunuksen Karjalassa*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki. Accessed June 23, 2025. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-7818-3>
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Kati Kallio. 2023. "Tradition and Ownership: Disputes about Karelian Laments in Finland." *Appropriation as a Perspective and Topic in the Study of Religion and Spirituality*, edited by Linda Annunen and Terhi Utriainen. Special issue of *Approaching Religion* 13(3): 40–59. <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.131229>
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Emmi Kuittinen. 2024. "Collaboration between an Artist and a Researcher in the Field of Laments in Finland." In *Joint Knowledge Production and Collaboration in Research*, edited by Kendra Stepputat and Felix Morgenstern, 57–77. *Graz Studies in Ethnomusicology* 29. Graz: Institute for Ethnomusicology University of Music and Performing Arts Graz.
- Stepanova, Eila. 2014. *Seesjärveläisten itkijöiden rekisterit: Tutkimus äänellä itkemisen käytänteistä, teemoista ja käsitteistä*. Joensuu: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura.
- 2015. "The Register of Karelian Lamenters." In *Registers of Communication*, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 258–274. *Studia Fennica Linguistica* 18. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.18>
- 2023. "Karelian Lament Poetry: From Oral Tradition to Cultural Heritage." Unpublished Paper Presented at the conference Laments Lost or Alive and Well: International Conference of the Lament Tradition, May 15–17, 2023, Helsinki, Finland.

- Stepanova, Eila, and Liisa Matveinen. 2017. "Introductions of the Songs." In *Kandomuani sinä – You, my Dear Carried-One: Laments and Other Songs from Karelia* (CD + booklet), edited by Eila Stepanova, 10–32. Global Music Centre Publications 17. Helsinki: Global Music Center.
- Tenhunen, Anna-Liisa. 2006. *Itkuvirren kolme elämää*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Tolbert, Elizabeth. 1990. "Women Cry with Words: Symbolization of Affect in the Karelian Lament." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 22: 80–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/767933>
- Valk, Ülo. 2022. "An Introduction to Vernacular Knowledge." In *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, edited by Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman, 1–23. Sheffield: Equinox. <https://doi.org/10.1558/isbn.9781800502147>
- Wilce, James M. 2009. *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444306248>
- Wilce, James M., and Janina Fenigsen. 2015. "Mourning and Honor: Register in Karelian Lament." In *Registers of Communication*. edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 187–209. *Studia Fennica Linguistica* 18. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.14>

Incommunicability

How Lamentation Pushes Us to Rethink Colonial Models of Poetics, Performance, and Communication

CHARLES L. BRIGGS

© <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2023-3285>

I start this essay by evoking a poignant example from a 1980 paper by Lauri Honko (1980) in which he raised several issues that confront me. He captured a powerful scene in which a woman commented in her lament on having just returned to her sister's home for the first time after her death. The verses conveyed the affective transformation of a landscape as the woman contrasted walking into the yard previously versus her reactions on seeing the same sight after her sister's death. Honko commented: 'The baffled question "why?" keeps recurring, and so does "this coming" and "the previous coming". Why before like that and now like this?' (ibid., 28). Each verse contrasted images of earlier arrivals: the sun 'shining brightly' versus 'such dark clouds have stopped above the yard' and nightingales playing and swallows singing versus the birds injured or killed – seemingly by the impact of death and grief; racks used for drying the skirts of 'dear sisters-in-law' stand broken (ibid., 36). This landscape of mourning became a palimpsest that overlays geographies of life and death, performatively constructed by the lamenter's poetics of mourning.

Here, I reflect on the 'why' questions that are often so pervasive in laments as they unfold through contrasting perceptions of the world, or, perhaps more accurately, divergent practices of worldmaking. The lamenter invited us to share with her a sense of the ordinariness of entering a familiar, familial, knowable landscape precisely by projecting its current unfamiliarity, foreignness, unknowable character. It had become, in Freud's (1919) terms, uncanny, utterly familiar, and strange at the same time. I want to press on the uncanniness captured by laments, the way mourners are deprived of the tools that make worlds familiar and knowable, and are trapped by states of confusion and uninterpretability. I analyse the ideological work (Gal and Irvine 2019) performed by mourners in poetically asking these difficult questions in such a way as to transform familiar lifeworlds. My essay pushes work on linguistic (Kroskrity 2000) and semiotic ideologies (Keane 2007) by questioning ideological constructions of communicability – deeply-rooted assumptions that the role of communication lies in exchanges of referential, transparent signs that render lifeworlds intelligible. Rather, I suggest that the power of lamentation emerges, in part, from its status as a quintessential embodiment of *incommunicability*, as emerging from liminal spaces in which quotidian assumptions about language, bodies, materialities, and ontologies are suddenly overturned as people are thrust into worlds in which communicability seems to have become unachievable.

I fell into studying laments somewhat accidentally. Shortly after I began collaborating with Indigenous people – generally termed Warao – in a rainforest of eastern

Venezuela, I came suddenly and unexpectedly on relatives lamenting for a young girl. During my first year of fieldwork, which included learning the language, I recorded laments that emerged in wakes and funerals. Steven Feld's (1990) work in New Guinea, Honko's (1974; 1980) studies of Karelian and other laments, and Urban's (1988) analysis of laments performed in Indigenous Brazilian communities provided key points of reference. Given my grounding in linguistic anthropology as well as folkloristics, Honko's work was valuable due to his emphasis on the poetics of Karelian laments. Honko suggested that 'The most characteristic stylistic devices of the lament are alliteration, repetition, and metaphorical language' (1974, 30). He emphasised the use of diminutives and frequentative verbs (which convey the repetitive and/or intense nature of an action), suggesting that they 'have become stylistic indexes of a particular folklore genre, which no longer have grammatical meaning' (quoted in Wilce and Fenigsen 2015, 197). Most importantly for Honko, 'The central stylistic criterion of lament, however, is its enormously kaleidoscopic language of metaphors' (1974, 34).

Suggesting that 'the metaphors of the laments are pleasant to the ear even when one does not fully understand them' (ibid., 35), Honko constructed a linguistic ideology of 'the rather obscure Karelian laments' that opposed referential interpretability to poetic elaboration. He proposed several explanations for the proliferation of metaphors. One is the need to avoid direct reference to the deceased, particularly via names or kinship terms. Another is the poetic creativity of performers, including the use of 'uninflected and meaningless' 'supplementary words [...] in order to obtain adequate alliteration and also the rhythm'. Honko goes on to suggest that 'this is a phenomenon of degeneration; probably these words originally occurred in specific contexts, and even today, in the laments of the best weepers, they do inflect and take on momentary tasks of meaning' (ibid., 35).

Eila Stepanova, a scholar of Karelian laments, has echoed this theme. She suggests that 'the main feature of Karelian and other Finnic laments is that their special poetic idiom is not easily comprehensible to the uninitiated listener' (2015, 263), and that 'it poses a considerable barrier to understanding the content' (Frog and Stepanova 2011, 204). Stepanova has related the issue of interpretability to the different discursive functions of their elaborate poetics. She suggested that 'people believed in the magic power of the name, and therefore in order to avoid harming relatives, either living or deceased, they did not mention names directly' (2012, 263). She further argued that 'the number and elaboration of the circumlocutions used by the lamenter is an indicator of the importance of the topic or object of a lament' (2017, 499). Like others, Stepanova also has argued that laments served as means of communicating with relatives dwelling in the world of the dead, as well as with its other inhabitants. She thus retains the issue of interpretability as she shifts it to this other audience: 'According to traditional beliefs, dead members of the family could not understand colloquial speech but could understand the language of laments' (2015, 263). In commenting on how 'circumlocutions [...] involved substitutions for all manner of everyday things', Wilce and Fenigsen (2015) agree with Stepanova's reorientation of the semantic transparency question: 'The relative opacity of these expressions did little to limit their effectiveness, since lamenters believed that their supernatural addressees *did* understand the lament register and not everyday language' (ibid., 196; emphasis in original). In analysing Inghrian laments, Aili Nenola (1986, 216) similarly retains a focus on intelligibility even as she moves beyond denotation: 'The etymology of some words may be unclear but their affective character is always comprehensible'.

Here, I propose an analytical shift in how we approach this question. The seemingly partial loss of referentiality actually points us to one of the most significant dimensions of laments and to why they occupy important positions within communicative economies – in terms of both ideology and practice – and also to why their study is of tremendous value for scholarship, far beyond the ranks of lament specialists. To make this argument, I must present a new theoretical framework that I have developed, which centres on the concept of incommunicability – all that seemingly escapes from ideological preoccupations with referentiality, transparency, and interpretability (Briggs 2024). Scholars often begin with the assumption that language and other semiotic forms should be communicable, that is, that another person should be able to understand the same meaning that appears in the mind of the speaker or writer. This foundational assumption leads to treating instances in which shared interpretability does not emerge as exceptions as in need of special modes of explanation. Instead, I use incommunicability – i.e. a concept that centers on instances in which communicability seems to be limited, disrupted, or impossible – as my foundational analytic, thereby opening rich discussions of the forces that thwart communicability or lead to projections of individuals or even entire populations as being incapable of achieving it. I argue here that laments provide perhaps the clearest illustration of how people inhabit incommunicable spheres. I then argue that starting analytically with incommunicability can help us analyse laments and articulate their broader communicative and scholarly importance. In illustrating how we can analyse laments through the lens of incommunicability, I document them, as encountered during a mysterious disease outbreak in the Delta Amacuro rainforest, Venezuela.

Towards Incommunicability

In previous work, I used the term ‘communicability’ to refer to ideologies of the production, circulation, and reception of cultural forms (Briggs 2005), that is, to ideas about how semiotic forms are projected as being mobile in particular ways. Rather than a scholarly mapping of what are projected as the objective facts of communicative practices, the notion provides a way of capturing the important role of ideological models that construct, interpret, and evaluate how particular social worlds are brought into being through communicative practices. One of the key bases of dominant ideologies of language in Western thought is John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ([1690] 1959). He argued that the core of language is the exchange of purely referential, abstract, transparent, disembodied, and decontextualised signs that are clearly and rationally ordered in the minds of individuals. Locke elevated white, elite, European, able-bodied males as fully capable of perfecting communicability, even as he projected women, labourers, persons with sensory disabilities, and all the people of Asia and the Americas as unable to achieve this.¹ Communicability thus came to be accepted as a model of how communication is – or at least should be – transparently enacted and a means of evaluating each individual’s knowledge and rationality on the basis of their ability to perform communicability. Race enters this picture not simply

1. Locke’s frequent exclusion of Africa in such formulations may be related to his status as an investor in a corporation that transported enslaved people to the West Indies and as the administrator for a council focused on New World plantations; see Woolhouse 2007:111.

as a preoccupation in the United States but much more broadly, given communicability's foundational association with white supremacy, colonial dominance, and racial hierarchies (Bauman and Briggs 2003).

But where does folklore enter here? Locke and other seventeenth-century thinkers constructed a foundational binary between modernity and traditionality (see Bauman and Briggs 2003). Just as inhabiting the modern subject slot involved framing discourse as embodying communicability, traditionalising subjects and discourse often focused on ideologically constructing what was cast as its opposite. Locke's contemporary, John Aubrey suggested that 'Old customs, and old wives fables are grosse things' (1972, 132) that constitute 'Encroachments of Ignorance on Mankind' (ibid., xxxi). In his view, modern communicability and technologies such as printing were leading to the disappearance of incommunicable forms. Nineteenth-century folklorists, such as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1884), often cast a positive if condescending light on how folklore seemingly departed from Lockean communicability. We can reread Regina Bendix's (1997) notion of authenticity as inscribing aestheticised indicators of communicable failure on cultural forms as markers of their traditional value. Richard Bauman traces 'country communicability', which was embodied in phonographic recordings that constructed stereotypes of rural residents as left behind by the modern transformations quintessentially embodied in urban spaces, even as it commercialised performances that imbued them with acoustic form (Bauman with Feaster 2023).

Note the positionality of folklorists here: full members of modern communicable realms, they could document departures from communicability and translate them into communicable frameworks of scholarly, rational discourse. Previously, I suggested that Américo Paredes's (1958) work is particularly valuable for its argument that Latinx folklore did not exist in blissful ignorance of white, elite communicability but rather critically engaged it and then developed alternative forms (Briggs 2012). Even as more conservative folklore scholarship paternalistically applauded the folk for their seeming ignorance of dominant regimes of communicability, much recent work either argues that performance practices of stigmatised groups have been erroneously interpreted as communicable failures or it portrays them as forms of resistance to dominant communicable regimes. The problem is that these approaches take communicability, the transfer of transparent, rationally-ordered signs, as their point of departure and then analyse what seems to lie outside of it, thereby becoming cartographers of incommunicability. Portraying folklore as the inherent embodiment of incommunicability reproduces its positionality as the stigmatised vernacular (Goldstein and Shuman 2016), maintains dominant regimes of communicability, and locates folklore scholarship as a privileged site for translating incommunicability into communicability.

Building on Black feminist theory, particularly the work of Hortense Spillers (1987) and Savannah Shange (2019), I propose taking this constitutive outside (Laclau 1990, 18) as a foundational analytic. The concept of incommunicability is helpful in four ways. First, it captures how some individuals and populations are banished from communicability, deemed incapable of performing utterances and actions required for demonstrating one's status as a modern, rational, liberal subject – often by projecting imagined communicative practices in which no one actually engages. Even as incommunicability is projected as encompassed by communicability, the subjects it produces are expelled to exterior, distanced, often stigmatised realms. Incommunicability thus becomes pathological exterior that appears after dominant communicabilities are in

place – and in charge. Second, with reference to lament, people sometimes fall into worlds of incommunicability where their communicable bases are suddenly shaken by such events as the death of a close relative or widespread fatalities during an epidemic. Accordingly, they become deprived of the communicative tools that formerly enabled them to make sense of their sensory world, calibrate their perspectives with others, and engage in the ongoing processes of self-identification. Third, the term provides a way of thinking about how some people fruitfully inhabit incommunicability, thereby refusing the primacy of communicability – its projected status as the primordial grounds for defining and evaluating subjects, subjectivities, and identities. Fourth, incommunicability invites us to reject communicability as the default starting point, presenting incommunicability as an alternative analytic. Communicability in turn becomes a more useful analytic when we see it as a constructed, contrived projection rather than an actually existing baseline. Rather than positing a binary between the two, I turn the tables by repositioning communicability *within* incommunicability, thereby dislodging communicability from its ideological dominance through a relational definition that provides a new way of approaching folklore, language, medicine, and other domains.

Starting with incommunicability can enable us to rethink the nature of folklore and its position in the world, and push folklorists to renounce their 300-plus-year history of claiming to be the people who can best bridge the seeming chasm between communicability and incommunicability. I contend that lamentation is one of the clearest embodiments of incommunicability and one of the most provocative ways in which people come to inhabit it. Moreover, I argue that its groundedness in incommunicability positions lamentation as a crucial force in communicative and political economies. Thus, I want to reposition the study of lamentation not as a sub-specialty that is only of interest to certain specialists but as central to folkloristics, not to mention women's and gender studies, anthropology, communication, and other fields.

Why privilege lamentation studies as a site for theorising incommunicability? Let me offer various reasons. The incommunicable position of the lamenter is not imposed by dominant institutions – medical, educational, legal, and other – through stigmatising practices that include denials of communicable competence and rationality. The need to perform a lament, except in the case of paid performers, springs from circumstances that lie beyond the lamenter's volition, such as deaths (and their anniversaries), rites of departures (such as when a relative is recruited to fight a war), and marriage ceremonies, as brides leave their families to join their husband's. If Locke had known about laments, he might have positioned them – rather than rhetoric – as his *bête noire*, the diametrical opposite of communicable rationality. Laments generally have crucial referential content but also develop strategies that challenge semantic transparency, thereby demanding that listeners focus their attention beyond referential content alone. The proliferation of parallelism and grammatical reduplication, along with musical elaboration, denies Lockean demands to treat signifiers (that is, dimensions of form) only as vehicles for conveying semantic content in as economical and transparent a fashion as possible. Lamenters both manipulate form-function relations (Hymes 1981) and interject signs that lie outside a Saussurean *langue*, most prominently the 'icons of crying,' in Greg Urban's (1988) terms: such features as the 'cry break,' voiced inhalation, creaky voice, and falsetto vowels create representations of crying. As Honko (1974) and others have suggested, lamentation laughs at the de-

mands of Lockean communicability that discourse must be stripped of indexical connections to specific contextual features and disembodied, that is, that they be tied to rational minds and abstract semantic relations rather than particular bodies that are linked affectively. And here is perhaps the most crucial reason: laments not only start in states of incommunicability, where ways of knowing and communicating about oneself and the world have suddenly collapsed, but they refuse to submit to communicability. A general feature of laments is that attempts to reduce them to summaries of referential content are pitiful, having stripped away most of what constitutes them as performances and moves listeners. It is hard to talk back to a lament.

Lamenting a Mysterious Outbreak in a Venezuelan Rainforest

I now turn to my most recent ethnographic work on lamentation and the rather horrific context in which it emerged. In July 2007, a strange disease appeared in Mukoboina, a small community in a Venezuelan rainforest.² Children developed fever, headache, and body aches. Parents took them to see healers. When their efforts failed, they visited local nurses. Strange symptoms followed – tingling sensations in the legs, then numbness and paralysis. The children stopped eating, then drinking. They had strange hallucinations and bouts of anxiety. Doctors and nurses in rural clinics tried intravenous lines, analgesics, antipyretics, and antibiotics, but nothing worked. After the initial deaths, a local doctor referred the patients to the nearest hospital, and, baffled, physicians then sent them to metropolitan centres to be seen by specialists. Seven children, aged between three and eleven, died between July and September of 2007 and another in January of 2008 in Mukoboina. June of 2008 witnessed more deaths over a broader area. By August, the outbreak had killed thirty-two children and six young adults. Venezuelan and Cuban epidemiologists were stumped.

In addition to the deaths, the lack of a diagnosis, and autopsies performed without consent, what bothered parents most was being excluded from efforts to produce knowledge about the disease. Parents compiled vast archives through observing their children's illness and the words and actions of healers, nurses, and doctors, vested not in written records but in the narratives that grew in length and complexity with each symptom, visit to a caregiver, and death. Although parents offered to share their stories with clinicians and epidemiologists, health professionals refused, allowing parents to participate only by responding to questions regarding such details as the children's names and dates of birth and death. Clinicians, epidemiologists, and health officials in Delta Amacuro state clearly did not consider that incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems might greatly aid efforts to identify racialised health inequities and craft policies designed to ameliorate them (Breilh 2021; Durie 2004). Parents prompted Conrado Moraleda, President of the Neighborhood Health Committee, to demand action from local health authorities, but officials seemed more interested in hiding than ending the outbreak. Conrado thus joined his brother Enrique in organising an investigation. Dr. Clara Mantini-Briggs, a Venezuelan public health physician, and I were in the area, collaborating with residents in creating a model for a new health system. The Moraledas

2. I have discussed the outbreak in previous work (Briggs 2021; Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2016). Some details – but not the analysis – come from these sources.

recruited us, along with healer Tirso Gómez and nurse Norvelis Gómez, to help figure out what was killing the children and young adults and to end the deaths.

Our work began shortly after dawn on 28 July, 2008 in Muaina, a small community near the coast (see Figure 1). Arriving at Muaina produced one of those scenes that is both unimaginable and whose horror you know intimately, where your feet seem to be pulled along by a desire to launch headlong into it – and yet susceptible at any point to the urge to turn and run. The doorway, flooded with tropical sunshine, led to a darkened interior where we would confront our first direct encounter with a body claimed by the mysterious disease.



Figure 1. Muaina, Delta Amacuro, Venezuela, 2008. Photo: Charles L. Briggs.

On the right side of the house, a healer with greying hair and a kind face was treating a young man who lay before him in a hammock. His song, which commanded *hebu* pathogens to leave the boy's body and end his cramping, was drowned out by the voices of five women and one adolescent. They became visible as we approached more closely and saw a young man in a coffin. Mamerto Pizarro was the third and most recent Muainan claimed by the unknown disease (see Figure 2). The mourners' faces, traced by grief and more than a day of mourning, were of his mother, grandmother, two aunts, sister, and brother. Nevertheless, their renewed energy sprung from their awareness that they would soon be taking Pizarro by canoe to the cemetery.

Our visit focused on figuring out the cause of the disease and finding a way to prevent more deaths. We came to Muaina for a meeting, hoping that hearing residents speak one-by-one about the outbreak would enable us to piece together what had caused it. Their testimonies could provide the 'facts' that would enable us to create an epidemiological table that would turn deaths into cases and reveal temporal and spatial contours that would help us see how the disease had spread. But laments cannot be easily inserted into clinical, epidemiological, or journalistic spaces, even along



Figure 2. Mamerto Pizarro, pictured while studying at the Indigenous University of Venezuela in Tauca, circa 2006. Photo: unknown, used with permission of Pizarro family.

their borders. You cannot elicit the performance of a lament in the Delta, only the immediacy of a death can do that.³ Laments have rich referential content, powerfully making memories and images, but these emerge as fragments that are woven into musical, poetic, and acoustic features and into relations between a lifeless body and the performers' bodies, which rock back and forth, grasp the corpse, and bathe it with tears. These dimensions are hard to transcribe, and they are even harder to summarise. Comprehending the words sung in laments requires fluency in Warao and immersion in the specificities of kinship relations, biographies, and histories of connections and conflicts within and among settlements.

Below is a transcription of the text of a forty-five-second section of the laments we witnessed that morning. It features Pizarro's mother, grandmother, two aunts, and his fifteen-year-old brother, Melvi. Although men do perform laments in some Warao communities, they seldom compose extensive verses but largely repeat refrains that capture the impact of the loss. Melvi's lament was striking both for his age and how he contributes to and echoes the collective construction and circulation of referential content, even as his musical elaboration was more limited. Producing this transcript involved many hours of work with the women (and the younger brother in this case) in discerning what was sung. The women's remarkable ability to remember and to sing again their laments was key; they asserted that these words continue to hold tremendous value. I have separated the lamenters' contributions to make them easier to read. In the performance, their voices are closely woven together in polyphonic fashion.⁴

3. It is, however, quite possible to ask people to repeat verses of laments that they have sung previously; in Hymes's terms (1981), however, such acts are "reports" of past performances.

4. See Briggs (1992) on the polyphonic dynamics of Warao laments and Briggs (1993) on their musical and acoustic dimensions.

Brother:

My brother, when you were still healthy, we got along well together; now you have left without me. When you were well, you would go with me to Siawani to grow ocumo chino tubers; now you have left me.

My brother, we milled lumber together at the sawmill; now you have left me. When you were healthy, you would get up at dawn to put diesel in the big generator, and then we would plane and finish the boards, while you were still healthy. Now death has claimed you, you died without me.

Grandmother:

You, my grandson, before you died, you used to sleep in my house, you fished for me.

Perhaps you fell into this state because you chastised a healer or because you had a bad tongue?

Aunt Catalina:

You have suffered terribly now, we thought that you were going to get well.

I see that things came out very badly for you now, why did it have to be like this? What happened that made you suffer so miserably? Since you had been healthy, when you got sick we thought that you were going to recover. But now you truly became ill.

Aunt Berta:

This drunken woman [referring to herself] is wailing, she is wailing for her nephew. You won't be the only one to die, I'm going to die, too, but it won't be tomorrow, I don't know when. Your younger brother went before you, now you are following him; you are going away and leaving us, both of you.

Mother:

My child, you were so strong and healthy, but now you are really in bad shape; what happened to you to make you end up like this?

When you were well, you were very successful [in the Indigenous University of Venezuela], but now you have left us, we can't see you again, I will never encounter you again.

We thought that you were going to get well. You have abandoned your home because you have gone. And I will also never see you again.

In what land did you die?

This began when your uncles, who work as school-boat drivers, crashed into each other's boats, afterwards you died. It was their fault that you died.

You have taken the same path [as your younger brother], both of you are leaving together. The two of you have gone away together. Just as you used to go out together, you are leaving together again, we will never again see you. Together you brought us sadness.

All female lamenters:

You won't be the only one to die – we will follow you into death! We will not be like the forest, which never grows old.

Melvi characterised his close relationship with his older brother. After alluding to pleasant memories of returning with him to their mother's childhood community to grow sago tubers, he focused on the immediate past. The government paid contractors to build the sorts of houses inhabited by non-Indigenous people on the mainland, using lumber cut from nearby forests and sheets of particle board. The contractors hired Mamerto and Melvi to cut trees, bring them by motorboat to Muaina, and mill them into lumber (see Figure 3). Melvi thus chants: 'we milled lumber together with the sawmill [...] you would get up at dawn to put diesel in the big generator, and then

we would plane and finish the boards.' The other lamenters then picked up on these words. Here, we come back to Honko's question of the place of landscapes in laments: the sawmill was visible right beyond the house. The lamenters were thus transforming the contractors' appropriation of the village grounds into a landscape of mourning, such that the sawmill became part of the geography of death.



Figure 3. The contractors' sawmill in Muaina, 2008. Photo: Charles L. Briggs.

The maternal grandmother emphasised how close she was to Pizarro – how he used to sleep in her house and catch fish for his grandparents, suggesting his generosity and familial loyalty. She juxtaposed a corporeal geography that traced a sudden shift from his healthy childhood and youth to his sudden illness and death through a seemingly tangential allusion to how he 'chastised a shaman'. This cryptic reference adds to the sawmill trope in turning 'why' questions into a series of hypotheses about what might be causing the outbreak.

Florencia Macotera, Pizarro's mother, asks a series of 'why' questions that portray her puzzlement over how such a 'strong and healthy' youth could quickly get in 'really bad shape'. Showing great promise, Pizarro had been chosen by Muaina's leader, Librado Moraleta, to succeed him as the latter was dying from cancer. Macotera remembers that Pizarro gained admission to the Indigenous University of Venezuela and had excelled there. Her question 'In what land did you die?' refers to his death in a tertiary care facility in the metropolitan centre of Puerto Ordaz. Although she knows the location, her statement conveys her inability to visualise the scene, because she did not accompany her husband and Pizarro's wife as they took him in an ambulance. Macotera accordingly did not see him die there, nor had she ever visited the hospital. She takes up the grandmother's parodic and critical revoicing of a powerful healer's claim that Pizarro had 'a loose tongue' and had insulted him, thereby asking

if a conflict that emerged after two uncles who drove children to school in their boats might have resulted in forms of sorcery that somehow affected Pizarro. Each happy image becomes part of the landscape of mourning and epidemiology that she is tracing as she punctures each of these imagistic bubbles by declaring that they will never be repeated.

Aunt Catalina extends this juxtaposition of images of a thriving youth endowed with a promising future with his 'miserable' suffering. She notes that the symptoms he initially presented seemed like familiar sorts of maladies, thus 'we thought that you were going to get well'. Aunt Berta, who was quite overwhelmed with grief, places Pizarro's death in the context of other deaths in the outbreak: 'Your younger brother went before you, now you are following him; you are going away and leaving us, both of you'. All of the female wailers converged in projecting how Pizarro's death has undermined their will to live: 'You won't be the only one to die – we will follow you into death! We will not be like the forest, which never grows old'. I have here only summarised forty-five seconds of lament performances that had continued all night and would only end with when Pizarro was taken to the cemetery in the afternoon.

Given that Pizarro was Enrique's nephew and that he had assisted with transporting his body to Muaina, Enrique knew that laments were being sung that morning. He thus designed the beginning of our investigation in such a way that it would start precisely by listening to laments. Macotera was lost in a space of incommunicability; as she exclaimed over and over in her lament, she had no idea what had killed her two sons and desperately wanted answers. The outbreak had left everyone – parents, community representatives, nurses, and physicians in a state of incommunicability, such that all strategies for producing and sharing knowledge had failed. Rather than embracing that space, health officials attempted to suppress it by forbidding the local doctor from drawing attention to the outbreak. His inability to provide a diagnosis sprung, in part, from treating the parents as incommunicable – as unable to offer more than the most rudimentary contributions to producing knowledge about the illnesses and deaths (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2016). The laments conveyed this overwhelming sense of incommunicability far more than their mere referential content. This sense of confusion and uncertainty was heightened by the unnerving acoustics and poetics of laments, with rapid bursts of textual phrases strung between slow and emphatic refrains that asserted the finality of the death, inflected by complex acoustic parameters that reached into listeners, enmeshing them in powerful affects. By starting in the space of lamentation, Conrado, Enrique, Norvelis, Tirso, Clara, and I joined the parents and other Muaina residents within the space of incommunicability. Indeed, hearing the laments, we had no choice.

In Delta Amacuro, laments form a quintessential space of collective incommunicability, where performers and listeners join together in questioning what has taken place and why. The status of laments as means of constructing landscapes of mourning rendered them perfect means of tacking the epidemiological puzzle by examining each site that Pizarro had recently occupied, leading to a collective process of knowledge production. Lamenters demanded not only answers but official action – they frequently enjoined us to 'tell Chávez', that is, to bypass the local government and its notorious indifference to the lives and deaths of Indigenous residents and take word of the outbreak directly to officials of President Hugo Chávez's pro-Indigenous administration.

Laments furnish openings that can provide affordances for other types of performances. Macotera could hear the parents and community members as they participated in the collective narrative performances taking place next door. Indeed, given that Warao houses lack walls, narratives and laments were acoustically overlaid all morning. Macotera got up slowly from beside Pizarro's coffin about an hour into the meeting to tell her story. The previous speaker wrapped up quickly, and everyone moved aside as Macotera walked ever so slowly toward the narrator's white plastic chair (see Figure 4). Her white shirt was soiled, her hair in disarray, and her face drawn from days of worry followed by a night and morning of intense mourning. She related how her younger son, nine-year-old Dalvi, felt ill during a cousin's wake. She traced Dalvi's neurological abnormalities on her own legs, mapping the tingling in his feet and the progression of numbness and paralysis upwards to his waist. Macotera's face became contorted as she mirrored Dalvi's shock when he choked on a sticky soft drink – he could no longer swallow fluids. After describing the assistance she obtained from the local nurse, Macotera recounted the parents' decision to take Dalvi to a larger community with physicians and renowned healers.⁵



Figure 4. Florencia Macotera narrating the death of her younger son, Dalvi, 2008. Photo: Charles L. Briggs.

5. I analyse this narrative in Briggs (2019).

Leaving not a dry eye, Macotera recalled Dalvi's dying words, uttered as the short boat ride was ending. Muaina lacks potable water and sewage infrastructures, but a generator sometimes provides a few hours of electricity. Several houses boast DirecTV connections and large screen televisions, enabling Dalvi to see Power Rangers television programs. During the trip, he seemed to be fighting these cartoon villains. Macotera quoted her son as saying: 'Mama, the monsters have killed me. They have taken my heart. Mama, I'm leaving without you now. I'm going now. My dead cousin Eduardito has come to get me. He's with me. I'm going now. We're going now.' Macotera then recounted her response: 'don't die yet son. Wait a little longer for me.' Quoting his words once again, Macotera portrays the remarkable empathy evident in his reply: 'Okay, I'll stay. I won't die. I'm not going to die, Mama.' She reported, however, that Dalvi's eyes were closing, his voice fading. Macotera then quoted his final words:

Mama, Mama, I won't die. I won't die. I won't die. Mama, for you I won't die. My body will grow cold, but I won't die. I'm going to come for you, Mama. Wait for me, Mama. When I die, don't cry for me. Don't cry for me.

Macotera concludes the story in her own words: 'And then he grew silent. My son Dalvi died'. With this description, Macotera's complex intertextual weaving of lament and narrative came full circle as we learned how her son had provided her in advance with the words that she would use in performing a lament over his body.

The narratives and laments similarly presented the parents' vast narrative archives of knowledge regarding preceding events, detailed accounts of their children's diet, words, and actions, how the parents had tried to save them, and input from healers, nurses, and doctors – the material that doctors had rejected. Just as her lament explored a geography of epidemiological hypotheses, Macotera's narrative provided rich diagnostic detail. Her embodied description suggested the possibility of a disease of the nervous system, one that would pass upwards from feet to legs to hips to the central nervous system, at which point it interfered with the complex process of swallowing and prompted hallucinations. It seems to be the case that the disease changed the nervous system of a nine-year-old boy, who had never exhibited a heightened degree of empathy in the past, in such a way that he exhibited a maturity far beyond his age in anticipating his mother's mourning and trying to console her. Dr. Clara Mantini-Briggs was quick to pick up on how these symptoms suggested possible infection with the rabies virus, occasioning a hypothesis that she was soon able to confirm clinically.

Pizarro's wife, Elbia Rivas Torres, did not perform a lament at his wake (see Figure 5). Resting next to her mother in a hammock in an adjacent house, she was already experiencing symptoms. Her family asked us to visit her. Our work during the next days started and ended with visits to the Rivas Torres. Clinical examination enabled Dr. Clara Mantini-Briggs to provide a presumptive clinical diagnosis of rabies, a viral neurological disease with no cure and a virtually 100% case fatality rate.⁶ Together with nurse Norvelis Gómez, Dr. Mantini-Briggs was able to provide palliative care to ease Rivas Torres's intense pain. The family asked us to document her wake and funeral (see Figure 6).

6. Timely vaccination after exposure to an animal bite is, however, effective in preventing rabies.



Figure 5. Elbia Torres Rivas, as she was dying, with her mother, Anita Rivas, 2008. Photo: Charles L. Briggs.

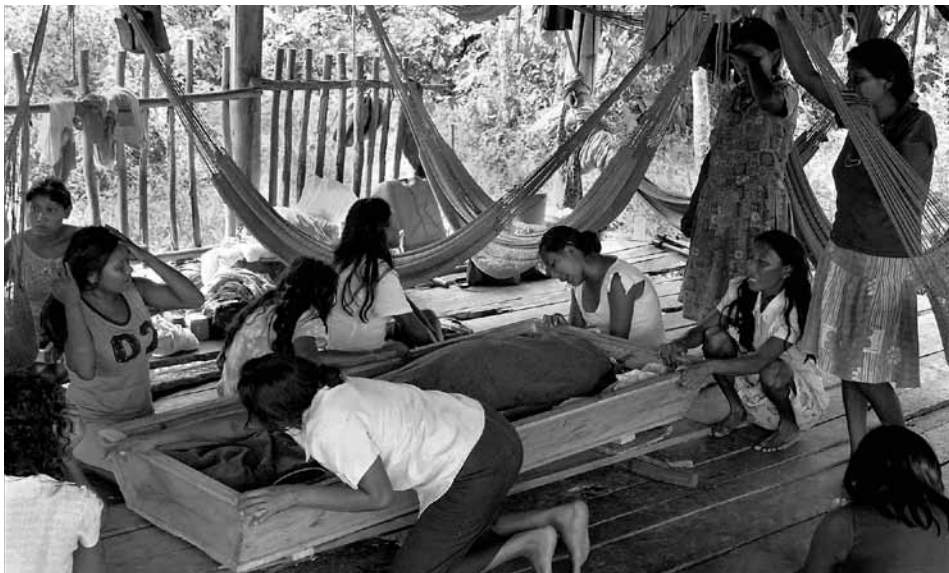


Figure 6. Singing laments for Elbia Torres Rivas, Barranquita, 2008. Photo: Charles L. Briggs.

The outbreak was hardly the first time that the Delta residents experienced incommunicability. Delta Amacuro's political-economic landscape rests on a racialised opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The former are stereotyped as so deeply enmeshed in a premodern world that 'they' are incapable of thinking rationally, acting politically, or mastering basic concepts of hygiene and medicine. Racialisation structures clinical encounters, such that Indigenous patients are deemed incapable of participating actively in diagnosis, of grasping what physicians tell them (even when translated by bilingual Indigenous nurses), or following through on treatment regimes.

In short, following the colonial logic so powerfully analysed by Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008), physicians turn their patients into incommunicable subjects by constructing them as communicable failures, a process that is repeated in educational, political, economic, media, and other contexts.

Herein lies the power of what Enrique and Conrado organised in community after community where children had died – they met the parents' long-standing demands to provide acts of witnessing in a forum for the public and collective sharing of knowledge. Parents were vitally interested in contributing to the diagnostic process, pressing their demand to 'tell me why my children died!' Having lost one, two, or three children, they did not want anyone else to die. Their laments and stories also demanded acts of listening that would affirm the value of the children's lives and the importance of their deaths. By taking a report directly to the capital and telling the story to national and international journalists, the four Indigenous representatives provided evidence that Indigenous people could contribute to producing health knowledge. They demanded an end to the stereotype of incommunicability that was used to denigrate Indigenous residents and deny their basic constitutional rights. National and international journalists portrayed the four as articulate and agentive and recognised their demands for an active role in shaping health and other policies in Delta Amacuro (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2016, 136–150). Equally important here is how the process began – by prioritising the space of lamentation to fully embrace the state of incommunicability induced by the outbreak and use it to craft new ways of thinking and acting.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to develop further my case that laments provide a quintessential embodiment of incommunicability. Honko (1974, 35) wrote that 'the metaphors of the laments are pleasant to the ear even when one does not fully understand them'. Even as he put his finger on a basic feature of lament, I would not frame the issue as a binary between poetics versus reference. His formulation starts from communicability, from the Lockean conviction that each stretch of discourse should be interpretable in semantic terms, yielding a transparent analysis of its contents. Lament texts that do not yield to this process of interpretation can then be judged to be products of 'a phenomenon of degeneration' (ibid., 35).

Instead, I have started the other way around, with the lamenter's experience of incommunicability, of inhabiting a life world where faith in the self, language, and knowledge has been shaken. The perception of incommunicability does not spring from difficulties in decoding referential content but rather the inverse – from grasping the performers' expressions of incommunicability – of doubt, confusion, and disorientation. Knowledge of the tradition and competence in performing and listening to laments thus increases people's ability to productively inhabit spaces and states of incommunicability. The relationship between self and voice was similarly called into question as the Delta Amacuro lamenters constantly expressed their inability to accomplish what they most wished to do: obtain answers, contact the deceased, turn things around. The polyphonic structure of Warao laments meant that the individual voices were not organized in a harmonic (or monophonic) chorus but rather maintained their own rhythms, pitches, and content even as they were loosely coordinated with other performers along all these

criteria (Briggs 1992). The very notion of communication was likewise upended as lamenters seemed to be talking to and with the dead, even as their own selves and those of their deceased relatives had become unreachable. Human beings who were listening were demoted to the status of overhearers. The issue was not that it was impossible to identify the referential content – I did so, in collaboration with the lamenters. Rather, the overwhelming outpouring of words, music, motion, and other signs of mourning embedded the processes of picking out fragments of reference within a process of reading the broader semiotic and psychic contours of the laments.

The gripping affective and acoustic power of Warao lamentation includes suppression of an overtone often referred to as the ‘singer’s formant’ (Briggs 1993). The singer’s formant is a concentration of energy between 1.8 and 3.8 kHz, which lends a ‘bright timbre’ to the voice. Warao lamenters, on the other hand, implicitly project affective intensity by suppressing sound in this range, making listeners’ eardrums resonate with the acoustic parameters of what is taking place within the lamenters. The incommunicability of laments is thus infectious. Even community members who were less directly affected by the death were called to embrace – if to varying degrees – senses of uncertainty, disruption, dislocation. There was no simple way to switch off the communicative and psychic effects of the laments, just as it was difficult to declare their content to be false. As we saw with Macotera’s narrative, this incommunicability spread to other genres, even as it is transposed into their poetic and ontological structures.

Beyond times of wakes and funerals, the incommunicability of laments invades broader natural-cultural parameters. Warao communities are largely androcentric, where the voices of powerful males (who are generally the political leaders and most powerful healers) often silence those of women. Nevertheless, even the most dominant and sometimes threatening males are constantly aware that women are likely to hold them accountable later in maximally visible and audible events when a death occurs. Powerful healers have sometimes been expelled by communities after lamenters accuse them of complicity in causing one or more deaths. Although the circumstances of the rabies outbreak were extraordinary, these laments and their collective performance fit rather closely with the patterns I have observed in Warao laments over several decades. Moreover, without pretending to propose any sort of universal, I do not think that Warao lamentation is unique here. One of the reasons that Karelian lamentation is particularly interesting is its tremendous prominence as a cultural form, which seems to provide a basis for its current re-traditionalisation today. I would surmise, based on the literature, that it thus exerts a powerful force in broader communicative, as well as social and more-than-human, ecologies in communities where laments are performed.

Many readers of this volume would probably agree that laments constitute one of the most crucial topics for folklorists, but I think that it is worth thinking about how to make this point clearly for scholars who do not focus on the genre. Starting with John Aubrey (1972) in the seventeenth century, the people we now call folklorists have claimed a dual status, positioning themselves as full members of realms of modern communicability and as uniquely qualified to identify those of incommunicability. They document the cultural forms that incommunicable worlds hold and translate them into communicable objects that can be offered to other moderns. For centuries, they gathered the purportedly disappearing fragments of incommunicable cultures to tell tragic tales of the impending triumph of communicability. There might seem to be a contradiction in claiming to be a champion of incommunicability, all the while appropriating what are labelled

as fragments of incommunicability and handing them over as communicable symbolic capital to elites, to echo Jack Zipes (1979) critique of the Brothers Grimm.

I am proposing that we make a clear break with this 300-plus-year history. Folklorists have seldom been terribly successful in advancing the case that they have the most powerful tools for producing communicability – for fashioning objects that are quintessential embodiments of precision, rationality, and transparency. Despite their best efforts, their raw material – folklore – limits the success of this project, given the impossibility of irradiating traces of incommunicability. If we come to see laments as quintessential embodiments of incommunicability and as invitations to see worlds through its lenses, then lament study can offer itself as a model for building a critical folkloristics by embracing incommunicability as a foundational principle and point of departure. Rather than standing as an artifact of alterity, as an alien if fascinating cultural form, we can position lamentation as a quintessential embodiment of incommunicability, and thus a central dimension of life. It stands both as a space which we enter when forms of knowledge and structures of intelligibility fall apart and when regimes of communicability judge people – particularly members of racialised populations – to be communicable failures. In the latter case, people often embrace these spaces of incommunicability not due to their presumed ignorance of modern communicability but rather as means of critically and sometimes parodically engaging its ideologies and poetics. In short, communicability and incommunicability are both powerful ideological tools, and it would be valuable for scholars to analyse the ideological work they do. Otherwise, our understanding of incommunicability will be shaped by the false images that those claiming the status of modern citizens do in constructing stereotypes of incommunicable subjects.

If folklorists can learn to dwell, analytically, *within* incommunicability and use this position to critique dominant communicabilities, they will launch a critical folkloristics. This step requires a degree of humility and the willingness to surrender the scholarly arrogance which suggests that only folklorists can adequately interpret what eludes ‘the folk’. Rather, embracing incommunicability entails becoming apprentices to non-elite actors, including those of racialised and stigmatised communities, who have long developed keen understandings of how incommunicability is produced and how it can be used to X-ray natural-cultural hierarchies and their effects of power. The work of W.E.B. Du Bois ([1903] 1990) and Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008) are, I would suggest, models here. Accordingly, placing incommunicability at the centre of analytic infrastructures could provide an excellent means of advancing the crucial work of decolonising folkloristics.

Acknowledgments

The performances discussed in this chapter were recorded while collaborating with Conrado Moraleda, Enrique Moraleda, Norvelis Gómez, Tirso Gómez, Clara Mantini-Briggs, and the residents of Barranquita, Muaina, and twelve other communities in diagnosing and documenting the outbreak in 2008. I thank the other members of the team; Florencia Macotera and Indalesio Pizarro (Mamerto’s parents); Anita Rivas and Arsenio Torres (Elbia’s parents) for teaching me so much about the power of collaboration. Viliina Silvonen invited me to the conference that give rise to this volume and, along with Eila Stepanova, ushered it through the review and editorial process. I thank members of the Helsinki audience for useful questions and comments.

References

Sources

In the course of fieldwork in Delta Amacuro state between 1986 and the present, I have recorded laments in Arawaimuhu, Murako, Kwamuhu, Mariusa, and other areas of the Delta and joined with lamenters and their relatives in transcribing and discussing them.

Literature

- Aubrey, John. 1972. *Three Prose Works*, edited by John Buchanan-Brown. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press.
- Bauman, Richard, with Patrick Feaster. 2023. *A Most Valuable Medium: The Remediation of Oral Performance on Early Commercial Recordings*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv31xf5jb>
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles L. Briggs. 2003. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and Social Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486647>
- Bendix, Regina. 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Breilh, Jaime. 2021. *Critical Epidemiology and the People's Health*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780190492786.001.0001>
- Briggs, Charles L. 1992. "'Since I am a Woman, I Will Chastise my Relatives': Gender, Reported Speech, and the (Re)Production of Social Relations in Warao Ritual Wailing." *American Ethnologist* 19(2): 337–361. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1992.19.2.02a00080>
- 1993. "Personal Sentiments and Polyphonic Voices in Warao Women's Ritual Wailing: Music and Poetics in a Critical and Collective Discourse." *American Anthropologist* 95(4): 929–957. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1993.95.4.02a00080>
- 2005. "Communicability, Racial Discourse, and Disease." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34: 269–291. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120618>
- 2012. "What We Should Have Learned from Américo Paredes: The Politics of Communicability and the Making of Folkloristics." *Journal of American Folklore* 125(495): 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.125.495.0091>
- 2019. "The Bodies of the Narrator." In *Contexts of Folklore*, edited by Simon J. Bronner and Wolfgang Mieder, 87–98. New York: Peter Lang.
- 2021. *Unlearning: Rethinking Poetics, Pandemics, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Logan: Utah State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7330/9781646421022>
- 2024. *Incommunicable: Toward Communicative Justice in Health and Medicine*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.122697>
- Briggs, Charles L., and Clara Mantini-Briggs. 2016. *Tell Me Why My Children Died: Rabies, Indigenous Knowledge and Communicative Justice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smhr5>

- Du Bois, William E. B. (1903) 1990. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Vintage.
- Durie, Mason. 2004. "Understanding Health and Illness: Research at the Interface between Science and Indigenous Knowledge." *International Journal of Epidemiology* 33(5): 1138–1143. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyh250>
- Fanon, Frantz. (1952) 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markman. New York: Grove Press.
- Feld, Stephen. 1990. "Wept Thoughts: The Voicing of Kaluli Memories." *Oral Tradition* 5(2–3): 241–266.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1919). The 'Uncanny.' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII (1917–1919), *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217–256. London: Hogarth.
- Frog, and Eila Stepanova. 2011. "Alliteration in (Balto-)Finnic languages." In *Alliteration in Culture*, edited by Jonathan Roper, 195–218. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305878_13
- Gal, Susan, and Judith Irvine 2019. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108649209>
- Goldstein, Diane E., and Amy Shuman. 2016. *The Stigmatized Vernacular: Where Reflexivity Meets Untellability*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2979/stigmatizedvernacular.0.0.01>
- Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. 1884. *Grimm's Household Tales*, tr. Margaret Hunt. 2 vols. London: George Bell and Sons.
- Honko, Lauri. 1974. "Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry." In *Finnish Folkloristics I*, edited by Pentti Leino with Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Urpo Vento, 9–61. *Studia Fennica* 17. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 1980. "The Lament: Problems of Genre, Structure and Reproduction." In *Genre, Structure and Reproduction in Oral Literature*, edited by Lauri Honko and Vilmos Voigt, 21–40. Budapest: Akadémiai Kaidó.
- Hymes, Dell. 1981. *'In Vain I tried to Tell You': Essays in Native America Ethnopoetics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9781512802917>
- Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kroskirty, Paul V. ed. 2000. *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research.
- Laclau, Ernest. 1990. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso.
- Locke, John. (1690) 1959. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. New York: Dover.
- Nenola-Kallio, Aili. 1986. The Units of Comparison in the Study of Baltic-Finnish Laments. *Journal of Folklore Research* 23(2): 205–220.
- Paredes, Américo. 1958. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Shange, Savannah. 2019. *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness, and Schooling in San Francisco*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007401>
- Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17(2): 64–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/464747>
- Stepanova, Eila. 2012. "Mythic Elements of Karelian Laments: The Case of *syndyzet* and *spuasuzet*." In *Mythic Discourses: Studies in Uralic Traditions*, edited by Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala, and Eila Stepanova, 257–287. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 2015. "The Register of Karelian Lamenters." In *Registers of Communication*, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 258–274. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.18>
- 2017. "Parallelism in Karelian Laments." *Oral Tradition* 31(2): 485–508. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ort.2017.0018>
- Urban, Greg. 1988. "Ritual Wailing in Amerindian Brazil." *American Anthropologist* 90(2): 385–400. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1988.90.2.02a00090>

- Wilce, James M., and Janina Fenigsen. 2015. "Mourning and Honor Register in Karelian Lament." In *Registers of Communication*, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 187–209. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.14>
- Woolhouse, Roger. 2007. *Locke: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zipes, Jack. 1979. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Scandinavian Laments in Modern Times

Evidence versus Invisibility

FROG

📄 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5967-6281>

En Kirkefærd, hvorunder en rig Afdød føres til Graven, giver dog maaske det mærkeligste Træk af disse gamle Skikke. Thi her anvendes stundom Græde- og Hyle-Koner. De sidde, indtil otte i Tallet, omkring Kisten i en egen Baad. Deres Dragt er sort, med hvide, nonneagtige Hovedklæder. Man kan høre deres Jammer paa Afstand, medens Farten gaar sagte over Vandet. Naar de stige i Land, tiltage deres Klage-Hyl. De græde virkelige Taarer, – thi det er deres Fag, og denne embedsmæssige Sorg har gode Sportler. Disse gamle Kvinder have en egen Stil i Hændervridninger og Gebærder. Det er et kristeligt Eumenide-Chor, der giver Begravelses Ceremonien en vild, dramatisk Virkning, bag hvilken Sørgehusets LigeGYldighed eller Kummer kan unddrage sig Mængdens Blik. Denne Pomp er dog en Sjeldenhed, og man taler længe efter om den lykkelige Hensovede, der havde Græde-Koner ved sin Grav. (Welhaven [1842] 1851, 156.)

A journey to the church, during which a rich deceased person is conveyed to his grave, indeed offers perhaps the most remarkable trait of these old customs. For here weeping-women or wailing-women are sometimes used. They sit as many as eight in number around the coffin in their own boat. Their dress is black with white, nun-like headwear. One can hear their lamentation at a distance, while headway is made slowly over the water. When they come to shore, their complaint-wailing increases. They weep real tears – for it is their trade, and this official mourning has good compensation. These old women have their own manner of wringing their hands and of gesticulation. It is a Christian chorus of Eumenides, which gives the burial ceremony a wild, dramatic effect, behind which the family of the deceased's indifference or grief can evade the gaze of the crowd. Their pomp is however a rarity, and it is talked of long after about the lucky one who has passed away, who had weeping-women at his grave. (Trans. Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen.)

The passage above is Johan Sebastian Welhaven's description of lamenters. It appears in *Billeder fra Bergens-Kysten* (Images from the Coast of Bergen), which was first published in three instalments in the newspaper *Den Constitutionelle* in 1842 and then circulated in a collection of Welhaven's writings first published in 1851, when interest in Germanic funerary songs was beginning to rise (e.g. Müllenhoff 1847, 25–26). Welhaven's *Billeder* was soon embraced as part of the National-Romantic literature. It was included in schoolbooks (e.g. Lassen 1861) and was even plagiarised in German (Krauss 1888, 687). The description above was thus very widely read, and yet Scandinavian lament traditions of this period are generally unrecognized, unknown, and unresearched. They are invisible to international lament research and unknown to the scholars debating the existence

of lament traditions in medieval and Iron Age Scandinavia. The present chapter is concerned with this invisibility, which is argued to be the result of stratified and intersecting ideologies that have impacted on the traditions, on how those traditions were perceived by people interested in documenting folklore, and also on researchers' interests.

Ideology is approached here according to the concept of semiotic ideologies, developed in linguistic anthropology (e.g. Kroskrity 2001; Keane 2018; Gal and Irvine 2019), combined with an approach to culture as constituted of socially circulating signs (e.g. Urban 1991, 1). An ideology is thus understood as a system of ideas, assumptions and evaluations that link sign systems or practices to people, time, places or things in the world and situates these in relation to one another. From this perspective, linking a practice like lament to gender (e.g. Stepanova 2015, 270) occurs at the level of ideology, as does a folklore collector's relative evaluation of certain traditions as relevant or interesting to document while other traditions remained irrelevant or not recognized as 'traditions' at all (Frog 2019, 225).

Welhaven's description offers a valuable point of departure for discussion because, under scrutiny, it reveals several points of tension between the tradition described and ideologies of National-Romanticism and modernity. It is easily overlooked that Welhaven's description is not from a nineteenth century travelogue but rather a crafted literary work that constructs the area where he grew up into a glorious and somewhat mystical living parallel to the ancient world on the Mediterranean Sea, with comparisons to Ithaca, the Sphinx, Pompeii, the Kraken and Leviathan, the Vatican and so on ([1842] 1851, 138–143). His paragraph on funerary customs stands out as foregrounding lamenters as exotic rather than making the potentially mundane exotic through comparison, hyperbole, and enriching descriptions. Furthermore, his representation is laced with features of contention from the perspective of modernity. His comment above that the women cried *virkelige taarer* (real tears) for *gode sportler* (good compensation) connects with points of concern about both the authenticity of the performed emotion (cf. Gleditch 1919, 460) and the ethics of its commodification (e.g. Boisen 1853, 360).¹ Welhaven mitigates the tensions by considering the value of the spectacle in enabling the deceased's relatives to *unddrage sig nængdens blik* (evade the gaze of the crowd) (cf. Boisen 1853, 360). Welhaven's preceding paragraph frames lamenting as a peculiar feature of local Christian religious life comparable to the *katholsk, mumlende Tilbedelse* (Catholic, mumbling worship) and *forældede Psalmer* (outdated hymns) – i.e. of pre-Reformation rather than pre-Christian practices (cf. Kallio et al. 2017, 56–126), emphasised by describing the lamenters as a *kristeligt chor* (Christian chorus). Calling the lamenters a Greek chorus confers a significance of high culture on what the women do, yet framing it in relation to drama simultaneously underscores their expressive behaviour as performance in a coordinated orchestration of collective agency. Within the crafting of this literary work, identifying the lamenters with the Eumenides – i.e. the Furies – cannot be considered neutral or accidental and reveals a deep tension: he characterizes the lamenters as a swarm of monstrous, powerful and threatening agents of emotion whose performance gives the funeral *en vild, dramatisk virkning* (a wild, dramatic effect) (cf. Wilce 2009, 49–51). Welhaven presents the lamenters as exotic and

1. On the struggle, from the perspective of modernity, with authenticity in lament performance, see Wilce 2009, ch. 3; on authenticity in discourse surrounding folklore more generally, see Bendix 1997.

fascinating for his audience. However, rather than framing them as representing a valuable tradition of the past, his depiction reveals something deeply troubling about them, which reflects a tension between this tradition and the dominant ideologies of his time.

Lament is here approached following Eila Stepanova's definition as:

sung poetry of varying degrees of improvisation, which nonetheless follows conventionalized rules of traditional verbal and non-verbal expression, most often performed by women in ritual contexts and potentially also on non-ritual grievous occasions (Stepanova 2015, 258).

Lament researchers will immediately recognise that Welhaven is describing some type of ritual. However, an astute reader will observe that the verbal component of performance is not explicit, even if it could be implied by the comparison to a Greek chorus. In this respect, Welhaven's description seems to be characteristic of other references and descriptions in modern times. Currently, I have found only two mentions of lamenters' use of language, one of which is by a priest rather than a folklore collector (Leganger 1922, 225). These threads of evidence weave together with the evidence from the medieval period and broader comparisons to consider sources like Welhaven's description to refer to a lament tradition in line with Stepanova's definition. The invisibility of lamenters' speech thus becomes a point for consideration.

The present chapter offers a general overview of the discussions and evidence of Scandinavian lament traditions, situating them in the broader context of the Circum-Baltic as a macro-cultural region, complemented with broader evidence of lament in Germanic cultures. These contexts are provided in support of the otherwise very thin evidence of later traditions. The variety of evidence for Scandinavian lament in recent centuries is reviewed for Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The final discussion shifts emphasis from the evidence to the factors that have erased lamenters' voices, broken down their traditions and rendered them invisible to research even in areas where lamenting survived into the twentieth century.



Figure 7. Photo accompanying a description of lamenters (*hylekoner*), their practices and distinctive dress and headgear on the islands around Bergen. (Juuhl 1917, 287, no caption; reproduced from Nasjonalbiblioteket, Nettbiblioteket.)

Research Discussion

Research discussion of Scandinavian lament in modern times is almost completely lacking. Lamenters were not completely invisible in Norway, where they were occasionally mentioned in Norwegian ethnological studies. However, lamenting seems not to have been recognized as a potential contemporary practice in other Scandinavian countries, where researchers have interpreted references to lamenting as simply crying (e.g. Hagberg 1937, 150). Occasional mention in Norway seems not simply to be owing to the survival of the traditions, since the respective studies largely limit their discussion to a quotation or echo of Welhaven's description, which they may also cite (e.g. Juuhl 1917, 286–287; Hodne 1980, 109; cf. however the early example of Sohlman 1852, 168). Welhaven was born and raised in Bergen (SNL, “Johan Sebastian Welhaven”), and his description has been treated as representative. Its features seem consistent with other evidence (cf. Figure 7), but it has eclipsed other sources, sometimes leaving it unclear whether an author knew any (e.g. Visted 1908 [n.d.], 189). Researchers' awareness of the tradition is reflected in the inclusion of the question ‘*Husker folk gråtekoner i Deres bygd?*’ (Do people remember lamenters in Your village?) on a 1957 Norwegian ethnographic questionnaire (NEG 64). A few decades later, in his monograph on death traditions, Bjarne Hodne comments that numerous sources mention the practice, though he only quotes and cites Welhaven (1980, 109). Lament only entered the field of vision of Scandinavian folklore research in Norway, where it seems to be tightly connected to the popularity of Welhaven's *Billeder*. Lamenting has remained invisible in the Swedish evidence (e.g. Hagberg 1937, 150, 316) and in Denmark (e.g. Troels-Lund 1903–1904, XIV, 142–145, 183–184; cf. also Kragh 2004).

While nineteenth- and twentieth-century lament remained largely invisible in Scandinavian research, Germanic comparativists included Scandinavian examples as part of a broader Germanic tradition. The discussion of Germanic lament seems to have precipitated mainly at the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g. Böckel 1913, 100–103; Ehrismann 1918, 36–38). This research suggests that German-language laments disappeared from the central cultural regions relatively early, while evidence of laws and records from for instance the sixteenth century were linked to descriptions of the Roman historian Tacitus (*Germania* VII–VIII), descriptions in Old Germanic epics (e.g. *Beowulf* 3150–3155a) and nineteenth-century descriptions of laments among German-speaking groups that had emigrated during the Middle Ages (Hauffen 1895, 88–89; Schröer 1864, 150, 157, 180–181; Schuller 1865, 27–39; Schuster 1865, 457–461; see further Frog and Stepanova, forthcoming). Although some evidence may point to lament as surviving longer even in Germany,² the comparative discussions addressed laments as traditions of the past rather than found in the present, and they seem not to have incited searches for laments even among the remote German-speaking

2. Amaranthes' *Frauenzimmer-Lexikon* (Ladies' Lexicon) has an entry that could be on some type of lamenters (1715, 694, s.v. ‘*Groschen-Frau*’), and Adolf Spamer identifies some nineteenth-century descriptions as referring to lament practices in places in Germany (1934, 189; see also von Schönwerth 1857, 241–242).

populations.³ The paucity of lament texts and detailed descriptions left very little for comparative research or analysis. However, Otto Böckel's survey (1913, 100–103) was influential, and now reaches more recent audiences through Lauri Honko's summary (1974, 13–14). Böckel included the plagiarised version of Welhaven's description (1913, 100), which entered it into further circulation (Spamer 1934, 189),⁴ yet it was never taken up in Scandinavian scholarship.

At the same time, laments were researched and discussed across the Baltic Sea. Particularly noteworthy is that laments were elevated in Finland in the service of nation-building projects especially during the twentieth century. This included, for example, having a Karelian lamenter perform for the King of Norway, who then requested a copy of the text (Stepanova 2023). Although research on lament remained secondary to genres that were commonly valorised in European heritage-construction projects, such as epic and folktale (Stepanova 2014, 15–16), lament was collected, studied and also popularized through staged 'folk' performances (Stepanova 2023). Especially across the first half of the twentieth century, Finnish and Scandinavian folklore research formed a very tight network through the Folklore Fellows (e.g. Frog 2021), yet these connections seem not to have stimulated awareness or interest concerning potential Scandinavian lament traditions.

In parallel with the invisibility of Scandinavian lament traditions in recent centuries, a discussion evolved around evidence in medieval textual sources. This discussion was complicated by being founded on text-centred research. Texts were approached in isolation from practices, viewing genres in two-dimensional terms of form and content, and without considering potential gaps between the texts and social realities, which is problematic for practice-based oral traditions (Frog 2016). As a consequence, heroic epic (eddic) poems presenting a woman lamenting about heroes or forms of court poetry representing the Virgin Mary lamenting Christ were conflated with laments (a problem that persists: e.g. Bampi et al. 2020). There was thus no clear distinction between women's lament and men's commemorative court poems that were composed to be remembered by others and regularly reproduced (e.g. Ehrismann 1918, 36–45; Sävborg 2013, 86). The research thus followed commonplace usage of the words *lament* and *lamentation* for any expression of sorrow, a view that was reinforced by (now debunked) arguments that certain genres of men's courtly commemoration poetry were etymologically termed *laments* (Wessén 1915; Noreen 1924) or that they originated from laments (Ohlmarks 1944; see also Harris 2004).

3. Laments seem to have still been known among some Transylvanian Saxons in the mid-twentieth century (Suppan 1963), and Richard Wolfram reports having heard them among Zipser Germans (1947, 43). The lament traditions of these groups doubtless evolved through the contacts and interactions with the lament traditions of local cultures (cf. Stepanova 2011). In 2001 in Turček / Ober-Turtz in central Slovakia, Hana Urbancová recorded a very short fragment of a lament in the local German dialect. The singer told that the words of the lament were improvised and very similar to the traditional Slovak laments (Urbancová, p.c., 31 December 2023). Women's impression was that German-language lament 'had been sung at funerals under the influence of the surrounding Slovak villages' (Urbancová 2023).
4. Richard Wolfram (1947, 44) also translated the relevant passage, but from the quotation in Visted (1908 [n.d.], 189).

Approaching lament as a genre of practice in Scandinavia was pioneered by Carol J. Clover (1986), springboarding from a comparison of lamenters in the Old English epic *Beowulf* with Karelian lamenters (Mustanoja 1967). Clover extended comparisons through a variety of medieval European examples, but she was unaware of Scandinavian traditions in recent centuries. Probably because examples of lament texts were lacking, Clover's seminal study did not establish a discussion of lament as a women's genre in Scandinavia: its main impact has been on viewing women's grief as a device in literature, and further explorations of the question are relatively recent. Else Mundal argued that certain metaphors in representations of lamenting in eddic poetry reflect a lost women's genre of verbal art (2012), noting that these uses of metaphors contrast with the paucity of such metaphorical comparisons in Germanic epic more generally (on which, see Liberman 2022, 110). Eila Stepanova showed that lament traditions in the Circum-Baltic area evolved in cross-cultural networks of reciprocal influence, leading to the development of shared features or form, content and contexts of use beyond funerary practices; she proposed that Germanic lament traditions belonged to the same networks (2011).⁵ Stepanova and I have subsequently explored evidence of medieval Scandinavian lament traditions, building on the work of Clover and Mundal (Stepanova and Frog 2019; Frog and Stepanova, forthcoming). We found that representations of lament in Old Norse epic exhibit rhetorical structures characteristic of laments (cf. Honko 1974) as well as conceptions of lamenting as prompting others to weep. However, the women's speech is conformed (like all other direct speech) to the epic mode of discourse, which lacks a formulaic infrastructure that would allow for lamenter's needs of situational improvisation; this poetic form therefore cannot be considered to accurately represent the poetic form of laments in social practice. Similarly, we found that representations of lamenting in saga prose either erased women's speech or represented it in the form of court poetry that is the genre's ideal of elevated poetic speech, but that is even less suited to lamenters' needs. Collectively, the medieval evidence supports Scandinavian lament as a women's tradition of verbal art in the Iron Age and into the Middle Ages, although no examples of the poetry have survived.

Modern Evidence

Because Scandinavian lament in modern times has been largely or wholly invisible to research, there is a lack of surveys and discussions of examples. The material gathered here represents an ongoing investigation, while the primary concern is for the invisibility of these traditions in research. The evidence comes centrally from Norway, where, perhaps largely owing to Welhaven, lamenters became at least recognised as a social category. Since Swedish and Danish tradition research has not engaged this category, examples have only been identified by outsiders poring over the literature, such as Germanic comparativists noting the practice in Swedish-speaking Estonia (Böckel

5. Stepanova's study is a comparison of Finno-Karelian and Lithuanian laments as representative of Finnic and Baltic traditions, which are brought into dialogue with Slavic laments. She mentions the references to Old Germanic traditions, but the texts of such traditions have not been preserved so they could not be brought into the formal comparisons (2011, 140).

1913, 100–101) or the Austrian ethnomusicologist Richard Wolfram mentioning an example, as quoted below (1947, 44).⁶

NORWEGIAN LAMENT

Welhaven's description seems to have become iconic of the tradition in research discourse: it generally appears widely quoted, echoed and cited (e.g. Sohlman 1852, 168; Visted 1908 [n.d.], 189; Juuhl 1917, 287; Hodne 1980, 109; further dissemination through Krauss 1888, 687). Some references in publications appear independent of Welhaven's description and suggest a degree of social recognizability of the practice (e.g. Boisen 1853, 360). Others reference personal encounters, as when Hans Leganger presents funeral practices in Mangested discussed below. Although I have not yet identified the archival sources mentioned by Hodne (1980, 109), the 213 responses to the 1957 questionnaire NEG 64 constitute approximately 2,300 pages of material. Many respondents did not follow the questionnaire's numbering, yet ten gave positive or at least ambiguous direct answers to question 112: '*Husker folk gråtekoner i Deres bygd?*' (Do people remember lamenters in Your village?). Of course, possible influence from Welhaven's text cannot be excluded, but the respondents seem to have answered earnestly.

Responses to the questionnaire offer minimal information about the tradition. Formulating the question to predict a yes/no answer was not conducive to elaboration. Respondents that went through the questions systematically often simply wrote 'no' or 'unknown', or they skipped the number entirely. Of the ten positive or ambiguous answers, almost half were under ten words, the longest being about 110 and the second longest only half that. An answer from Buskerud (southern, inland Norway) of almost thirty words only recollects talking about lamenters and ascribes them to the remote past (NFM, NEG 64, 13172, p. 12). A respondent from Telemark returned to the question, elaborating: '*Dei skulle gråte i likferde, iallfall dei nærest*' (NFM, NEG 64, 13032, p.9) (They should weep when taking the deceased to the cemetery, at least those closest [to him/her]). One from Sogn og Fjordane (north of Bergen) stated: '*No-kre gamle koner var jamnast med i dei fleste likferder, men det var ingen visse, og namnet gråtekoner er ukjent i den tyding*' (NFM, NEG 64, 13368, p.5) (Some old women usually came along on most trips of a deceased person to the cemetery, but not always, and the name *gråtekoner* is unknown in that meaning). One from Nordland (northern coastal Norway) says: '*skjønt en kunne tru det var leigde gråtkone like til i tretti firtiåran, då mange gråt kolosalt*' (however, one can think that lamenters were hired into the thirties and forties, then many wept colossally), and recollects two in particular, '*og desse to gråt som om det var de sjølv som skulle jordes*' (and these two wept as though they were being buried themselves) (NFM, NEG 64, 26086, p.9), which points to first-hand knowledge. The responses present minimal information, but they refer to 'hiring' lamenters, lamenters accompanying the corpse to the cemetery and to the practice continuing into the twentieth century.

6. Although the title of Wolfram's article translates as 'Laments in Norway', he acknowledges: '*Wir haben in diesen Liedern nicht eigentliche Totenklagen der mehr oder weniger improvisierten Art vor uns, sondern Psalmen, die an solcher Stelle verwendet und in besonderer Weise gesungen werden*' (1947, 49) (In these songs, we do not have before us proper laments of a more or less improvised technique, but psalms, which were used in such a place and sung in a particular way).

Leganger contended that people on the western coasts of Norway exhibited greater emotionality in their practice of Christianity than those inland, and he brought forward lamenting in that context. He tells that the coffin would be opened before carrying it out, and that the men sang ‘*gamle, eiendommelige vers til gamle og eiendommelige toner*’ (1922, 225) (old, peculiar verses to old and peculiar melodies) and:

de kvindelige paarørende kaster sig ned ved kisten med tunge suk og lydelig graat og ofte med høie skrik og kisser og kjærtegner den døde og roper ham eller hende ved navn; snart stiger mændenes sang høiest, snart kvindernes graat, mens bevægelsen griper om sig blandt de tilstedeværende, saa graaten blir almindelig og besvimelser ikke sjeldne. (Leganger 1922, 225.)

the women among the next of kin throw themselves down at the coffin with heavy sighs and crying aloud and often with loud screams and they kiss and caress the deceased and cry out to him or her by name; soon the men’s singing becomes the loudest, and soon again the women’s crying, while the commotion takes hold of those present, so that weeping becomes common and fainting is not rare.

Leganger goes on to say that when ‘*de nærmest paarørende ikke [...] kan frembære en synlig og lydelig bevægelse*’ (the closest relatives are not [...] able to perform the visible and audible commotion), then this is done by ‘*virkelige hylekoner!*’ (real lamenters! [original emphasis]), which he had encountered two or three times (1922, 226).

Leganger asserts first-hand knowledge of lamenting, which he situates as a constituent of coastal Christian practices parallel to the men’s singing of old, peculiar songs. The implication is that the traditions are rooted in a pre-Reformation (rather than a pre-Christian) past. His description centres on the women’s physical and verbal interaction with the deceased that competes in volume with the more formalized singing of the men. The competing performances might be compared to Welhaven’s description of lamenters as performing through the funeral ritual. However, ‘lamenters’ are mentioned with an exclamation point, suggesting that he considered them as exotic, and he characterizes them as *by definition* outsiders to the immediate kin who perform in their stead. In published references to Norwegian traditions, the use of *hylekone* (lamerter, literally howl-woman) and *grætekone* (lamerter, literally weeping-woman) often appears specifically used for a surrogate or supplementary performer of grief. That ‘lamerter’ would designate a specialist who could be called on to lament is also found among the Siebenburg Saxons (Schuster 1865, 458). In the Norwegian discussion, the word seems not to extend to *any woman* who laments: the women’s embodied and verbal performances of grief in Leganger’s description appear to reflect a lament tradition, but it is presented only as a local expression of emotionality rather than a performance tradition. The respondent from Sogn og Fjordane quoted above notes that the word was not used locally for the mentioned practice. Although Leganger frames lamenters as unusual or exotic, they are not characterised through their performance practices *per se*, but rather through taking on a surrogate role of expressing grief on behalf of others.

The presentation of lamenting and lamenters to characterise the emotionality of coastal Christianity implicitly contrasts with conventions of emotionality elsewhere. Ideologies of emotional display are placed in relation to the practice of hiring lamenters by the priest F. E. Boisen:

Jeg veed man bruger i Norge ved Begravelser Hulekoner, som ligefrem leies til at græde over de Døde; det synes vistnok at være en ond Skik, men jeg vil dog heller see en leiet hylekone, der twinger Taarer frem og fordreier Miner, end jeg vil see det samme at være Tilfældet med den Afdødes Kone, Mand, Fader, Moder eller Børn. (Boisen 1853, 360.)

I know people in Norway at burials used lamenters (literally ‘howl-women’), who are actually hired to weep over the deceased; it probably seems like an evil custom, but I would indeed rather see a hired lamenter forcing out tears and wrenching mine than I would see the same with the deceased’s wife, husband, father, mother or children.

That lamenters received *gode sportler* (good compensation) (Welhaven [1842] 1851, 156) or were *betalte* (paid) (Juuhl 1917, 287) seems to have been a contentious aspect of the tradition. That a skilled lamenter could perform in the place of family members is also recorded both for German-language lament traditions (Schuster 1865, 458; see also Amaranthes 1715, 694; Schuller 1865, 29n. 66) and cross-culturally in the Circum-Baltic (e.g. Stepanova 2014), yet that such lamenting participated in local reciprocity systems tends to go unremarked. Boisen’s comment makes explicit an inclination to morally evaluate such commodification as *ond* (evil or wicked). Writing within an ideology that stigmatises public or dramatic displays of (at least negative) emotions as shameful (see also Wilce 2009, ch. 7), he mitigates this evaluation as preferable to the alternative that family members publicly display such grief themselves. His stance is comparable to Welhaven’s view that lamenters draw attention away from the family in their grief ([1842] 1851, 156). Boisen interprets lamenters from that perspective as dubious, and yet acceptable because they provide a service of distancing community members from public performances of grief, taking the stigma upon themselves so that others do not have to.

Among the Norwegian material surveyed here, Leganger’s is the only account that explicitly mentions verbal behaviour as part of the performance, which seems only to be mentioned to illustrate the personal level of the women’s emotional expression. That the lamenter addresses the deceased directly is consistent with widely found devices of laments (Honko 1974). That this is identified with the close relatives of the deceased rather than specific to women hired to lament suggests that the verbal component of lamenting was common to women’s practices and their words were commonly rendered invisible behind the volume, drama and spectacle of their performances of grief. It further implies that what they said was viewed by these men as incidental or taken for granted.

The Norwegian term for lament, usually *grædekone*, developed additional associations. First, it was used to refer to lamenters of other cultures, such as in the biblical and classical worlds, yet this never advanced to a comparative interest. Perhaps more significantly, *hylekone* (literally ‘howl-woman’) and *grætekone* were taken up as derisive terms for people (usually men) who objected or complained about political and social situations or issues. Welhaven’s influence can also be detected here, when his expression *græde- og hylekoner* is found in this context (Anonymous 1886, 1). Terms for lamenter thus took on denigrating connotations in political debates and popular discussions. In some cases, a polemic reference may also be linked to some direct knowledge of Norwegian practices (e.g. Gleditch 1919), though the responses might not (Beckman 1919). In any case, the denigrating connotations that became linked to the term may have been a subtle factor that disinclined researchers from investigating the tradition.

SWEDISH LAMENT

Evidence of Swedish lament is highly fragmented, dispersed and little has been identified. The mourning practices of the Swedish-speaking society on the island of Runö / Ruhnu (Estonia) in the Gulf of Riga are identified with Germanic lament traditions already by Böckel (1910, 100–101). They may reflect traditions carried with the medieval immigration from Sweden, surviving in a remote insular community comparable to German-language lament traditions found among communities that also emigrated in the Middle Ages. However, the descriptions use verbs for wailing and screaming with emphasis on their volume and no mention of lament as verbal art (Ekman 1847, 65, 90–91; Russwurm 1855, 91). I have otherwise found a statement that lamenters were customarily engaged in Småland. However, this is in a footnote to a translated folktale (Djurklou 1887, 67n) and I have yet to identify the source of the information. I find only two fuller descriptions that may reflect lament practices in Sweden, the first of which is rather ambiguous.

Anders Tidström may describe a scene of lamenting in an 1765 travelogue (Tidström 1891). He tells that a wife *'jämra och skrika'* (wails and screams) over her husband's coffin with her daughters in a funeral procession. Tidström reports that she should not *'gråta'* (cry) or it would look like she felt guilty about something she had done to the man.⁷ Tidström's presentation suggests that the scene represents a traditional practice, yet he makes no such connection. It is unclear why tears would suggest guilt, but Tidström was university-educated, witnessed this funeral as an outsider and he emphasises the spectacle, so this could simply be Tidström's interpretation (Tidström 1891, 7; Hagberg 1937, 383). The funeral was in Halland, which is on the western coast of southern Sweden. If we consider proximity and connectivity over national borders, this was to the south of Telemark, Norway, where, roughly two centuries later, lamenting was also identified with the funeral procession (NFM, NEG 64, 13032, p.9).

Louise Hagberg presents an example of lament from the Uppland archipelago to illustrate what she describes as acceptable displays of *'överdriven sorg'* (excessive grief) in funerary contexts, a context that itself is resonant with Tidström's description:

De närmaste trädde fram till den öppna kistan, vanligen hållande varandra i armen, de allra närmaste först, sedan fränder och vänner i viss tur och ordning, som ordnas av 'värden'. Är det far och mor, som skola ta avsked av en son, står modern en lång stund, 10 à 15 minuter, och vaggar under konvulsivisk gråt våldsamt fram och tillbaka med kroppen, gång på gång ropande den dödes namn. Hon smeker och klappar hans huvud och tager honom upprepade gånger i hand. Ett omdöme om den dödes vandel – han tilltalas alltid med ordet 'lille' framför namnet – uttalas ofta, till exempel: 'Lille, lille Nils, du har alltid varit snäll mot mor'. Fadern står mera stilla bredvid och gråter samt smeker sonens händer och ansikte. Detta avskeds-tagande kan ibland taga mer än en halvtimme i anspråk. Så komma alla de övriga fram, en och annan kan säga några ord eller hålla ett tal [...]. (Hagberg 1937, 316.)

The closest people approached the open coffin, usually holding each other by the arm, the closest of all first, then relatives and friends in a certain order, arranged by the 'host'. If it is the father and mother about to say farewell to a son, the mother stands for a long time, for

7. I would like to thank Tommy Kuusela, Eva Thelin and Kendra Willson for their assistance and comments concerning this curious description.

10 to 15 minutes, during which she cries convulsively and violently rocks her body back and forth, calling out the dead man's name again and again. She caresses and pats his head and repeatedly takes him by the hand. An evaluation about the deceased's behaviour – he is always addressed with the word 'little' before his name – is often expressed, for example: 'Little, little Nils, you have always been kind to Mother'. The father stands more quietly next to her and cries and caresses his son's hands and face. This farewell can sometimes take more than half an hour. Then all the others come forward, one or two can say a few words or make a speech [...].

Although Hagberg does not recognise this as a lament (cf. Wolfram 1947, 44), she presents it as a performance practice specific to a close female relative and for which men are present but not active. The performance is characterised by verbal behaviour with a duration of ten to fifteen minutes or perhaps half an hour in total, which suggests a complex performance. Regularly addressing the deceased with the epithet 'little' is consistent with the prominent use of diminutives as a characteristic linguistic feature of laments in the Circum-Baltic area (Stepanova 2011, 134). Whereas diminutives in languages east of the Baltic Sea are formed through word morphology, Swedish is structurally different and uses epithets for this effect.

Hagberg's interest in this example as an excessive display of grief is on the backdrop of a widespread development in Swedish culture that silence advanced as the norm for funerary traditions (Hagberg 1937, 150). This development could become linked to the motif of tears being empowered and able to affect or harm the dead (1937, 146–150), but Audun Kjus (p.c.) suggests that the practice of silent funerals spread initially among elites as a fashion from the court of Louis XIV (see also Troels-Lund 1903–1904, XIV, 187–188). Social conventions of silence are antithetical to lament practices, and made the traditions of Runö and in the Uppland archipelago exotic, and may also be why Tidström related the woman's dramatic performance of grief in Halland to some type of moral impropriety.⁸

DANISH LAMENT

The current lack of evidence from Denmark reflects the lack of consideration by researchers (cf. Kragh 2003) rather than being evidence of an absence of lament practices. I was unaware of any examples until shortly before the publication of the present book. I spent a day browsing the 1,100–1,200 responses to the National Museum of Denmark's 1953 *Spørgeliste 18: Død og begravelse* (Questionnaire 18: Death and Funeral), each from one to a hundred or more pages. The collection is fascinating, but it had no question about lament or lamenters. This contrasts with identifying only a few lines of answers in the Norwegian questionnaire NEG 64's ca. 2,300 pages, owing entirely to having a relevant question that could be checked, without which it would have been necessary to carefully reading the whole collection. Nevertheless, I recently encountered two relevant discussions by Troels Frederik Troels-Lund in his fourteen-volume compendium on daily life in the sixteenth century (1903–1904). Neither discussion makes any reference to lamenting *per se*. The following is based exclusively

8. If Tidström's use of the verb *gråta* concerns mourning with tears, the harm that is implicit in his description of her display of grief (i.e. referring to a violation) might also have been related to conceptions of tears harming the dead.

on Troels-Lund's work, which suggests that more information may be found in his source documents.

Troels-Lund introduces *sørgekvinde* (mourning-women) as a women's role at funerals in a survey of secular authorities' attempts to regulate their apparel in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (1903–1904, XIV, 142–145). Rather than connecting it with lament, he considers the practice to have developed owing to the difficulty of organising attractive mourning garments on short notice. He claims that, in order to display appropriately attired mourners, people '*holdt et eget Korps of Kvinder, der mod Vederlag modte ved Begravelser*' (ibid., 142) (maintained their own crew of women, who, for a fee, could attend a funeral). Troels-Lund's description is shaped by his emphasis and interpretation. Nevertheless, he reports that it was customary for these women to be '*i Sørgehuset for at husvale de efterlevende og til Gengseld nydt Vin og Konfekt*' (loc.cit.) (in the grieving home on the morning of the funeral in order to comfort the survivors, and to receive as compensation wine and candies). The discourse that these women only feigned grief for such benefits apparently culminated in 1578 with a magistrate forbidding the women to enter the house and also to limit their numbers to "*tre Par efter et fornemt Lig, to Par efter et gement*" (loc.cit.) (three pair for a distinguished corpse, two pair for a common one). Troels-Lund reports that such legislation varied, highlighting women's insistence on their practices despite the authorities' views, until the decline of the tradition, around 1700, the latest reference he could find to such a practice being from Germany in 1715 (ibid., 143).⁹

Sørgekvinde also appear in Troels-Lund's discussion of a custom, rooted in the Catholic era, of giving a cow to the Church for the soul of the deceased, which would be led immediately following the deceased in the funeral procession (1903–1904, XIV, 183–184). Troels-Lund reports that, in the towns, *sørgekvinde* were first to follow the deceased, interpreting this as an innovation of the soul-gift being replaced by a display of *sørgekvinde* (ibid., 183), an interpretation that seems improbable when placed in a broader historical perspective.

OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONS IN NORWAY, SWEDEN AND DENMARK

The evidence reviewed above is very thin, yet it points to Scandinavian lament traditions surviving at least in a variety of scattered pockets into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These pockets generally appear in areas that are remote or where other traditions with deeper historical roots are found. In Norway, Welhaven's description seems to have both brought lamenters into focus and become emblematic, pushing other sources into the shadows. More subtly, it characterised lamenters as hired public performers of grief. The discussion of Norwegian lamenters centres on the role and social position at a funeral rather than on the women's performance practices, viewing the category in a way that excludes immediate female relatives – i.e. they were not 'lamenters' in that sense, even if they embodied the same performances of grief. Kjus (p.c.) observes that a compensation-based service may have had socio-economic

9. The short entry appears in Amaranthes' *Frauenzimmer-Lexikon*: '*Groschen-Frau: Heissen die-jenigen alten traurig geschleyerten Weiber, so bey der Leich-Procession den Beschluss von dem Frauenzimmer machen: bekommen davor jede einen Groschen*' (1715, 694) (*Groschen-woman*: Refers to those old women dressed in mourning who form the end of the group of women in a funeral procession).

implications: Welhaven's description may be of a high-status funeral, and *sørgekvisder* in Danish funeral processions were clearly linked to status displays. However, the 1578 Danish legislation that prohibits *sørgekvisder* from comforting people in the home 'og til Gengseld nydt Vin og Konfekt' (Troels-Lund 1903–1904, XIV, 142–145) (and to receive as compensation wine and candies) suggests that the compensation could be relatively modest and dependent on a family's means. In any case, the narrow conception of lamenters as invited or commissioned outsiders might account for the lack of discussion of lamenting in Sweden and Denmark, and for the examples above only being approached as lamenting by scholars from outside of Scandinavia.

In Sweden, the general custom of silent grieving would have operated as a social prohibition against specialist lamenters – i.e. requiring silence excludes lamenting. The example from the Uppland archipelago illustrates that public performances of grief could be accepted and even valued in local communities, but the performance described was by the closest family. This would also be consistent with the performance at the funeral witnessed by Tidström in 1765 (1891, 7). However, Tidström's critical perspective on the scene may reflect his position as a university-educated outsider who identified with dominant ideologies of public displays of grief. Boisen's stance toward Norwegian lamenters shows a similar stigmatisation of public displays of grief, but much less strongly, and indeed as validating the role of lamenters as taking responsibility for such displays so that the family does not have to. In Sweden, the example from the Uppland archipelago illustrates that public performances of grief could be accepted and also valued in local communities, although potentially limited to close relatives. Nevertheless, the general custom of silent grieving may have broken down local lamenting traditions on a widespread basis. Limiting lament to personal performances within a narrow circle of intimacy would reduce the performances to which people would be exposed, their opportunities to develop competence and internalise the tradition, and it would potentially also impact on the social evaluation of the tradition.

The Danish evidence is currently the thinnest: Troels-Lund's discussions present *sørgekvisder* as objects of visual display, focusing on attire as emblematic of mourning without mention of embodied behaviour. However, the Norwegian evidence offers points of comparison in the (a) even-numbered groups (b) exclusively of women (c) who were not related to the deceased and (d) characterised by their attire, (e) whose presence as mourners was considered prestigious, (f) although the authenticity of their grief was questioned, and (g) who were paid or compensated for this activity. The number of correspondences makes it unlikely that all parallels are accidental. In this light, the *sørgekvisder* who immediately follow the coffin (rather than a cow) may reflect the older form of the tradition, whereas physically distancing them from the coffin and thus from the deceased appears more likely the innovation. More research is needed, since the lack of comment on spectacle may reflect Troels-Lund's interests rather than its absence from his sources. The lack of reference to verbal behaviour is unsurprising, yet the distancing of the *sørgekvisder* from the deceased might be linked to other changes that reduced or eliminated the significance of verbal performance.

In Norway, there was clearly a widespread practice of engaging lamenters for embodied performances of grief in funerary contexts. In Denmark, the practice of engaging women as embodied mourners appears correspondingly widespread until

around 1700, although the performance of grief beyond attire remains unclear. If the information is accurate, the note that lamenters were engaged in Småland (Djurklou 1887, 67n) points to corresponding practices also in at least parts of Sweden (perhaps notably in the zone of historical conflicts between Sweden and Denmark). Norwegian sources in addition to Welhaven identify lamenting with the transportation of the deceased to the cemetery, which is also the situation of the performance witnessed by Tidström in Halland, and a characteristic of the Danish tradition. This aspect of the tradition may be compared to a practice in the area of Røldal and Suldal, Norway, on which Wolfram did fieldwork in the 1940s. The funeral procession included men singing psalms to distinctive melodies that *'klang wie wildes Geheul'* (1947, 46) (sounded like wild howling) and that Wolfram considered analogous to lamenting. He observes: *'Auf dem Wege zur Kirche blieb das Totengefolge bei jedem Hause stehen und es wurden einige Verse gesungen'* (1947, 45) (On the way to the church, the funeral procession stopped at each house and a few verses were sung). This points to a social communicative function of the performance as notifying people of the death and funeral. The area is generally west of Telemark and south of Bergen, areas where lament was reported as accompanying the journey with the deceased to the cemetery. A parallel between the men's howling voices carrying over the water and that of the lamenters in Welhaven's description may seem incidental. However, Welhaven's description presents the lamenters accompanying the deceased as a spectacle to be heard and seen, pointing to a similar social function of public notification, rather than being an embodied performance of grief for the funeral party only. This structural similarity between the men's and women's practices presents the possibility that the procession would also stop briefly for laments to carry to the respective residents on the journey to the churchyard.

Hodne's survey of Norwegian funerary practices mentions women and their choreography in connection with several customs, but he points out that the roles of women were generally limited to the homestead. The journey to the churchyard and the burial ritual most often included men only, and women's participation thus became discussed as a recent innovation related to social changes (e.g. Hodne 1980, 107). However, this seems unlikely to be the case with lament, which appears instead to have been displaced, reducing women's participation in public spaces. The practice on Runö was replaced by hymn singing (Klein 1924, 377), and similar displacements may have occurred elsewhere. The practice of men's howling performance of psalms could be considered in this light.¹⁰

The verbal art of Scandinavian lament is visible in medieval sources, although only through the filter of the lenses of other genres. Among the more recent materials reviewed here, however, the descriptions commonly refer only to lamenting using

10. Kjus (p.c.) observes that a similar displacement might be behind legislation that requires singing by a priest in a variety of situations during the funeral where laments might earlier have been performed. However, he also highlights that the role of women in funerary practices varied considerably at the local level. Kjus stresses that, among ordinary people, the most significant activities surrounding the deceased happened in the home, before the procession to the churchyard. Consequently, legislation against, and changing attitudes toward, holding wakes (Christiansen 1968, 66–67; Kjus, in preparation) may have been particularly significant for the decline of the lament tradition.

verbs like ‘to cry out’ and ‘to scream’ that denote loud vocalising without necessarily including verbalising. Only two sources explicitly indicate that their performance entails speech at all. In Leganger’s description of Norwegian lament, this is only a comment that the performer calls out to the deceased by name (1922, 225). On this backdrop, the example from the Uppsala archipelago appears surprisingly detailed, indicating linguistic features, semantic content and even quoting or more likely paraphrasing an utterance (Hagberg 1937, 316). The Danish material raises the question of whether the verbal part of lament may have been displaced,¹¹ and thus that the Norwegian tradition may also have broken down so that only the deceased’s name was uttered. However, it is improbable that the breakdown of the tradition would narrowly restrict the verbal component of lamenting rather than breaking down restrictions of formal conventions. It thus warrants observing that, in the Swedish example, the first sentence on verbal expression also only mentions naming the deceased (*loc.cit.*), of which the rest is an elaboration that Leganger would presumably not have considered interesting (cf. Kallio et al. 2017, 124–126). The sources from this period can be viewed as silencing lamenters’ voices insofar as they are marginalized and invisible. When lamenters are presented, their voices may indeed be foregrounded, but their words are regularly erased, rendering their speech invisible.

The invisibility cannot be attributable only to a women’s tradition being a combination of factors that: (a) it was less interesting for documentation by men, and (b), as a tradition of situational improvisation, there were no socially circulating and regularly reproduced lament texts, leaving laments outside of the types of texts commonly recognised as convertible into heritage objects. The pervasive erasure of lamenters’ speech may be owing to an additional factor that it was not recognised as verbal art. This would be consistent with the most detailed comment about a lamenter’s speech only being the prominent use of the diminutive and the type of content she expressed (Hagberg 1937, 316). German laments from the continent are poorly documented, but appear in many cases close to normal speech, although rhyme and even stanzaic structuring are also found (Schuller 1865, 27–39; Schuster 1865, 457–461; cf. Bozzone 2016, 17). That medieval sources appear to characterise Scandinavian lament as having both a poetic form and distinctive language points to a salience as verbal art at that time. A change in such salience could be comparable to what happened in the verbal charm tradition: the spread of rhyme during the Middle Ages collapsed the poetic system of metered alliterative poetry that had been used for verbal charms, whereafter they lacked any regular poetic system and are often in prose. If this hypothesis is roughly correct, it would suggest that the general tendency for lament to remain invisible also led the poetic form of women’s speech to remain unnoticed or dismissed.

11. Kjus (p.c.) makes the important observation that the processions became extremely important for high-status funerals, and the visual display that is clear from the legislation (above) may have become the primary or only feature of lamenters’ presence through changes in fashion.

A Tradition Rendered Invisible

Welhaven's description reveals in its artistry the tensions with which lament was received in the context of Scandinavian Lutheran modernity. Long-established dominant ideologies of emotional display had stigmatised lament performance (Wilce 2009, chap. 7). This stigmatisation seems to have been stronger in Sweden and perhaps also in Denmark than in Norway, severely disrupting lament traditions. Ideologies linked to modernity also produced discourses of authenticity, which made the performance of grief for compensation dubious, intersecting with evaluations of lamenters' dramatic displays of emotion (Wilce 2009, ch.3). Viewed through these ideological lenses, lament was in tension with norms of the dominant society, which inhibited valorising the tradition as heritage and a precipitation of research around it. These ideologies seem to have brought the commodification of lamenting into focus as a further contentious feature of the Norwegian tradition. Lamenting as a women's tradition of verbal art remained invisible in these discussions, but only in part because of remaining in the shadow of the spectacle of specialist lamenters. These ideologies intersected with those of National-Romantic heritage-construction projects, which provided a lens that conferred value on certain types of traditions in contrast to others and also only recognised certain practices and not others as traditions at all. During the nineteenth century, traditions considered suitable for heritage-construction projects tended to be characterised by formal stability and emblematicity that could be extricated from peasant communities and converted into symbolic resources consistent with the ideas and values of the male Lutheran intellectuals and elites. The Scandinavian Lutheran ideologies must have been particularly inhibitive to discussion even through the twentieth century, because the traditions never came into focus in connection with the Germanic comparativists, the rise of interest in women's traditions in especially the last quarter of the twentieth century or the turn of attention to lament in Scandinavian medieval evidence. As situationally improvised speech, laments did not produce formally stable verbal texts that circulated socially and were readily convertible into consumable published products. The contentions surrounding specialist lamenters marginalised their practices while the verbal art of lament remained completely invisible, presumably because it was not recognised as verbal art at all.

Acknowledgements

Research presented here was partially completed within the framework of the project Mythology, Verbal Art, Mythic Knowledge and the Lived Environment (ASME) (2021–2025) based at Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki, funded by the Kone Foundation. I would also like to thank especially Audun Kjus as well as the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments that have greatly helped to improve this text.

References

Sources

National Museum of Denmark, Spørgeliste 18: Død og begravelse [questionnaire], 1953.
NFM, NEG 64 = Norsk Folkeminnnesamling, Norsk etnologisk gransking, emne nr. 64: Død og begravelse, 1957.

Literature

- Anonymous. 1886. "Verdens gang." *Vestmar: Et blad væsentlig for Kragerø og Omegn* 19(125), Saturday 23 October 1886: 1–2. <https://www.nb.no/items/526fd8296930cbde34260e15bfda994b?page=0>
- Amaranthes' *Frauenzimmer-Lexikon*. Leipzig: Friedrich Gleditsch & Sohn, 1715.
- Bampi, Massimiliano, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdottir, eds. 2020. *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*. Studies in Old Norse Literature. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787447851>
- Beckman, Bishop. 1919. "Den norske kirkes grædekoner." *Norsk kirkeblad* 16(36): 502–505.
- Bendix, Regina. 1997. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Böckel, Otto. 1913. *Psychologie der Volksdichtung*. 2nd edn. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner.
- Boisen, F. E. 1853. "Om at lade sig trøste." *Budstikken: Et folkeskrift til oplysning og opbyggelse* 2(12): 353–372.
- Bozzone, Chiara. 2016. "Weaving Songs for the Dead in Indo-European: Women Poets, Funerary Laments, and the Ecology of *kléyos." In *Proceedings of the 27th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, edited by D. M. Goldstein, S. W. Jamison and B. Vine, 1–22. Bremen: Hempen.
- Brun, Lyder ["Red"]. 1919. "Grædekonerne." *Norsk kirkeblad* 16(36): 505–507.
- Christiansen, Inger. 1968. "Likvakeskikken i Norge." *Norveg* 13: 32–72.
- Clover, Carol. 1986. "Hildigunnr's Lament." In *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, edited by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 141–83. 1986. Odense: Odense University.
- Djurklou, G. 1887. *Folke-eventyr: Fortalte paa svenske bygdemaal*. Trans. N. Rolfsen. Kristiania: J. Dybwad.
- Ehrismann, Gustav. 1918. *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, I. München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Ekman, Fredrig Joachim. 1847. *Beskrifning om Runö i Liffland*. Tavastehus: G. Nordenswan.
- Frog. 2016. "'Genres, Genres Everywhere, but Who Knows What to Think?': Toward a Semiotic Model." In *Genre – Text – Interpretation: Perspectives from Folklore and Beyond*, edited by Kaarina Koski & Frog with Ulla Savolainen, 47–88. *Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 22. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 2019. "Approaching Ideologies of Things Made of Language: A Case Study of a Finno-Karelian Incantation Technology." *Folkloristika: Journal of the Serbian Folklore Society* 4(1): 211–257.

- 2021. “Suomalainen koulukunta’: Suomalainen folkloristiikka metodisten jatkuvuuksien ja muuttuvien paradigmojen välillä”. Trans. Joonas Ahola. In *Paradigma: Näkökulmia tieteen periaateisiin ja käsityksiin*, edited by Niina Hämäläinen and Petja Kauppi, 59–88. Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 100. Helsinki: Suomalainen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Frog and Eila Stepanova. Forthcoming (2026). “Lamenters, Mythic Knowledge and Ritual Practice: The Question of Traditions in Late Iron Age and Medieval Scandinavia.” In *Women and Goddesses in Old Norse Religion*, edited by Tommy Kuusela. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Gal, Susan, and Judith T. Irvine. 2019. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108649209>
- Gleditch, Jens. 1919. “Den norske kirkes grædekoner.” *Norsk kirkeblad* 16(33–34): 459–462.
- Hagberg, Louise. 1937. *När döden gästar: Svenska folkseder och svensk folktro i samband med död och begravning*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- Harris, Joseph. 2004. “*Erfikvæði*: Myth, Ritual, Elegy.” In *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions. An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert & Catharina Raudvere, 251–255. Vägar till Midgård 8. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Hauffen, Adolf. 1895. *Die deutsche Sprachinsel Gottschee: Geschichte und Mundart, Lebensverhältnisse, Sitten und Gebräuche, Sagen, Märchen und Lieder*. Graz: K.K. Universitäts-Buchdruckerei und Verlags-Buchhandlung ‘Styria’.
- Hodne, Bjarne. 1980. *Å leve med døden: Folkelige forestillinger om døden og de døde*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Honko, Lauri. 1974. “Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry.” In *Finnish Folkloristics I*, edited by Pentti Leino with Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Urpo Vento, 9–61. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Juuhl, Johan C. W. 1917. “Havstrilen: En særtype av den vestlandske bonde.” *Nordmanns-forbundet* 10(1): 278–290.
- Kallio, Kati, Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, Senni Timonen, Irma-Riitta Järvinen and Ilkka Leskelä. 2017. *Laulut ja kirjoitukset: suullinen ja kirjallinen kulttuuri uuden ajan alun Suomessa*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Keane, Webb. 2018. “On Semiotic Ideology.” *Signs and Society* 6(1): 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695387>
- Kjus, Audun. (In preparation). *Final Journeys: A History of Death and Funeral Practices in Norway*.
- Klein, E. 1924. *Runö: Folklivet i en gammalsvenskt samhälle*. Uppsala: Lindblad.
- Kragh, Birgitte. 2004. *Til jord skal du blive: Dødens og begravelsens kulturhistorie i Danmark 1780–1990*. Aabenraa: Museumsrådet for Sønderjyllands Amt.
- Krauss, F., 1888. *Von der Ostsee bis zum Nordcap: Eine Wanderung durch Dänemark, Norwegen und Schweden mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Kunst- und Culturgeschichte, Sage und Dichtung*. Neutitschein, Wien, Leipzig: Rainer Hosch.
- Kroskirty, Paul V. 2001. “Language Ideologies.” In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 496–517. Malden: Blackwell.
- Lassen, H. 1861. *Læsebøg i modersmaalet for skolernes højere klasser: Tilligemed svenske læsestykker og en litterærhistorisk oversigt*. Christiania: W. C. Fabritius.
- Leganger, Hans. 1922. “Om vestlandsk kristendomstype.” *Norvegia sacra: Aarbok til kunnskap om den Norske kirke i fortid og samtid* 2: 218–231.
- Lieberman, Anatoly. 2022. “Humans as Formulaic Beings.” In *Weathered Words: Formulaic Language and Verbal Art*, edited by Frog and William Lamb, 103–113. Cambridge: The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Harvard University.
- Mundal, Else. 2012. “Female Mourning Songs and Other Lost Oral Poetry in Pre-Christian Nordic Culture.” In *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, edited by Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen and Alexandra Bergholm, 367–388. Turnhout: Brepols. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.MISCS-EB.1.100762>

- Mustanoja, Tauno. 1967. "The Unnamed Woman's Song of Mourning over Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 68: 1–27.
- Müllenhoff, Karl [Muellenhoff, Karolus]. 1847. *Commentationis de antiquissima Germanorum poesi*. Kiliae: C. F. Mohr.
- Noreen, Erik. 1924. "Kuiða: En hypotes." In *Festschrift Eugen Mogk zum 70. Geburtstag 19 Juli 1924*, 61–65. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Ohlmarks, Åke. 1944. "Till frågan om den fornnordiska skaldediktningens ursprung." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 57: 178–207.
- Ranke, Kurt. 1951. *Indogermanische Totenverehrung, I: Der dreissigste und vierzigste Tag im Totenkult der Indogermanen*. FF Communications 140. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Russwurm, C. 1855. *Eibofolke: Oder die Schweden an den Küsten Estlands und auf Runö: Eine historisch-etnographische von der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu St. Petersburg mit einem demidowschen Preise gekrönte Untersuchung*, II. Reval: Fr. Fleischer.
- Sävborg, Daniel. 2013. "Elegy in Eddic Poetry: Its Origin and Context." In *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, 81–106. New York: Routledge.
- von Schönwerth, Fr. 1857. *Aus der Oberpfasz: Sitten und Sagen*, I. Augsburg: Matth. Rieger'sche Buchhandlung.
- Schröer J. K. 1864. *Versuch einer Darstellung der deutschen Mundarten des ungerischen Berglandes mit Sprachproben und Erläuterungen*. Wien: K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei.
- Schuller, Georg. 1865. *Volksthümlicher Glaube und Brauch bei Tod und Begräbnis im Siebenbürger Sachsenlande: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte: Zweiter Theil*. Programm des evangelischen Gymnasiums in Schässburg und der damit verbundenen Lehr-Anstalten, zum Schlusse des Schuljahres. Hermannstadt: S. Filtsch.
- Schuster, Wilhelm. 1865. *Siebenbürgisch-sächsische Volkslieder, Sprichwörter, Räthsel, Zauberformeln, und Kinder-Dichtungen*. Hermannstadt: Theodor Steinhausen.
- SNL = Store norske leksikon. "Johan Sebastian Welhaven." https://snl.no/Johan_Sebastian_Welhaven
- Sohlman, August. 1852. "Norges folkliv." *Nordisk Tidsskrift* 1: 160–175.
- Spamer, Adolf. 1934. "Sitte und Brauch." In *Handbuch der deutschen Volkskunde*, II, edited by Wilhelm Peszler, 33–236. Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion.
- Stepanova, Eila. 2011. "Reflections of Belief Systems in Karelian and Lithuanian Laments: Shared Systems of Traditional Referentiality?" *Archaeologia Baltica* 15: 128–143. <https://doi.org/10.15181/ab.v15i1.18>
- 2014. *Seesjärveläisten itkijöiden rekisterit: Tutkimus äänellä itkemisen käytänteistä, teemoista ja käsitteistä*. Kultaneito 14. Joensuu: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura. <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.79192>
- 2023. "Karelian Lament Poetry: From Oral Tradition to Cultural Heritage." Unpublished paper presented at Laments Lost or Alive and Well: International Conference of the Lament Tradition, 15–17 May 2023, Helsinki, Finland.
- Stepanova, Eila, and Frog. 2019. "On the Analogical Comparison of Performance Environments: Lament Poetry's Soundscape as a Case Study." *RMN Newsletter* 14: 91–111.
- Suppan, Wolfgang. 1963. "Über die Totenklage im deutschen Sprachraum." *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 15: 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/836230>
- Tidström, A. 1891. *Anders Tidströms resa i Halland, Skåne och Blekinge år 1756*. Edited by M. Weibull. Lund: De skånska landskapens historiska och arkeologiska förening.
- Troels-Lund, Troels Frederik. 1903–1904. *Dagligt liv i Norden i det 16^{de} aarhundrede*, I–XIV. København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag.
- Urban, Greg. 1991. *A Discourse-Centered Approach to Culture. Native South American Myths and Rituals*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Urbancová, Hana. 2023. "The Funeral Lament in Slovakia: Historical Sources, Local Traditions." Unpublished paper presented at Laments Lost or Alive and Well: International Conference of the Lament Tradition, 15–17 May 2023, Helsinki, Finland.

- Visted, Kristofer. [n.d.] 1908. *Vor gamle bondekultur*. Kristiania.
- Welhaven, J. S. [1842] 1851. "Billeder fra Bergens-Kysten." In J. S. Welhaven, *Reisebilleder og digte*, 137–158. Christiania: Chr. Tonsbergs Forlag.
- Wessén, Elias. 1915. "Om kuida i namn på fornordiska dikter: Ett bidrag till eddadiktninges historia." *Edda* 4: 127–141.
- Wilce, James M. 2009. *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444306248>
- Wolfram, Richard. 1947. "Totenklagen in Norwegen." *Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 22: 43–50.

The Changing Corporeality in the Twentieth-Century Seto Burial Laments

MADIS ARUKASK

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7929-996X>

The academic understanding of human culture, and of the many things it encompasses, is dominantly intellectual. It is a process of sense-making rather than feeling. Studies are realised in text, a researcher may only be able to cognise something by doing fieldwork, thereby examining the other under study. Traditional folkloristics is mostly text-based – drawing its source material from different folklore genres, each which reflects its specific conception of reality. In the case of earlier recordings, there often is a lack of extra-textual contextual information. This also applies to earlier recordings of the burial laments of the Finnic peoples, including Setos. Even if a former collector, as an eyewitness, had the foresight to place their textual recordings within the description of the ritual (burial, commemoration, etc.), the direct human tangibility that would help us understand it today is no longer apparent from the transcriptions of decades or centuries ago. The traditional worldview and the human being who lived in it remain relatively inaccessible in all their complexity for the modern person.

However, no folklore genre is a monological finished text. It is often processual, taking shape in practice, in dialogue with real life. The actual realisation of a phenomenon recorded as a text has taken place in the performance, in the situational context, in contact with the community and the counter-roles of the performer. This is how the individual and the tradition are intertwined. According to Ülo Valk:

instead of taking persistent forms, folklore is often ephemeral as it emerges in direct response to recent events, the breaking news of the day, acute social issues and political tensions. Even though its roots are in the past, folklore points to the future where its effects and uses become visible. (Valk 2022, 3.)

The location where the burial lamenting – like any other folkloric performance – has taken place is the real world. The formulaic language and other poetic means in the text have flowed from the spatiotemporal reality that is both natural and supernatural. The mental distance creates confusion and makes people today no longer feel truly at home at the place where the material comes from. In this reality, the performer, the experiencer, whose presence is now only vaguely perceptible, has also been present. Nevertheless, like John Miles Foley (1991, xii) has written, ‘instead of looking at oral or oral-derived poems through the interposed lens of literary values and assumptions, and consequently finding aesthetic inquiries stalled, we must begin at a much more fundamental level by determining how these poems convey meaning.’

The lament as a genre and a practice is extremely physical. This physicality is echoed in the texts, but in the performer's activity (performance) the physical and the mental have also formed an organic whole, expressed in emotion or in the ritual technicality of the performance. Lamenting is a perfect example of the embodiment of tradition, the meeting of the mental and the physical in a whole. In his pioneering lecture, 'Techniques of the body', Marcel Mauss says: 'we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions. These actions are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of the society' (Mauss 1973, 85). The physicality of burial laments – in this case, physicality reflected in earlier textual recordings – is one of the interests of this chapter. As a research question, I am interested in how the human body and lamenter's emotions as reflected in the Seto burial laments have been subordinated to changes arising from twentieth-century modernisation. Has the human body of the traditional text been understood in the same way since the 1930s as it was at the end of the nineteenth century? In this chapter, I will look at how lament as a genre and practice lost its collective functions during the twentieth century as a result of changes in the broader social world.

I pair the corporeality seen in the poetic language of lament texts with the physicality of lamenting as a ritual act. This relationship is not static, but naturally changing. A poetic text and its formulaic language can often remain unchanged longer than a society and its ideologies. I understand ideology here as a dynamically changing processual phenomenon. As a system of ideas that aspires both to explain and change the world (Cranston 2024), ideology itself is by nature a changing phenomenon. Conceptualising it in general as 'the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life' (Eagleton 1991, 1), the following question arises: how has the ideology of lamenting and Seto lamenters' embodiment as part of this changed over time? In examining this question, one must take into account the changes in society, in this case the process of modernisation in the twentieth century.

Along with societal change, ideological change in folklore also takes place. Coping with these changes requires the creativity of culture-bearers to understand traditional texts and practices and/or to transform them, where possible, to the extent necessary to make them more intelligible. Such a creative attitude does not only concern abstract concepts, but also the corporeality that is the interest of this chapter. In terms of ideology, it is not only thoughts, ideas, and beliefs that change but also perception of the human body and everything that is conceivable and possible in relation to it.

Registering and interpreting ideological changes for both the performer and the researcher is not a simple task. My methodological approach is essentially textual, based on previously collected Seto lament texts. In looking at corporeality in texts, I draw on what is known about beliefs and popular religiosity of Seto and other (Finnic) peoples in the region. Consequently, the problem of understanding the former religious images found in lament texts is important and of interest to this chapter.

Behind every folklore genre, there is not only a specific practice (ritual, activity), but also a body of beliefs that today may appear obscure. Vernacular beliefs – unless they are recorded in great detail – again raise a quandary. What can be found here is not religion as a dogma, but a lived belief in its individual expressions. As Leonard Primiano has put it,

Vernacular religion as an approach to understanding religion as it has been lived in the past and is lived today emphasises the study of the belief systems of religious people. This means a consideration of the contents and motivations of the actual beliefs of people. (Primiano 1995, 51.)

Thus, the second research question of this chapter, which I can only briefly address, is how the post-mortem location of the deceased, the location of the corpse, is represented in the texts. Here, the earlier, more general understandings are intertwined in the texts, with all kinds of individual interpretations which can now often only be guessed at.

Setos, the Research of Seto Burial Laments, and the Modernisation of the Seto Culture in the Twentieth Century

The Setos are one of the southernmost of the Finnic peoples. Their current habitat is in southeast Estonia, bordering the Pskov Province of the Russian Federation (see Figure 8; the description in the number 8 should be ‘South Estonian and Seto’). Historically, their settlement area used to extend deeper into Pskov Russia and historically they have been called the Chud of Pskov. The Setos speak the Southern Estonian language, thus being direct linguistic relatives of the Southern Estonians, but their history diverges from that of other Estonians from the thirteenth century. The territory of the Setos’ (or rather their ancestors) remained under the influence of Novgorod Russia and the Greek Catholic Church, while that of other Estonians fell under the Roman Catholic Church and in the Western cultural sphere (Jääts 2000, 651–652). Therefore, the material, religious, and spiritual culture of the Setos is significantly different from that of the Estonians. The Seto population is now estimated at around 10,000. Today, it is estimated that there are approximately 12,500 Seto speakers in Estonia (Kalkun et al. 2018)

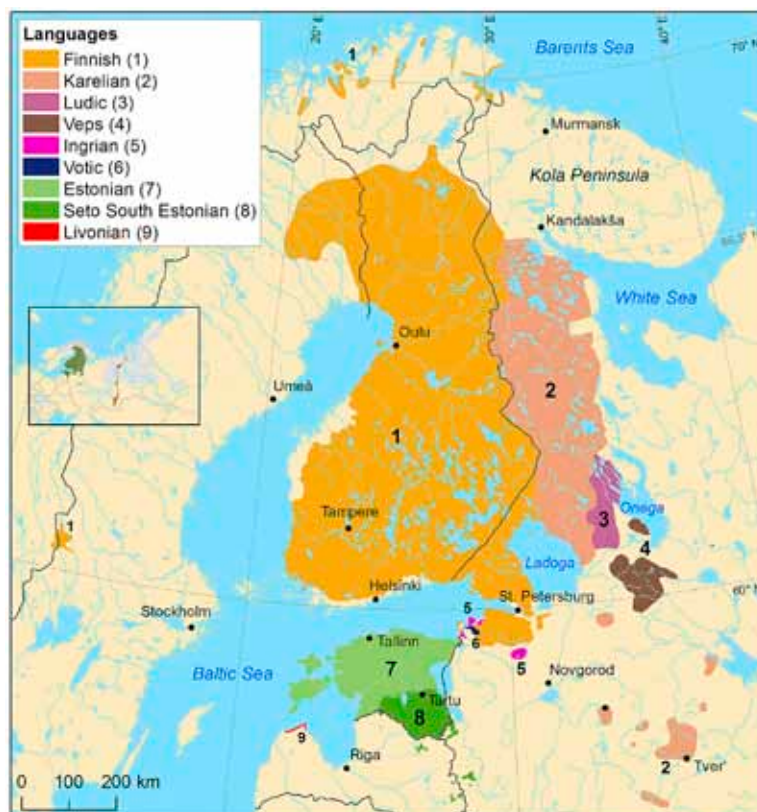


Figure 8. Distribution of the Finnic languages at the beginning of the twentieth century (Rantanen et al. 2022).

It is important to point out that the Setos lived in the western periphery of the Russian cultural space until the 1920s, being linguistically marginalised from the Slavic world (Jääts 2000, 653–654; Kuutma 2006, 59–61). This marginal position is reflected in appellations given to them (Russian: *полуверцы* – ‘half-believers’; Estonian: *setu* – ‘that other’), marking their secondary status from the perspectives of both Russian and Estonian cultures.

Belonging to the Russian cultural sphere and living in the Pskov Province until the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in a relatively high illiteracy level of the Seto people as well as the preservation of a premodern and unique folk culture, and a collective identity based on that. Among all this was a living tradition of lamenting, which began to decline during the twentieth century. It is no secret that the vernacular Greek Catholic Orthodox culture fostered the survival of the laments, while Lutheran theology and ideology in north Europe drove them out of the folk culture (in the Finnic context, among Estonians and Finns; see also Honko 1974, 17–20; Konkka 1985, 13–15).

At the end of 1918, the Soviet Union, which had recently emerged from the Russian revolutions, invaded the Republic of Estonia, which had been established that same year. The Estonian War of Independence ended with the Tartu Peace Treaty of February 1920. Estonia, as the winning side, received, in addition to other contributions from Soviet Russia, the territories of the Pskov Province inhabited by the Setos. The following decades saw the modernisation of the Seto people in the Republic of Estonia (Jääts 2000, 654–655). We can assume this moment to be the beginning of changes in the Seto lament tradition. The ideology of lamenting began to change alongside with the slowly modernising society. In addition to the immersion into Estonian – that is, Western – culture from the 1920s, a new political turn followed in 1940 – the Soviet occupation, which ended in the early 1990s, and the German occupation during Second World War. In Estonia, the Seto people were exoticised on the one hand, and subject to arrogance and even rejection on the other, especially by their immediate neighbours in the southeast Estonia (see also Kalkun 2014; 2017). This attitude remained in full force until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when it gradually began to recede.

Seto folklore and folk songs have been collected in two main waves in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see also Kuutma 2006). The first of these took place at the turn of the twentieth century, the second from the 1930s when Setos had already come into more direct contact with modern Estonian culture. The songs and laments collected during the first wave were published in the huge, three-volume collection, *Setukeste laulud* (*Songs of the Seto*; Hurt 1904–1907) by Jakob Hurt, the pioneer of academic folklore collecting in Estonia. The material analysed in this chapter, however, belongs to the second collection period, from the 1930s onwards, because it reflects changes in worldview, both spiritual and corporeal.

For folklorists and ethnographers, Seto culture has been a rich field of study and the collection of its folklore continued throughout the century. The 1930s and the 1960s–1970s are particularly important for the collection of laments and folk songs. At least 100 burial laments were collected during the twentieth century. The lamenting tradition was well alive also in the second half of the twentieth century, and folklorists were able to collect texts from performers born in the first half of the century. Paul Hagu, a

folklorist of Seto origin, has summarised that, in all, over nearly 150 years of collecting about 3,500 wedding laments, more than 300 burial, and about twenty recruit (conscription) laments have been recorded from Seto lamenters (Hagu 1995, 120).

If the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the modernisation policy of the Republic of Estonia towards the Setos (literacy, education system, administrative and everyday life), then after the Second World War, in Soviet-occupied Estonia, the Setos gradually began to move to Estonian cities and other regions, voluntarily integrating and assimilating into modern Estonian culture. However, the coming of Soviet power did not lead to an outright disintegration of the traditional Seto culture. Generations born and raised in traditional society in the late nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth still dominated. The most decisive changes in the Seto's rural disintegration began after Estonia regained its independence in 1991. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the traditional territory of the Setos was divided between the Republic of Estonia and the Russian Federation. This led to an intensification of the migration of Setos to Estonia, the end of the Soviet-era rural life, and major changes in their social and economic systems.

Like rural life and traditional culture in general, the tradition of lamenting in today's Setomaa region is fragmented and has perhaps only survived in the consciousness of a few experts. However, the tradition has not died out completely, as the singing of Seto *leelo*, traditional folk songs, continues. Unlike other Finnic peoples, the Seto singing tradition and the laments are, above all, poetically close (Hagu 1995, 120; Oras et al. 2021, 48–49), much closer to each other than, for example, the Karelian (Nenola-Kallio 1982, 79–81) or Vepsian folk songs and laments are to each other. In the last 150 years, during which Seto laments have been collected, the lament tradition has not undergone any breaks or decisive changes – apart from decline and folklorisation. It is, however, important to understand whether and how in the course of the changes of the twentieth century, traditional formulaic language has been understood and made cognitively intelligible by the performers themselves.

Investigating this, it is not possible to rely on anthropological studies of individual performers, as such research was little practised in twentieth-century Estonian folkloristics. There are the texts themselves and the dynamics of change reflected in them. Supposedly, this should somehow reflect the social and mental changes that affected Seto culture in the twentieth century. Let me suggest here some possible turning points within this period: During the twentieth century the individualisation associated with gradual modernisation, the impact of the education system, and finally the erosion of traditional communities took place. Because of that, the function of lamenting changed. Instead of a collective function, the individual aspiration of the lamenter began to emerge. We may also speculate about the possible impact of Christian images of the otherworld on the pre-Christian images in laments with the introduction of church services in Estonian in the early twentieth century, and also about the impact of Soviet atheist propaganda and the scientific worldview on any kind of previously existing religious imagery in laments at the second half on the century. Gradually, a decline of traditional rituals took place during the Soviet period and later. All this led to the withdrawal or obscuring of traditional premodern concepts of corporeality, and to change the overall ideology of lamenting together with it.

Burial Lament as a Genre of Traditional Culture

Laments have sometimes been taken as a primitive poetry, and been described as ‘the poetry of final parting’ (Honko 1974, 9). In terms of the mode of expressivity, weeping is undoubtedly an excellent example of the emergence of lyrical personhood in folklore – long before this kind of personal expression became dominant in modern ballads or in popular culture. This primordial lyricism of laments, however, has all along been positioned in a very different background system compared to more recent folklore and its performances, which legitimises personal sentiment. In the newer forms of expression, it is not only the experience of emotion that is important, but also its organic demonstration, where personal sentimentality takes priority. Personal suffering justifies condemnation directed at society, or the crimes, blood, and revenge committed for the sake of self-gratification as can be seen in more recent folk ballads, sentimental folk literature, or its extension in our days – soap operas, pop songs, and so on.

The lyricism of laments is not so individualistic, although the twentieth century undoubtedly brought changes in this direction. This also characterises the material in this chapter. The emotionality of archaic folklore is primarily introspective. Of course, the lamenter has also had to express her emotionality, sometimes even excessively in certain situations where the community expects such behaviour. The intensity of the lamenting may have been a measure of the lamenter’s respect or esteem towards the deceased (a blood relative or husband). The real emotion may have been paired with demonstrative emotionality. I have witnessed this somewhat obligatory lamenting in my Vepsian fieldwork, in commemorative situations when the actual grief has already long since subsided. Perhaps Adam Olearius (1599–1671), a German scholar and diplomat, who describes the lamenting at the Narva cemetery on the Whitsun Eve (24 May) on his 1634 trip to Moscow as follows, witnessed something similar:

The Church-yard was full of Muscovite women, who had spread the Graves with Handkerchers, whereof the Corners were fring’d with silk of several colours, upon which they had lay’d dishes full of fish broyl’d and fry’d, Custards, Cakes, and painted Eggs. Some stood, other kneel’d, making divers questions to their Kindred, weeping over their Graves, and expressing their affliction by dreadful howlings; but with so little attention, that they slipp’d no occasion of speaking, nor indeed of laughing with those of their acquaintance who pass’d by. (Olearius 1669, *The 1st Book*, 4.)

From this demonstration derives the other, non-personal, ritual dimension of archaic emotional expressiveness, where alongside the aforementioned communal appraisal, the religious aspect may become even more important. Crisis in traditional culture has never been a purely personal experience but has been mostly accompanied (or even foregrounded) by a collective aspect.

The collective nature of traditional, pre-modernist folklore must be kept in mind when examining the lament texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Seto burial laments frequently offer a traditionally shaped expression of a personal experience. When a daughter weeps for her mother at a funeral, or a mother for a son who has died prematurely, the personal tragedy can be intuitively felt by a reader in the texts. At the same time, however, the traditional collectivist imperative should be considered, according to which the mourner never represents only herself, but also the

entire community of the living. The mediation and maintenance of the bond between the communities of the living and dead in the lamenting is something that cannot be overlooked.

The traditional functions of burial laments are therefore manifold and varied. In addition to expressing personal grief, channelling it, and also controlling and delimiting it, the following collectively important aspects should be mentioned (see also Arukask 2011, 132–133): communication and exchange of information with the community of the dead (deceased relatives) via the person being buried or who has already passed away earlier, and the ensurance of the safety of the living community in the case of possible unpleasantness or unexpected occurrences from the other side. The latter requires a brief explanation, as its expressions can be detected in the Seto texts.

The relationship with the dead can be ambivalent in traditional cultures. On one hand, there is the tribal kinship which is not broken by the death of a person (cf. Адоньева 2018, 87–92). In traditional cultures, it is generally believed that family and tribal relations continue on the other side. This is evidenced by corresponding images in the older folk songs of the Finnic peoples (especially the Seto), in belief reports, and in their custom – which has survived to the present day – of placing family members on the same grave site, close to each other. People who are close to each other (in traditional culture this means, above all, blood relatives) belong together, the emotional bond with them may lose its intensity over time, but it is never broken. The knowledge that fertility and prosperity pass to the side of the living through the dead, and that everyone will one day have to rejoin the community of their deceased ancestors, tends to presuppose a positive attitude towards the dead, which also finds expression in the corresponding communication, including laments.

On the other hand, the community of the living is always accompanied by a sense of dread for the deceased, especially the untimely dead, people who have gone missing, or the dead who for some reason have remained unsatisfied. However, the community of the dead as a whole is not necessarily safe either, but ambivalent: they need to be cared for, their wishes need to be respected, and this needs to be affirmed by appropriate rituals. The dead must be pleased, and to take advantage of their goodwill, it is important not to forget to honour them on commemoration days, or to arrange ritual receptions at times when the boundaries between the two worlds are more open. For peoples with an Orthodox background, this is the spring-summer period, for example for the eastern Slavic peoples' Pentecost week (Russian: *русальная неделя* – 'the week of rusalkas'; see Левкиевская 2000, 233 ff.; Агапкина 2002, 348 ff.). For Lutheran Estonians and Finns, the autumn-winter period is when masking and mumming has taken place. Seto folk culture also devotes sufficient time and energy to commemorating the dead.

The boundaries – both mental and physical – between the living and the dead must be clearly marked and controlled. All such activities belong to the sphere of sacred (see also Anttonen 2005), which is also inherent to lamenting as a ritual. An essential part of maintaining the relationship with the dead is the corresponding diplomacy, again expressed most explicitly in laments, in which various forms of self-assertion may be attempted. Lamenting sessions in commemorative situations and, indeed, in funerals are important for this kind of border control. Lamenting satisfies not only the emotional hunger of a person for the lost person(s), but also the need of the dead to be

in touch with the living to know how the situation is like in the community of living relatives – before this curiosity can take an ominous turn in the form of the uncontrolled return of the dead to this world.

The transmigration of the deceased is not in itself unusual in archaic perception; indeed, it is impossible to avoid it totally. It is precisely the responsibility of the living to control these processes that is at issue. It is necessary to ensure that the visits of the dead do not take place unexpectedly, but in a regulated manner, in a recognisable form and at the right time. The corresponding textual motifs also address this issue in laments. The taboo nature of the world of the dead is also reflected in the language used. The ‘honorific register’ (see Wilce and Fenigsen 2015) is expressed by the use of euphemisms, especially corresponding poetic synonyms for the dead, and diminutives when addressing them. The former seem to be less prominent in Seto burial laments when compared to Karelian or Vepsian ones. On the other hand, the use of diminutives in addressing the deceased is very dominant in Seto lament texts.

The spectrum of the commemoration work thus encompasses both communities in their respective worlds. To a greater or lesser extent, these worlds are also reflected in the various laments. The heterogeneity in the depictions of where the deceased is located or in other topographical representations of the other world – or of the nature of the deceased – can be interpreted as a result of the archaic nature of the genre and the parallel survival of ideas from different belief layers. It can also be explained by the cumulative nature of oral culture, where instead of an analytical processing of material, an accumulation of various information takes place (Ong 2002, 37–39). The products of oral folklore may therefore seem full of contradictions, discursively confusing. Mythological narration, as Iurii Lotman has put it,

is built not on the principle of a chain, as it is typical for a literary text, but is coiled like a cabbage, where each leaf repeats with certain variations all the others, and the endless repetition of the same basic plot kernel is coiled into a whole open for building up (Лотман and Минц. [1981] 2002, 729).

The Body of a Dead Person in the Grave and Home Visiting Soul

In this section, I will take a closer look at the aspects of corporeality that can be found in the texts of Seto burial laments of the twentieth century. As mentioned above, the exemplary material comes from expeditions to Setomaa by Estonian folklorists in the 1930s and after the Second World War, which is now held in the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu. I will quote only the most characteristic sections from the full lament texts, which are usually 20–100 lines long.

The fact that the location of the deceased can vary, sometimes within the same text, is not surprising. In this respect, Seto laments are not unique. Contradictions in the depiction of the location of the deceased also occur in the laments of other Finnic peoples such as Karelian (Stepanova 2012, 262), as well as Russians (Чистяков 1982, 121–123). Beyond the lament genre, in beliefs more generally, the location of the dead may be diverse or even confused. In the Seto laments, the deceased is located either in a grave or in a land of the dead, which is at some distance. Estonian folklorist, Oskar Loorits considered the former to be primary, the latter to be borrowed

from (Indo-)Germanic culture (Loorits 1949, 127–128). Christian otherworld, be it hell or paradise, is unknown in the laments recorded in the twentieth century. It has also been observed in Russian laments that representations of the otherworld which align with Christian models are very few in number (Wigzell 2005, 349–350), unlike visions of heaven and/or hell in other cases, such as in near death experiences or visits to the otherworld (Russian: *обмирания*). In sum, these are different religious strata. However, from the point of view of oral folklore and non-institutionalised religion, the above stratification or mixing, and the contradictions that this entails, need not be taken as a mistake or a systemic error. Rather, religious doctrines and systems are mostly products of religious specialists, and thus are secondary by their very nature, from an ethnographic perspective. A characteristic process of development from a diversely animistic belief system to a fixed religious doctrine can currently be traced in the Mari tradition (Alybina 2018).

The animatistic-like conception in Seto culture, which does not distinguish the soul from the body (see also Kulmar 1997), is characterised by the association of the deceased with his or her location, in our case the grave. The grave and the deceased in it are often necessary for people to better define the (intimate) relationship between themselves and the deceased. The images of the deceased in the grave in the laments are intimate, both in the funeral situation and afterwards. The commemorative traditions of the Seto, as well as those of other Orthodox Finnic peoples, are very physical and grave-related. On the commemoration days, people gather at the graves to eat and drink, but also lamenting takes place in physical contact with the grave or burial mound, or by leaning on the graves' cross. I have had the opportunity to see Vepsian lamenters lying on the grave or leaning on it, lamenting directly into the grave. The earlier custom of the Finnic peoples to leave a hole or an opening in the grave, into which the lamenter would weep, or from which the soul of the deceased was believed to have come out, probably leads back to the archaeological mortuary houses (for example Mägi 2005, 118–121), the ethnographic preservation of which can still be traced in twentieth-century Karelia (Kemppinen 1967, 34–35). However, the mortuary houses are reflected in the roofed crosses that symbolically resemble the building. The motif to leave a window for the deceased in the tomb also occurs in the Seto lamentation texts up to the second half of the twentieth century.

In the twentieth-century Seto laments, the grave is mostly depicted as an unpleasant, damp, or unclean place. It is possible that this is a newer emotional approach that contrasts the grave with the former home. There is undoubtedly a realism in this image (recording from 1976):

*Maamakõnõ, hallõ om õks hauda pandaq,
kallis kalmu kaaltada!*

*Mulla õks läät sisse mädänemmä,
liiva sisse ligonõmma.*

Mother, it's a pity to put you in the grave,
to tilt you into a tomb.

You're going to rot in the soil,
to soak in the sand.¹

(EKRK 77, 30, recorded in 1976.)

1. All translations by the author.

At the time of the funeral, the grave is still dry and pretty as can be read in the next example:

<i>Sul õks olõ-i viil, tsids'akõnõ, joht haud hall'tõt,</i>	The grave is not yet mouldy, dear sister,
<i>mar'a olõ-i joht, tsids'akõnõ, sul maa kop'tõt,</i>	the earth is not yet musty, dear sister,
<i>haud ommõ viil, tsids'akõnõ, kyik kullakibõninõ,</i>	the grave is still golden, dear sister,
<i>liiv ommõ kyik, tsids'akõnõ, küll hõpõsuurminõ.</i>	the sand is all like silver, dear sister.

(EKRK Fon. 87a (6), recorded in 1974.)

Then the situation will change, as can be read in this recording from 1961:

<i>Maamakõnõ, nu_ks sinolt ma küünü küsümähe,</i>	Dear mother, I turn to you to ask,
<i>maamakõnõ, nu sinolt ma nõsõ nõudmahe:</i>	dear mother, I want to know from you:
<i>maamakõnõ, agu om õks tah havvah halv elo,</i>	dear mother, is there bad life in the grave,
<i>maamakõnõ, agu om õks tah koobah kuri elo,</i>	dear mother, is there evil life in the cave,
<i>maamakõnõ, hammõkõnõ_ks om sälgä hall'tõt,</i>	dear mother, is the shirt mouldy on your back,
<i>maamakõnõ, kapuda_ks sul jalga kar'tõt?</i>	dear mother, your socks became rough on your feet?

(EKRK, Fon 23 (3), recorded in 1961.)

However, the description of moulding and rotting in the grave can originally be related to a much older concept, according to which the deceased does not directly decay in the grave, but just changes its quality, appearance, smell, when moving from the community of the living to the community of the dead. This is expressed in the texts by the possibility of the dead being washed so that they can return to the living. In the above-mentioned lament, there are lines:

<i>Maamakõnõ, kaiv om õks mul kullanõ kotoh,</i>	Dear mother, I have golden well at home,
<i>maamakõnõ, valdas ommõ mul vaski vanijal –</i>	dear mother, I have a copper well pole in the field –
<i>maamakõnõ, hot' ommõ_ks sul manna maa hais,</i>	dear mother, though you've got the stench of Mana,
<i>maamakõnõ, hot' ommõ_ks sul liki liiva lõhn,</i>	dear mother, though you've got the smell of sand,
<i>maamakõnõ, küll mõsõ ma manta maa haisu,</i>	dear mother, I'll wash away the stench of Mana,
<i>maamakõnõ, liiva võe_ks ma lõhna leotõllõ!</i>	dear mother, I'll wash away the smell of sand!

It is noteworthy that in archaic beliefs, washing is associated with magical manipulation, not hygiene or cleanliness in the modern sense. Ritual washing occurs in almost all traditional rites of passage.

Regarding death, the principle of inversion applies. The difference between this and the other world is not only in appearance (special clothing or a deformed body), but above all in smell, which in the beliefs of many peoples betrays the living in the world of the dead, or vice versa (also Пропп [1946] 1998, 158–160). Thus, the washing of the deceased after death, before burial, is the preparation of the still living for death, for transplantation into the community of the dead, to be accepted there. The ritual washing functions here as a washing away the former scent of the living. However, in the lament texts, the possibility of ritual washing is also presented as a means of

making the opposite transition – from the world of the dead back to the world of the living. The belief in a ‘reverse washing’ need not have been merely imaginary: consider, for example, the custom of heating a sauna for the dead during the time of the Finnic *hingedeaeq* (‘time of souls’) and *jakoaiqa* (‘divide-time’), when dead ancestors were expected to visit home, but also the Vepsian custom of washing one’s hands (or warming them against the stove) before entering the house after returning from graveyard. The latter is still practised, and I had to follow this while in the fieldwork. Thus, the mouldy grave and the smouldering corpse can be understood in a much more archaic context, although it is not certain whether this was understood by the Seto in the second half of the twentieth century.

Replacements have been offered for mouldy clothes, so that the deceased could come home:

<i>Kui saa-i tullaq, tätäkene, sa naila rōivilla,</i>	If you can’t come with those clothes, dear father,
<i>saa-i tulla, tätäkene, vast naila käng’ tsilla,</i>	if you can’t come with those shoes, dear father,
<i>sullō tuu, tätäkene, ma hammō havva pääle,</i>	I’ll bring you a shirt on the grave, dear father,
<i>käpäle, tätäkene, sul kängitseq tuu.</i>	I’ll bring shoes on the grave-dwarf, dear father.
<i>Sanna kütä, tätäkene, ma sullō kümmandega,</i>	I’ll heat sauna for you with dry wood, dear father,
<i>viha havvu, tätäkene, ma sullō villatsō,</i>	I’ll soften the whisk for you, dear father,
<i>surma mōsō, tätäkene, ma sinol suu mant,</i>	I’ll wash death from your mouth, dear father,
<i>kadsu kaota, tätäkene, ma kalō kaala mant.</i>	I’ll detach the plague from your neck, dear father.

(ERA II 194, 579/80 (7), recorded in 1938.)

Decayed clothing or nakedness can be taken as a code for otherness in different folklore genres of many peoples (in fairy tales see Неклюдов 2011). Torn clothing in masking rituals also suggests the otherworldliness of the character.

The deceased are sometimes depicted as wanting to come home. In twentieth-century laments, this is probably more a case of modern utopianism, still with deeply rooted beliefs. In recent folklore, especially in women’s folklore, utopianism is to be understood in a register of its own, which has been used to oppose an exhausting and disappointing everyday life, and through which unfulfilled dreams have been formulated and expressed (see Timonen 1992; 1998 in Karelian Kalevala-metric songs; Kalkun 2005 in Seto). It seems plausible to suppose that this register is also present in lamenting – what is impossible in reality is presented as wishful thinking. The deceased, who must be ritually washed, is then depicted as fleeing from the grave to the living side:

<i>Akna jätä, maamakōnō, kost vällä astuq,</i>	I’ll leave a window (for you) to step out of, dear mother,
<i>paja jätä, maamakōnō, kost vällä paedaq.</i>	I’ll leave a hatchway to escape out of, dear mother.
<i>Kui nakat, maamakōnō, no kodo tahtma,</i>	If you want to go home, dear mother,
<i>imekana, maamakōnō, no nakat kastōrahe,</i>	if you want to go (back) to the house, dear mother,
<i>sis ōks pakōq, maamakōnō, no vällä s’ oost pajast,</i>	then escape out of this hatch, dear mother,
<i>sis ōks astuq, maamakōnō, no vällä s’ oost aknast!</i>	step out of this window, dear mother.
<i>Kui ōks tulōt, maamakōnō, no kodo, kullakōnō,</i>	When you come home, dear mother,
<i>kui ōks tulōt, maamakōnō, no majja, mar’ akōnō,</i>	when you come to house, dear mother,
<i>vōe_ks ommō, maamakōnō, no man maa hyngu,</i>	oh, there’s a smell of earth near you, dear mother,

<i>võe ommõ, maamakõnõ, no liki liiva hyngu,</i>	oh, there's a smell of sand near you, dear mother,
<i>sis õks tii, maamakõnõ, ma luvva lodjapuust,</i>	then I'll make a cranberry broom, dear mother,
<i>sis õks haara, maamakõnõ, ma hüü hanipai,</i>	then I'll grab a [?]goose wing, dear mother,
<i>sis õks mõsõ, maamakõnõ, ma mant maa hyngu,</i>	I'll wash away the smell of earth, dear mother,
<i>sis õks mõsõ, maamakõnõ, ma likist liiva hyngu,</i>	I'll wash away the smell of sand, dear mother,
<i>sis õks tohit, maamakõnõ, sa tarrõ tullaq,</i>	then you'll still be allowed to come into the room, dear mother,
<i>väläst tohit, maamakõnõ, sis kävvue meele.</i>	you'll still be allowed to visit us from outside, dear mother.

(EKRK 74, 176/84 (10), recorded in 1973.)

At the beginning of this example, there is mention of an opening in the grave-head through which the soul of the deceased may move out. This is a relic of an archaic structure on the grave – the mortuary house – as mentioned before. This motif is very common in Seto lamentations, as well as in laments of other Finnic peoples (see Рахимова 2010, 98–120). The motif of the soul visiting home as a bird, butterfly, or other insect is also known. This is again a reference to the deceased in the tomb (or tomb-house), whose soul is with them and can leave the body and the tomb (or the body as a tomb). When putting a coffin in the grave, the lamenter weeps:

<i>Kats kuulkõq õks havvakaivjet,</i>	Listen, two grave diggers,
<i>viis liiva liitjet:</i>	five sand adders:
<i>jätäq õks sa lävi jalotsehe</i>	you shall leave the door in the footboard
<i>ja paja pähütsehe!</i>	and the hatch in the head-side!
<i>Kodo õks sa käüq kärpsel,</i>	Go home as a fly,
<i>ja lindaq kodo liblikal!</i>	and fly home as a butterfly!

(ERA II 163, 283/4 (63), recorded in 1937.)

In the Seto lament texts, the soul as insect going home has been noticed and taken to be a human person. It is possible that in this example the lamenter is mentioning the coming commemoration day, when the deceased is given her own dishes for meal:

<i>Ku ma õks näe, maamakõnõ, sääl kärbse käüvät,</i>	If I see a fly moving around, my dear mother,
<i>ku ma näe, maamakõnõ, sääl liblika lindav,</i>	if I see a butterfly flying around, my dear mother,
<i>sõs õks lää, maamakõnõ, ma tutvat tunnistam,</i>	I will go to recognise the one I know, my dear mother,
<i>umma lää, maamakõnõ, ma armast arvam!</i>	to guess the one I love, my dear mother!
<i>Liisna panõ, maamakõnõ, ma livva lavva pääl,</i>	I'll put an extra dish on the table, my dear mother,
<i>luidsa panõ, maamakõnõ, ma livva veere pääl,</i>	I'll put a spoon aside a dish, my dear mother,
<i>õga aja-i, maamakõnõ, ma liblikat livva päält,</i>	I won't chase the butterfly off the dish, my dear mother,
<i>õga aja-i, maamakõnõ, ma kärbest käe päält.</i>	I won't chase the fly off my hand, my dear mother.

(ERA II 194, 587/90 (1), recorded in 1938.)

As mentioned above, visiting the home of the dead is considered an unwelcome misfortune when it occurs in an uncontrolled manner. In some cases, it is regulated, linked either to periods of commemoration or to days of remembrance specifically linked to the death of the person (such as forty days after death). In the latter cases, among the

Vepsians, there may also have been a specific invitation of the deceased from the cemetery to return home, to be treated at home and then sent back (Винокурова 2011, 124–128). Among Slavs and eastern Finno-Ugric peoples, the deceased visiting the village on some commemoration day is either depicted as a man-sized puppet, or as someone from the living embodied as him (Толстая 1999, 143–144). This projection may have originally referred to animistic beliefs, as expressed for example, in the custom of making spirit dolls. Among the Khanty, the soul of the deceased is believed to be transferred to the special doll (Saar 1998, 3). Instead of a perishing body, the soul (in the case of the Khanty, it is one particular soul among many) finds a new home in an anthropomorphic object made specifically for this purpose. Traces of similar practices can also be found among Finnic peoples, although only in ritual contexts. I have heard the story of the funeral of a Vepsian man who was lost in the Second World War, where the clothes he had left were used to play him. However, symbolic funerals of the unrested, without knowing the place of death and burial with all the corresponding church rituals, have also been held in the twentieth century in Setomaa, and have led to the pacification of the deceased who had appeared to others in their dreams (Kuri 1996, 231–232).

Looking for Contact with a Dead Body

In addition to the insect that comes from the mortuary house or grave, there also occurs a motif of the lamenter wishing to touch the hand of the deceased. It is wished that the deceased would reach out their hand to the living from the grave, so that the living could speak with them as with a living person:

<i>Mullõ_ks annaq, maamakõnõ, sa käsi kääpäst,</i>	Give me, dear mother, you hand from the grave,
<i>mullõ_ks annaq, maamakõnõ, sa sõrm sõmõrast!</i>	give me, dear mother, a finger from sand!
<i>Käega, maamakõnõ, ma naka kynõlõmma,</i>	With (your) hand, dear mother, I will speak,
<i>sõrmõlõ, maamakõnõ, ma synno andma.</i>	to (your) finger, dear mother, I will give words.

(EKRK, F 164 (5), recorded in 1971.)

This contact has great emotional significance. It is wished – and then imagined – that the hand that reaches out from the grave is not cold:

<i>No_ks annaq, ristämäkene, mullõ sa käsi kääpäst,</i>	Give me, dear godmother, a hand from the grave,
<i>no annaq, ristämäkene, mullõ sa sõrmõq sõmõrast!</i>	give me, dear godmother, a finger from the sand!
<i>Külmä angu-i, ristämäkene, sa kättä kääpäst,</i>	Don't give me, dear godmother, a cold hand from the grave,
<i>jahet angu-i, ristämäkene, sa sõrmõ sõmõrast –</i>	don't give me, dear godmother, a cool hand from the sand –
<i>sis õks sütü-i, ristämäkene, mu süäme,</i>	then, dear godmother, my heart shall not burn,
<i>sis õks meelü-i, ristämäkene, mu mar'a meekekene.</i>	then, dear godmother, my soul will not be happy.

(EKRK 74, 160/5 (7), recorded in 1973.)

To touch the hand of the deceased, the lamenter may also express a willingness to find it in the sand:

Ma toosiq õks turust turbasõgla, I'll bring a peat sieve from the market,
liinast toosiq liivasõgla, and a sand sieve from the town
sõmõraq sõõr'ada ja turba tuulõda, to sift the sand and winnow the peat.
Sis lõvvä õks ma käe kääpast Then I will find a hand in the grave
ja sõrmõ lõvvä sõmõrast. and a finger in the sand.

(ERA II 163, 281/2 (61), recorded in 1937.)

From a contemporary point of view, the ultimate in morbid naturalism may be the complete excavation of the dead:

Maamakõnõ mu meelimar'akõnõ, Mother, my sweet berry,
kodo lasõ ma lapju perrä, I'm going home to get a spade,
kodo veerä ma vigla perrä – I'm going home to get a fork –
maamakõnõ, su kaiba ma vällä liiva seest, mother, I'll dig you out of the sand,
su käänä ma vällä kääpast. I'll turn you out of the grave.
Maamakõnõ, käänäsiq su vällä kääpast, Mother, I'd turn you out of the grave,
liiva seest ma vällä liik'tasiq. I'd move you out of the sand.

(EKRK Fon. 88a (38), recorded in 1974.)

I have elsewhere suggested that similar motifs could refer to the very archaic but still persistent practice of exhumation in different cultures, and the corresponding lamenting (see Arukask 2011). In rural Greece, there is a ritual aspect to the exhumation and lamenting of parts of the dead body, especially the skull (Danforth 1982, 55–69). It becomes a talisman and the deceased is brought back to a 'new life' in this world.

Another possibility to explain the motif of opening the grave leads to the Karelian, Vepsian, and North-Russian laments. In the Vepsian lament, the opening of the grave, the resurrection of the deceased, the opening of his eyes, and the beginning of a conversation are often imagined at the beginning (see Vepsian examples nos. 59, 62, 73 in Зайцева and Жукова 2012; also no. 440 in Honko et al. 1993). In Seto laments, there are no such complete motifs of arousing the dead. This kind of imagery is better preserved in necromantic folk songs than in lamenting. It should be noted that, in addition to the songs of the Seto and Ingrian peoples, this motif is also found in older Estonian folk songs. In these songs (see also Valk 2000; Lintrop 2001; Arukask 2004), an orphan girl is going to the grave of her dead parents and asks them for help to prepare her trousseau. In these very interesting songs, the opening of the grave is sometimes imagined, but more often it is not possible because of the grass or flowers growing on the grave and the cross on the parent's chest which prevents their resurrection. Similar motifs are also well known in Seto lamentations:

Rist olli, maamakõnõ, kas rassõ rindu päälä, Was the cross, mother, heavy on the chest,
kääbäs olli, maamakõnõ, kas rassõ kässi päälä, was the grave mound, mother, heavy on the hands,
selle saa-s, maamakõnõ, sa tullaq s' oost tunnist, that's why, mother, you couldn't come this hour,
vai õks olli, maamakõnõ, sul manna maa haisu? or did you, Mother, stench the earth?

(EKRK I 72, 479/80 (51), recorded in 1972.)

In Seto wedding customs, it has been a common practice to go to the grave of one's deceased parents to ask for their blessing and/or to invite them to the wedding (see Hagu 1995, 118; [1995] 2000, 210). However, in the lament texts from the second half of the twentieth century, this already seems more like a poetic utopia. In the dozens of collected twentieth-century Seto laments, personal emotionality – the desire to be close to a beloved one – seems to increasingly dominate rather than the collective diplomacy towards the world of the dead that was more prevalent earlier.

Conclusion

Typically for oral folklore, in twentieth-century Seto burial laments, conflicting elements and themes from different layers of belief can coexist or overlap. But such conflicting themes do not seem to pose a problem for the performers, and this can be explained by the lack of systematism and discreetness characteristic of oral culture and folk religion. However, it is evident that there have been certain changes in the belief system over time, as a result of which pre-Christian notions of the collective location of the dead have – under the influence of Christianity – begun to recede or to blend with ideas of a more permanent location of the corpse in the grave (or vice versa). Of course, the ideological background of laments has not been static, despite the fact that the function of the burial lamenting has remained broadly the same through different periods. Yet this process cannot be taken as simple and linear either. The simultaneous location of the deceased in different places can be seen as a remnant of an earlier, more complex conception of the soul. It is not limited to the concept of a single soul, as in Christianity, or even similar to the modern concept of the self.

However, although the traditional formulaic language of the laments preserves some very old religious ideas, the twentieth century, with the modernisation of the worldview of the Seto lamenters, resulted in attempts to reinterpret the texts. It is, in fact, characteristic of many older folkloric beliefs that they are accompanied by a demand on the part of the individual to understand the earlier worldview and to add their own explanations. In the case of the Seto in the twentieth century, however, there is no reason to speak of a direct replacement of a worldview, but rather of a moderate modernisation of the people. In laments, this is reflected in a greater dominance of personal emotional expressivity. It seems that modern emotionality is sometimes a way of smoothing out or making more comprehensible a blurred truth of the past.

The corporeality expressed in traditional laments, often in a rather naturalistic detail, is something that probably needed new explanations, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The ideology of laments, together with the concept of the body, had by then become more individual through modernisation. The archaic religious images of returning to this world through washing it – seen in references to exhumation, etc. – were no longer comprehensible. In making sense of such things, personal emotion and bodily feeling have been useful in combining the old traditionalism with a newer cognition. But this is probably more a personal rather than a collective cognition. Studying the Karelian lamenting of the twentieth century, Lauri Honko has noted that differences between individual lamenters may be greater than

regional differences (Honko 1980, 31). Whereas in traditional culture, the human body was understood as a collective sign, in modern times it has become a 'private property'. Not all people are equally good stewards of private property, but when communal support in the form of traditional collectivism recedes, one can be left alone in a new way. This prompts a question: can this also be reflected in the laments of the present day?

The lament as a genre, as a crucial phenomenon for communication and gatekeeping between the worlds of the living and the dead thus gradually lost its social functions during the twentieth century. It continues to recede alongside the disappearance of the older worldview and the fragmentation of the traditional community. Seto burial laments do not seem to have adapted well enough to survive all the changes of the twentieth century. Folklore is not an isolated thing in itself, but a phenomenon that can only survive in a culturally living interaction. Traditional folklore and folk culture, which was once a complete unified system, will – with the renewal of society, its ideology, and demands – survive only within individual people as micro-universes. Such were the bearers of the lament tradition in Setomaa in the second half of the twentieth century.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant (PUT number PRG2623) "ARS MORIENDI ESTONIA 2030: A medical anthropological and linguistic study to improve death literacy".

References

Abbreviations

EKRK – Collection of the Department of Estonian Literature and Folklore of the University of Tartu

ERA – Collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives

Sources

EKRK 77, 30 < Värska < Meremäe parish, Helbi village – S. Madisson < Jekaterina Sai, 56 years old (1976).

EKRK Fon. 87a (6) < Meremäe parish, Kõõru village – P. Hagu < Jefimia Kiveste, 73 years old (1974) = EKRK I 74, 400/1 (4).

EKRK, Fon 23 (3) < Mäe parish, Haudjasaare village – U. Kolk < Agrepina (Kreepa) Pihlaste, 69 years old (1961).

ERA II 194, 579/80 (7) < Meremäe parish, Krantsova village – E. Kirss – Ul'ga Ridala, b. 1868 (1938).

EKRK 74, 176/84 (10) < Luhamaa, Napi village – A. Mälk et al. < Anna Ploompuu, 62 years old (1973) = EKRK Fon. 83b (16).

ERA II 163, 283/4 (63) < Setu, Järvesuu parish, V-Rõsna village < Treski village – N. Ress < Tarja Purik, 67 years old (1937).

ERA II 194, 587/90 (1) < Meremäe parish, Kuige village – Ello Kirss < Nati Kingo, b. 1882 (1938).
EKRK, F 164 (5) < Vilo parish, Kolo village – T. Ojanurme < Anna Kand, 60 years old (1971).

EKRK 74, 160/5 (7) < Luhamaa, Napi village – P. Hagu, A. Mälk. < Anna Ploompuu, 62 years old (1973).

ERA II 163, 281/2 (61) < Järvesuu parish, V-Rõsna village < Treski village – N. Ress < Tarja Purik, 67 years old (1937).

EKRK Fon. 88a (38) < Meremäe parish, Täägluva village – Ü. Ende < Aleksandra Piholaan, 58 years old (1974).

EKRK I 72, 479/80 (51) < Meremäe parish, Tsirgu village – U. Kolk < Alla Muiste, 58 years old (1972).

Literature

Адоньева, Светлана Борисовна. 2018. *Прагматика фольклора*. Санкт-Петербург: Пальмира.
Агапкина, Татьяна Алексеевна. 2002. *Мифопоэтические основы славянского народного календаря. Весенне-летний цикл*. Москва: Индрик.

Alybina, Tatiana. 2018. "Contemporary Mari Belief: The Formation of Ethnic Religion." *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 12(2): 95–114. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jef-2018-0013>

Anttonen, Veikko. 2005. "Space, Body, and the Notion of Boundary: A Category-Theoretical Approach to Religion." In *Temenos. Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 41(2): 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.4779>

- Arukask, Madis. 2004. "Time, Sense and Meaning in Three Votic Songs (with Reference to Estonian and Setu Additions)." *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 28: 129–150. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2004.28.songs>
- 2011. "Communication Across the Border: What Burial Laments Can Tell Us About Old Beliefs." *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* 15(2): 130–150. <https://doi.org/10.3176/arch.2011.2.04>
- Чистяков, Виктор Александрович. 1982. "Представления о дороге в загробный мир в русских похоронных причитаниях XIX–XX вв." In *Обряды и обрядовый фольклор*, 114–127. Москва: Наука.
- Cranston, Maurice. 2024. "Ideology." In *Britannica*.
- Danforth, Loring M. 1982. *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691218199>
- Eagleton, Terry. 1991. *Ideology: An introduction*. London, New York: Verso.
- Foley, John Miles. 1991. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hagu, Paul. 1995. "Lamenter's Strategy in the Performance of Wedding Laments." In *ARV. Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 51: 115–124.
- (1995) 2000. "Poesia eksam: Setu mõrjaitkudest kõrvutuses läänemeresoomlaste põhjapoolsema itkutraditsiooniga." In *Tagasipöördumatus: sõnad ja hääled*, edited by Kristi Salve, Mare Kõiva and Ülo Tedre, 199–227. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi folkloristika osakond.
- Honko, Lauri. 1974. "Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry." In *Finnish Folkloristics I*, edited by Pentti Leino with Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Urpo Vento, 9–61. *Studia Fennica* 17. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 1980. "The Lament: Problems of Genre, Structure and Reproduction." In *Genre, Structure and Reproduction in Oral Literature*, 21–40. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Honko, Lauri, Senni Timonen, Michael Branch, and Keith Bosley. 1993. *The Great Bear: A Thematic Anthology of Oral Poetry in the Finno-Ugrian Languages*. Finnish Literature Society.
- Hurt, Jakob. 1904; 1905; 1907. *Setukeste laulud. Pihkva-Eestlaste vanad rahvalaulud, ühes Räpinä ja Vastseliina lauludega I–III*. Helsinki: Soome Kirjanduse Selts.
- Jääts, Indrek. 2000. "Ethnic Identity of the Setus and the Estonian–Russian Border Dispute." *Nationalities Papers* 28(4): 651–670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990020009665>
- Kalkun, Andreas. 2005. "The World of Seto Female Autobiographers." *Pro Ethnologia* 17: 11–30.
- 2014. "Fasts and Feasts in Estonians' Representations of the Seto Culture." *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 8(1): 53–73.
- 2017. "Introducing Setos on Stage: On the Early Performances of Seto Singing Culture." *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 68: 7–42. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2017.68.kalkun>
- Kalkun, Andreas, Helena Kupari, and Elina Vuola. "Coping with Loss of Homeland through Orthodox Christian Processions: Contemporary Practices among Setos, Karelians, and Skolt Sámi in Estonia and Finland." *Practical Matters Journal* (June 11, 2018). <https://practicalmattersjournal.org/2018/06/11/coping-with-loss-of-homeland-2/>
- Kemppinen, Iivar. 1967. *Haudantakainen elämä: karjalaisen muinaisuskon ja vertailevan uskontotieteen valossa*. Karjalan tutkimusseuran julkaisuja 1. Helsinki: Karjalan tutkimusseura.
- Konkka, Unelma. 1985. *Ikuinen ikävä: karjalaiset riitti-itkut*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Kulmar, Tarmo. 1997. "Conceptions of Soul in Old-Estonian Religion." *Folklore* 4: 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF1997.04.hing>
- Kuri, Külli. 1996. "Midagi kodukäijast." In *Palve, vanapatt ja pihlakas: Setomaa 1994. a. kogumisetke tulemusi*, edited by Heiki Valk and Ergo Västriik, 229–240. Tartu: Tartu NEFA.
- Kuutma, Kristin. 2006. *Collaborative Representations: Interpreting the Creation of a Sámi Ethnography and a Seto Epic*. FF Communications 289. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Левкиевская, Елена Евгеньевна. 2000. *Мифы русского народа*. Москва: Астрель.
- Lintrop, Aado. 2001. "Ema haul' lego ja lauluna." In *Regilaul – keel, muusika, poetika*, edited by Tiit Jaago and Mari Sarv, 299–313. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum.
- Loorits, Oskar. 1949. *Grundzüge des estnischen Volksglaubens I*. Skrifter Utgivna av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för Folklivsforskning 18:1. Lund: Carl Blom.

- Лотман, Юрий Михайлович, Зара Гиршевна Минц. (1981) 2002. "Литература и мифология." In *История и типология русской культуры*, 727–743. Санкт-Петербург: Искусство.
- Mauss, Marcel. (1935) 1973. "The Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2(1): 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/030851473000000003>
- Mägi, Marika. 2005. "Mortuary Houses in Iron Age Estonia." *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* 9(2): 93–131. <https://doi.org/10.3176/arch.2005.2.02>
- Nenola-Kallio, Aili. 1982. *Studies in Ingrian Laments*. FF Communications 234. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Неклюдов, Сергей Юрьевич. 2011. "Голая невеста на дереве." In *Славянский и балканский фольклор. Вып. 11: "Виноградье"*. Отв. ред. А.В. Гура, 195–204. Москва. <https://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/neckludov67.pdf>
- Olearius, Adam. (1656) 1669. *The Voyages and Travells of the Ambassadors Sent by Frederick Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy, and the King of Persia: Begun in the Year M.DC. XXXIII, and Finish'd in M.DC. XXXIX: Containing a Compleat History of Muscovy, Tartary, Persia, and Other Adjacent Countries: with Several Publick Transactions Reaching Near the Present Times: in VII Books*. John Starkey and Thomas Basset.
- Ong, Walter J. 2002. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Oras, Janika, Žanna Pärtlas, Mari Sarv, and Andreas Kalkun. 2021. "The Metrics of Seto Choral Laments in the Context of Runosong Metrics." *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 8(1): 40–98. <https://doi.org/10.12697/smp.2021.8.1.02>
- Primiano, Leonard N. 1995. "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folk-life." *Western Folklore (Special Issue: Reflexivity and the Study of Belief)* 54(1): 37–56. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1499910>
- Пропп, Владимир Яковлевич. (1946) 1998. *Морфология / Исторические корни волшебной сказки*. Москва: Лабиринт.
- Рахимова, Элина Гансовна. 2010. "Туонельские свечушки": словесная изобразительность карело-финских причитаний по покойным. Москва: ИМЛИ РАН.
- Rantanen Timo, Harri Tolvanen, Meeli Roose, Jussi Ylikoski and Outi Vesakoski. 2022. Best practices for spatial language data harmonization, sharing and map creation—A case study of Uralic. *PLoS ONE* 17(6): e0269648. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269648>
- Saar, Edgar. 1998. "On the Funeral Customs of the Northern Khants in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century." *Folklore* 7: 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF1998.07.khants>
- Stepanova, Eila. 2012. "Mythic Elements of Karelian Laments. The Case of *syndyzet* and *spuasuzet*." In *Mythic Discourses: Studies in Uralic Traditions*. *Studia Fennica. Folkloristica* 20, edited by Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala and Eila Stepanova, 257–287. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Timonen, Senni. 1992. "Utopian ideas in women's poetry." In *Folklore processed. In honour of Lauri Honko on his 60th birthday 6th March 1992*. *Studia Fennica. Folkloristica* 1, edited by Reimund Kvideland, 214–224. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 1998. "Every Tree Bites Me': North Karelian Lyric Poetry." In *Gender and Folklore. Perspectives on Finnish and Karelian Culture*. *Studia Fennica. Folkloristica* 4, edited by Satu Apo, Aili Nenola and Laura Stark-Arola, 201–235. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Толстая, Светлана Михайловна. 1999. "Обрядовое голошение: семантика, лексика, прагматика." In *Мир звучащий и молчащий: Семиотика звука и речи в традиционной культуре славян*. Москва: Индрик, 135–148.
- Valk, Ülo. 2000. "Regilaul kui kommunikatsioon teispoosusega: dialoogist nägemuseni." In *Kust tulid lood minule... Artikleid regilaulu uurimise alalt 1990. aastatel*, edited by Tiiu Jaago and Ülo Valk, 245–276. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus.
- 2022. "An Introduction to Vernacular Knowledge." In *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, edited by Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman, 1–21. Sheffield, UK; Bristol, CT: Equinox. <https://doi.org/10.1558/isbn.9781800502147>
- Винокурова, Ирина Юрьевна. 2011. *Обычаи, ритуалы и праздники в традиционной культуре вепсов. Учебное пособие*. Петрозаводск: Карельский научный центр РАН.

- Wigzell, Faith. 2005. "Reading the Map of Heaven and Hell in Russian Popular Orthodoxy: Examining the Usefulness of the Concepts of Dvoeverie and Binary Oppositions." *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 2: 346–367.
- Wilce, James M., and Janina Fenigsen. 2015. "Mourning and Honor: Register in Karelian Lament." In *Registers of Communications*, Studia Fennica. Linguistica 18, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 187–209. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvggx2qk.14>
- Зайцева, Нина Григорьевна, Ольга Юрьевна Жукова. 2012. *Käte-ške käbedaks kägoihudeks. Обернись-ка милой кукушечкой: вепские причитания*. Петрозаводск: Карельский научный центр РАН.

Motifs of ‘Souls’ as Signs of Mythical Thinking and Folklore Practice

From Traditional Lithuanian Laments to Popular Discourse

AUŠRA ŽIČKIENĖ

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4940-7835>

In this chapter, I aim to analyse the process by which the vanishing tradition of laments in Lithuanian rural communities is selectively adapted and integrated into modern culture and inspires contemporary myth within popular discourse. Following the first of the ten definitions of ideology given by Terry Eagleton, I am interested in ‘the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life’ (1995, 1), particularly in relation to traces left by the lament tradition.

However, this process cannot be explained without a brief discussion of the wider ideological context and its changes (see the next section of this chapter), since the material analysed in this chapter covers a very wide period of time: from an original nineteenth-century source (Juška 1882, 142–164) through its interpretations throughout the twentieth century, up to the present day. Antanas Juška’s collection of Lithuanian songs published at the end of the nineteenth century contains a total of twenty-four texts of funeral laments which are the starting point of my research. Other material was selected that contains interpretations of the laments from this primary source. For the study of living contemporary culture, I have also gathered material from the field (concerts, festivities, rituals of Baltic faith, and Catholic funerals), collected texts, and musical and visual material of various types, genres, and functions and tagged their contexts. I narrow the focus of the research to a range of questions regarding traces of the lament tradition in living culture, and then analyse, interpret, and synthesise the data according to a chosen theoretical framework, in which myth is understood as a manifestation of ideology, and tradition is considered as a folklore practice.

I draw on several distinctive motifs from traditional lament texts that are particularly important for illustrating the manifestations of contemporary re-mythologisation. These are mainly about *vėlė/velė* (soul), for example, the ‘bench of souls’, the ‘gate of souls’, the ‘door of souls’, the ‘guest of souls’, the ‘daughter-in-law of souls’.¹

1. *Vėlė*, or *velė*, is the Lithuanian term for the soul of a deceased person (Vėlė 2017; Velė 2017). The root of this word is related to the respectful naming of the deceased as *velionis*, or *vėlionis*, as well as to the pre-Christian religion’s chthonic deity, *Velinas*, *Velinis*, or *Velnias*, who was identified by Christians as the ruler of hell. It also relates to the word ‘*veliuka*’, which refers to a ghost, devil, evil spirit, or the soul of a dead person. The festival honouring the dead, celebrated on 2 November, is called *Vėlinės*, or *Velinės*.

O, priimkite savu žentelį, manu vyrelį, už baltų rankelių	Oh, take your son-in-law, my husband, by his white hands,
o, užstokite ant Vėlių durelių, o atdarykit Vėlių dureles;	oh, put him near the door of Souls, open the door of Souls;
tik jūs pirmesni, tik jūs kytresni,	only you can do it,
o, atdarykit Vėlių dureles, o, pasodinkite į Vėlių suoloelį.	oh, open the door of Souls, oh, sit him down on the bench of Souls.
(kad jau arti kapų)	(near the cemetery)
O, atkelkite Vėlių vartelius, o, atdarykite Vėlių dureles,	Oh, open the gate of Souls, open the door of Souls,
o, priimkite manu vyrelį, o, pasodinkite į Vėlių suoloelį,	oh, take my husband, oh, sit him down on the bench of Souls,
į lemtą pulkelį; (kad nebūtų Vėlių pultas). ²	among destined kin (to avoid being attacked by souls). ³

(Juška 1882, 153.)

From Juška's collection, the motifs in question began their independent journey into the spaces of contemporary culture. The first impetus for this journey was the work of amateur and academic researchers of mythology and folklore – undoubtedly an important element in the formation and consolidation of contemporary myth. It was they who gave rise to the values with which the above-mentioned motifs became linked. As we shall see shortly, they have not been lost today.

Historical View on the Changing Ideological Context

Only a couple of decades ago, researchers could still find the living Lithuanian tradition of lamenting the dead, which was in its final stages of existence. In some places, it was possible to collect the material in the field, interact with the practitioners of the tradition, and experience the joy of discovery although the 'souls' motifs had long-since completely disappeared. The lamenters or singers seemed to be different from us, researchers; they seemed to be living in a different time and culture, which we regarded as traditional. Traditional culture in Soviet-occupied Lithuania also had another connotation: the opportunity to know, explore, revive, and practice this culture was an act of returning to a primeval, mythical time, to a so-called 'golden age'. In a gloomy, frightening reality that crushed creativity and free academic thought, it was a chance to think about the culture of one's own nation and the possible path of its survival, based on the past and the values that emerge from it. The past – reified, idealised, and nostalgically reflected upon – was a strong counterweight to the state's ideological environment of the time.

The authorities in the field of ideological contexts of song studies provide insights into why such a dual reality – between official political and alternative cultural ideologies – emerged and how it functioned. In the nineteenth century, when Lithuania

2. The spelling of the Lithuanian text has been modernised.

3. All texts originally in Lithuanian translated by the author.

was occupied by tsarist Russia, the song tradition became an argument for the country's cultural tradition to be on the same level with the leading European nations, and thus became a catalyst for self-esteem and a sense of equivalence (Sadauskienė 2019; 2021). According to Jurga Sadauskienė, a canonical image of the traditional song developed over time, whereby songs were attributed folk origins, archaism, lyrical form, idealisation of the agricultural life, reflections of the natural worldview, high artistry, and high moral standards. The image of the song was aligned with the mission of the folk song to reflect the spirit of the nation (Sadauskienė 2019, 87–90; 2021, 15–19). This phenomenon was undoubtedly intensified by the period of Soviet occupation. The idealised, canonised song – as a tool for maintaining and strengthening the alternative, national ideology, the idea of national freedom and as an engine of the post-1960s ethno-cultural movement – became a particularly useful counterweight to the aggressively introduced concept of so-called Soviet folk art (Ramonaitė 2011, 41–49; Putinaitė 2022, 224). Thus, an idealised, exalted, and ethically and aesthetically incomplete view of the song tradition took hold for several more decades, the biggest drawback of which was a narrowed and archaised Lithuanian worldview (Sadauskienė 2021, 31–32).

The significant ideological gap between the two branches of the performing arts – the official, so-called Soviet folk art (a special genre comprising folk song and dance ensembles with a modern repertoire), and the so-called authentic tradition ((re)created traditional singing based on historical styles) – was no accident. Many scholars point out that alongside the official Soviet society, there existed another ‘invisible society’ (for a broader literature review, see Ramonaitė 2015a, 8–14). One form of supporting and defending Lithuanian culture as identity was the conscious practice of traditional culture, especially singing. This was in part the result of the involvement of professional scholars of folkloristics, but mainly stemmed from popular amateur culture and forms of leisure activities led by local historians, hikers, and communities of traditional folklore ensembles (Ramonaitė 2011, 41–50; Ramonaitė 2015b, 195–217). The activities of such communities had the characteristics of the dissident movements that denied and subverted Soviet ideology. Operating as social networks, they created their own, separate reality (Kavaliauskaitė and Ramonaitė 2011, 406).

It should be added here that the motifs of the nineteenth-century lament texts published in Juška's collection perfectly correspond to the characteristics of the song canon. Moreover, the living lament tradition of the Veliuona district – where Juška collected the songs – had already completely disappeared by the twentieth century and survived only as a written monument to a distant past. This is probably the reason why the motifs were perfectly suited to support an alternative ideology based on the idealisation of the past.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this study consists of two closely related concepts: myth as a manifestation of ideology; and tradition as a folklore practice. Both serve as instruments to summarise the whole of the chosen lament motifs (i.e. ‘souls’ motifs). In traditional funeral laments as well as in contemporary folkloric, artistic, communicative, and informational texts, the ‘souls’ motifs can be attributed to the practice of

folklore as well as the representation of ideology through mythology. Ideology, as a process of constant, undulating activation of ideas in social life, is linked to the theory of myth creation and its transmission, repetition, affirmation, understanding, and dissemination. As a communicative message loaded with specific symbolic meanings and significances, myth has been and still is one of the integral parts of ideology (e.g., Smith 1988, 174–208; Frog 2018; Krader 2021, 309–311).

According to the mythologist Algirdas Julius Greimas, 'mythology is not, as has been commonly assumed, a collection of myths collected by one people, but an ideological structure that can manifest itself in any "literary" form' (1992, 2). Myth reveals itself in spoken, written, pictorial, or any other form and – according to Roland Barthes – it is a type of speech (Barthes 1991, 107–108). Written language as well as photography, reportage, sport, spectacle, advertising, and ritual can be the material or immaterial expressions of a mythic message. This consists of virtually any material processed for the purpose of a particular communication (Barthes 1991, 108–109). Barthes also stresses the fluidity of the process of myth creation: myths may be very old, but they are hardly eternal; first some things become the basis for myth creation, then others – created on the basis of a certain pre-existing system of signs (ibid., 116) and always oriented towards the past (ibid., 108). Thus, myths, articulated in a variety of fragmentary ways, are essentially narratives, fragments of narratives, or hints about who we are.

As Anthony D. Smith, one of the most prominent scholars of modern mythology, has argued, 'without myths, memories, and symbols by which to mark off group members from "strangers", and without the cultural elites to interpret and elaborate them, there can be no real *ethnie*' (Smith 1984, 288, emphasis original). The need for a cultural myth always consists of nostalgia for tradition, and nostalgia is the seed from which the germs of the modern myth grow (Smith 1988, 174–77). Myth is crucial for the maintenance, actualisation, and reinforcement of national ideology and contemporary mythology plays the same role.

Raoul Girardet, an authority on contemporary mythology and a scholar of myth in politics, notes that the most important myths that stand out, including the myth of the Golden Age, emerge repeatedly in times of crisis, upheavals, and revolutions (Girardet 2007, 180–181). The political force that is able to make use of this myth in order to strengthen its position usually emerges as the ruling force. The representation of the so-called old times, based on flights of fancy, becomes a myth in the truest sense of the word: a fiction, a system of interpretation, a mobilising message (ibid., 132–133). He, like Barthes, points to the myth's fluidity – its infinite representations and unfixed contours, the stability of its structure, the simplicity and coherence of its logic, and at the same time its abundance of symbols and images (ibid., 141). In our case, the Golden Age myth is not directly related to the arena of political power; rather, we could speak of it as a tool of the dissident struggle for the upheaval of the political system – the myth is born and becomes a spiritual resistance on its own, unforced.

That is why the theory of folklore practice is also an important tool for the research presented here. Simon J. Bronner (2019) thinks of folklore as a praxis. He considers repetitive, ongoing, ritualised, variously connoted or stylised practices to which people attach meanings and which reflect a way of thinking that permeates an entire culture from the individual level to that of the state as a core category of analysis in folkloristics and cultural studies. According to him, observing such practices allows us to

study the choices determined by tradition, which define what will become accepted or not, what will be repeated and ritualised, and what will be simply 'used' and become a habit without additional meanings (Bronner 2012, 40). The myth form that emerges through such practices determined by local tradition can be described as a soft means of affirming cultural ideology and, at the same time, national identity, which does not originate from political ideology above, but gradually emerges from below and fills the cultural need for identity. It is precisely the power of local tradition that results in the continued recognition and acceptance of certain signs, expressions, symbols, and meanings in contemporary cultural practices. In this case, the motifs of 'gates of souls', 'doors of souls', and others in traditional lament texts illustrate that the adoption of tradition takes place through the reduction and transformation of form, as well as through the transfer of values and powers.

Making the 'Souls' Motifs Significant: Scholars and Public Authorities

As already mentioned above, in Lithuania, the exaggeration of past national strength and the subsequent elevation of its folklore as essential to identity were significant forces of the nineteenth-century national revival and movement for Lithuanian independence. Immediately after the publication of Antanas Juška's *Lithuanian Songs* in 1882, the texts of laments with mentions of 'souls' received attention as objects of linguistic and mythological research. They have been quoted and interpreted by influential people in Lithuania, such as Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927), Eduardas Volteris (1856–1941), and many others. Volteris, in particular, discusses and interprets the whole complex of motifs of the 'gate of souls' in great detail (Вольтер 1886, 179–187), formulating the main issues of mythology and which started a debate that continues to this day. In particular, the significance given to the notion of an honourable death should be emphasised. Basanavičius remarks: 'Even today we often say: "to sit on the bench of the souls", or to die blissfully' (1884, 132), and Volteris says that 'in pre-Christian times, the spirit of a deceased honourable man was referred to as a "soul"' (Вольтер 1886, 122).

Later, throughout the twentieth century, the texts of these laments were quoted and the images were interpreted many times, discussing various aspects of pre-Christian belief in the idea of the otherworld (e.g., Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė 1942, 207–208; Giedrienė 1976; 1977, 71–72; Beresnevičius 1990, 144). The mythologist Gintaras Beresnevičius (1961–2006) was probably the first to thoroughly discuss the features of changes in the representations of the otherworld and to distinguish the layers of beliefs in pre-Christian metempsychosis when he examined Juška's collected laments (*ibid.*, 64–68). However, he did so with caution, stressing the hypothetical nature of his arguments and the futility of the restoration of universal models (*ibid.*, 64–65). He notes that in the texts of Juška's laments about reincarnation of the deceased into a plant, there is no longer metempsychosis, but an imagination of a later time:

The benches and gates mentioned in the lament could have been suitable for different worldviews, both those recognising an otherworld 'beyond the water', in the 'underworld', and the 'heavenly' version of the otherworld. However, the very emphasis on 'gates' and 'benches' in the lament indicates that these images are beginning to define a transcendent

world already known in concrete terms, with its own boundaries (the 'gate') and space (which contains the 'bench'). Hence, such images come from an epoch in which the belief system in metempsychosis had already been overcome. The relic elements of metempsychosis beliefs were preserved in the lament tradition, but only the images that coincided with the vision of the space of the dead in an otherworld functioned in reality. (Beresnevičius 1990, 144–145.)

Donatas Sauka's (1929–2015) interpretation goes even further. In a folklore textbook for philologists published in 1982, he notes that the laments collected by Juška were stylistically ideal (Sauka 1982, 123). Sauka cites one of these laments as perhaps the most perfect example of the style:

My daughter-in-law of souls, my sheet of ice! You are the one we shall see off to the high hill! The one who is going to the high hill! With what blossoms will you bloom, with what leaves will you leaf? So that I may see, as I pass by, what blossoms you will send forth. How shall I know it's you? By the leaves? Or by the flowers? (Sauka 1982, 123.)

However, the scholar doubts whether these images are really a legacy of pre-Christian religion. After a precise analysis, he answers strictly: 'they are not a reminiscence of a living religious feeling, nor an instrument of a magical incantation, but a vision poetically painted according to the nineteenth century worldview' (ibid., 125).

However, the precise tone of the scholar's analysis does not fit into the popular discourse and does not feed into contemporary myth-making. No matter how authoritative Sauka and Beresnevičius may be as experts in mythology and folklore, as representatives of performative folkloristics, and as nurturers and inspirers of the spirit of the Lithuanian nation in the face of Soviet ideology, the popular consciousness needs a different register for authenticating the past. The insights of two very prolific and popular amateur mythology researchers, Algirdas Patackas (1943–2015) and Aleksandras Žarskus (b. 1946), were particularly conducive to the development of the popular discourse. They began to disseminate their work at the end of the twentieth century, initially via lectures, meetings, and conversations with people from various parts of Lithuania, and since 1990 have done so in articles, interviews, books, and radio and television broadcasts. These charismatic authors have been called 'ethnosophists' (Razauskas 2006). Their nationalist theories were extremely inspiring and encouraging, awakened a national consciousness, and raised awareness of the need to resist Soviet ideology. Although they did not have any relevant academic training (Žarskus was a geodetic engineer, while Patackas was a technological engineer), both freely and boldly interpreted data from linguistics, folklore, ethnography, historical sources, and mythology. They created a whole theory of the transformations of human life (birth, wedding, and death), which dealt with the harmony of life and death, and the responsibility of a person for their deeds (Patackas and Žarskus 1990a; 1990b; 1993; 2002; Žarskus 2009). These authors, in their best-selling publications, initially self-published or simply copied, also frequently quoted the lament texts collected by Juška, explained the motifs of 'souls', and presented their generalisations, which sometimes arose very freely from the compilation of unreliable data or even without providing any references to sources. For example: 'Old sources mention a bench of souls at funerals – the souls sitting on it, waiting to be transferred to the Other world on a white (pale) horse, into the beyond' (Patackas and Žarskus 2002, 22).

Another author whose thinking has contributed greatly to the creation and maintenance of the narrative that brings the ‘souls’ motifs to life in contemporary culture was Jonas Trinkūnas (1939–2014). He was a prominent Lithuanian public figure, an activist in the struggle for the regaining of Lithuania’s independence, the founder and leader of the Baltic faith community (Romuva), and a philologist by training. The faith community originated from a local history group that had been active since 1967 with Trinkūnas as one of its founders. The participants went to villages, recorded folk songs and dances, and learned them but their deeper goal was to (re)construct pre-Christian rites and celebrate festivals based on that mythological system. Trinkūnas was an extremely influential, a strong dissident who believed in his ideas, was able to communicate them, and generate a following. From the 1960s onwards, he built up the community of the Baltic faith mainly through direct communication – by speaking, persuading, organising meetings and trips to villages to collect folk songs (and, of course, to listen to traditional laments), and convening gatherings in nature to celebrate festivals, and so on. After 1990, he began to publish books, to express himself actively in the press and various other media. The books he compiled for the Baltic faith are often very creative in their use of the ‘souls’ motifs. For example, a collection of postulates, prayers, and hymns from the *Lietuvių senasis tikėjimas* (Lithuanian Old Faith), published around 2010 (Trinkūnas n.d.), includes a text dedicated to the deceased. Designed as an imitation of a lament, it is most likely intended to be simply spoken as a prayer, as evidenced by the ending of the text which is uncharacteristic of laments and contrary to the principle of their creation; the structure of a lament is always open, it never ends with a clear final figure:

Mielas (Velionio vardas),	Dear (name of the deceased),
Tai tu susiruošei į didžią kelionę,	You are going on a great journey,
Tai tavęs laukia tolimas keelis –	A long road awaits you –
Ar į tą šalę, kur aukštas kalnelis?	Is it to that country where the hill is high?
Vėlių motinėle, Vėlių tėveli,	Mother of Souls, Father of Souls,
Imkit už baltų rankelių,	Take him by his white hands,
Paimkite mielą (Velionio vardas),	Take the dear (name of the deceased),
Pasodinkite į <u>vėlių suoloelį</u> ,	Seat him on the <u>bench of souls</u> ,
Atkelkit <u>vėlių vartelius</u> ,	Open the <u>gate of souls</u> ,
Žaliavario vartelius,	The green copper gate,
Atidarykit <u>vėlių dureles</u> ,	Open the <u>door of souls</u> ,
Žaliavario dureles.	The green copper door.
Tai mėnulio vartai,	This is the gate of the moon,
Tai žvaigždžių vartai.	This is the gate of the stars.
Mielas (Velionio vardas),	Dear (name of deceased),
Nuneški garselį, nuneški žodelį	Bring the sound, bring the word
Mano giminėlei,	To my kin,
Perduok jiems mūsų godonę,	Give them our honour,
Perduok jiems mūsų meilę.	Give them our love.
Žemynėle, būk gera, priimk šią vėlelę,	Žemynėle [the goddess of Earth], be so kind, receive this soul,
Globok ir gerai saugok ją,	Take care of him and keep him well,
Lai tavo globa būna it minkštas patalas.	May your care be like a soft bed.
Ramybė Tau	Peace be with you
Per amžių amžius.	Forever and ever.

(Trinkūnas n.d., 50; underlining added.)

The prayer compiles motifs from folk songs, laments collected by Juška, as well as the funeral game which is a particular favourite of the Romuva community with the refrain 'green copper' and folk Christian hymns. The text is developed by introducing the unconventional images of the 'father of souls' and 'mother of souls'.

In another publication (Trinkūnas 2000), also prepared for the Romuva community (the content of which undoubtedly goes back much further than its year of publication), a section on rites for the dead is entitled 'Laments and Speeches'. Apparently, the practice of lamenting is rapidly transforming into poetic texts, not to be ritualistically recited, but to be simply spoken, although they are still called laments:

The purpose of laments is not only to mourn the dead. Laments are sacred texts, both for the deceased (who is advised to seek the intercession and help of his deceased relatives) and for his previously deceased relatives, who welcome him, open the 'gate of souls', place him on the 'bench of souls', and protect him from dangers.

The entrance to the otherworld, to the land of souls, is closed. It can only be opened with the help of ancestors, children, or parents who have died before. After all, they are the true guardians of the newcomers. (Trinkūnas 2000, 39; see also 2003, 39.)

The activities and ideas of Patackas, Žarskus, and Trinkūnas had a strong impact on the formation of popular images that remain ingrained in the collective memory.

'Souls' of Laments in Popular Discourse: from Traditional Laments to Rock Songs and Marketing Tools

As a very distinctive, memorable, and exceptional part of Lithuanian folklore and national identity, laments are reflected, quoted, and stylised in various fields of art (music, national poetry, visual and performing arts). 'Souls' motifs undoubtedly have deep meanings related to the contemporary Baltic faith and could therefore be explored in religious and subcultural discourses. However, I intend to leave these areas aside and turn instead to the rich material provided by the realities of everyday life, contemporary customs, and ritualisations and their reflections in the flow of information through various media sources. A few striking examples from this material illustrate processes of vibrant folklore practices and the relevance of mythical thinking. It should also be stressed that in this case, the ideological background is changing once again. In the twenty-first century, the motifs of connection and harmony between living and dead are being transformed from myth as a soft tool in the struggle against the occupying power to a ritualised narrative of respect for the deceased, which is permanently present in cultural memory and is reiterated through various practices and supported by popular-culture texts.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with a public social activist and business-woman Eglė Plioplienė, broadcast on 1 November, 2014 on national broadcaster's (LRT) radio program.⁴ The transcription appeared later that day on the pages of major and minor Lithuanian dailies and online news portals:

4. In Lithuania, 1 November, All Saints' Day, and 2 November, All Souls' Day (*Vėlinės*), are non-working days for honouring the memory of the deceased and for visiting and cleaning graves.

Reporter:

Where do the dead go? Where are the otherworld (*dausos*) and the gate of souls?

Eglė Plioplienė:

According to the words of the songs – on a high hill, in a special place, which is perceived, one could say, as paradise. The souls there have no earthly troubles, no worries. Perhaps that is why in laments, when someone close, be it a child, or a husband, has passed away, the souls are asked to take the little son by their white hands and lead him through the opened gate to the bench of the souls. It is hoped that this way, the deceased will be accepted in that field, which is on a high hill, and they will be well among their own kind. I think there is a direct link here with the souls [*vėlės*] as part of the flag [*vėliava*], as part of the nation, where the souls of the ancestors can and do come to their aid. The flag [*vėliava*] is like turf [*velėna*], where everything that dies in autumn is resurrected in spring with new flowers; likewise, through the world of the souls we can rise again as a nation. It seems to me that through our souls we radiate all kinds of energy, thoughts, and feelings. This is our continuity – that which is between here and there, very undefined, but on the other hand, also defined. Otherwise, there would be no death as a breakpoint, no rites and tales about it all. (Plioplienė 2014; underlining added.)

She has no doubt when asked about the otherworld (*dausos*) and the ‘gate of souls’. Her answer and explanation are based on a kind of play on the sound and meaning of words with the root ‘*vel-*’, linking statements that are not scientifically based. However, this interpretation very seamlessly confirms the necessity of the mythical ancestors as part of the nation, and thus the continuity of the nation both into the past and into the future: ‘through the world of the souls we can rise again as a nation’. The motifs of the ‘bench of souls’ and ‘door of souls’ are exaggerated in their own way, and used as a basis for the creation of an imaginary model of the ancient Lithuanian otherworld.

Today, it is no longer self-evident that these motifs actually originated in laments, as general knowledge of the lament tradition has become vague, approximate, and distant. In educational and informative books, in the press, and on the Internet, one can find similar recurring, migrating, and continuously repeated and varied statements that in Lithuanian folk songs the deceased sits down on the ‘bench of souls’, that the mother’s beloved son becomes the ‘son-in-law of souls’, the daughter becomes the ‘daughter-in-law of souls’, and that they depart through the ‘gate of souls’. Through this constant repetition, we can recognise signs of folkloric practice and we can discern a fairly coherent narrative in the many fragments.

The spread of these fragments intensifies each year in the run-up to All Saints’ and All Souls’ Days. Articles and interviews with ethnologists and representatives of the funeral business abound. Mention of the sublimely idealised ancient lamenting for the dead appears in the press, on Internet news portals, various websites, and in radio and television broadcasts. These are all reflections of living cultural practices. People plan trips across Lithuania to visit the graves of relatives and meet their loved ones there. Younger people are told about the lives of the deceased and memories are shared. In schools and kindergartens, children learn about the traditions of All Souls’ Day. There are many educational events that support the idea of an ancient, traditional, and protected cultural heritage. From mid-October onwards, the whole information environment is filled with the characteristic narrative of the relationship between the living and the dead. The motifs of ‘souls’ recur repeatedly in fragments of longer or shorter texts. For example, a website of a shop selling flowers, bouquets, and plant

arrangements explains the meaning of All Souls' Day (*Vėlinės*) to potential buyers with phrases such as 'brings us back to our origins', 'believed in since ancient times', 'called in ancient times', to encourage an unconditional trust in the past:

Lithuanians have celebrated All Souls' Day since ancient times. It is a pagan holiday. Lithuanian folk songs describe how people seem to pass on through the 'gate of souls'. This dark time brings us back to our origins and gives special meaning to visiting the graves of loved ones. It gives us a sense of togetherness and makes us believe that our deceased loved ones have not left us, that they are always there to protect us... It has always been believed that souls visit the graves of the places they once inhabited, and that their favourite time to visit them is in the dark, deep autumn. It is not for nothing that November was called the month of the souls in ancient times. (Gėlės ir manufaktūra 2017; underlining added.)

Another very distinct form of actualisation of lament motifs can also be identified. The motifs of 'souls' have become an almost canonical part of funeral speeches, messages in the press and other media about the deceased, although the death of the closest people can be announced this way in a private conversation (from the author's personal experience). As an example, this is how, in 2020, the library staff of a small southern Lithuanian town said goodbye to a deceased colleague by publishing a sensitive text on their website:

The fragile and temporary path of human life, and how quickly we walk it... On 28 July, after a serious illness, a creative, hard-working, sincere colleague sat down on the long bench of librarians' souls. Her heart stopped and was forever silent after her meaningful deeds, giving her wisdom and warmth of heart to those who were waiting for her. (Šakių rajono savivaldybės biblioteka 2020; underlining added.)

The Lithuanian-Australian newspaper *Mūsų pastogė* (Our Shelter) said goodbye to the late artist Viktoras Simankevičius with the following words:

He had already passed through the gate of the souls, he had already sat down on the souls' bench, where a longed-for bunch of relatives and friends were waiting for him. He has completed his journey on this earth, full of work and hope. (Kazokienė 2006, 5; underlining added.)

The motif of the 'bench of souls' is used in the article commemorating Antanina Liorentaitė (1906–2003), the first Lithuanian woman pilot and parachutist:

This August marks the 80th anniversary of when this great daughter of Lithuania received her pilot's license, and in February it will be 10 years since she sat on the long bench of Lithuanian pilots' souls. (Skučaitė 2013; underlining added.)

It should be stressed that texts commemorating the dead that use the metaphors with the 'souls' motif preserve the associated notion of an honourable death, which was already present in the nineteenth century. Such metaphors are only used when referring to loved ones or to those who are respected, and who have contributed to the state, nation, culture, or communities.

The motifs of the ‘souls’ are actualised and interpreted also in songs of various genres and styles. A song, ‘*Rauda*’ (Lament) by the rock band ‘*Skylė*’, was created as an imitation of a folk song. It is part of the album and concert programme ‘*Broliai*’ (Brothers, created in 2010),⁵ dedicated to the memory of the participants of the anti-soviet Lithuanian freedom struggles of 1944–1953. The album received extraordinary public attention and, as the songs were translated into Ukrainian in 2014, the band took part in the Maidan events and supported the spirit of Ukrainian resistance.

Oi, pabyrėjo	Oh, the maple leaves,
Klevelio lapeliai,	The maple leaves
Klevelio lapeliai	Have fallen
Po tą žalią sodužėlį.	Off the green garden.

Oi, pabyrėjo	Oh, our young brothers,
Mūsų jauni broleliai,	Our young brothers
Mūsų jauni broleliai	Are scattered
Po tas žalias giružėles.	In these green woods.

Oi, atsiverkit,	Oh, open
<u>Vėlelių varteliai,</u>	<u>The gate of souls,</u>
Oi, priimkit	Oh, welcome
Mūsų jaunus brolelius.	Our young brothers.

(Text by Gediminas Žilys (Rauda 2016); underlining added.)

The motifs are often incorporated into the names of projects, events, services, products, companies, and more. In 2020, the apiary called KUPA sent out an invitation to an educational event called ‘*Vėlių vartelius atkėlus*’ (With the souls’ gate opened):

Throughout the month of October, the apiary KUPA will be preparing for the upcoming All Souls’ Day and will invite you to an event dedicated to the Lithuanian concept of eternity [...] Each participant will make a candle for the upcoming All Souls’ Day. During the candle-casting, we will listen to Lithuanian and Latvian songs, in which we will see not only the longing for loved ones but also images of the otherworld and rebirth. Among them, the bee – the embodiment of the souls – has a special place [...] Together, we will feast on the table of souls, a necessary attribute of the souls’ period that has been forgotten in our times [...] Price per person 15 euros. Pre-registration required. (KUPA 2020.)

The Jonas Basanavičius Progymnasium in Vilnius invited students to gather at pre-Christian burial hills – barrows – to an event, called ‘*Atverkime vėlių vartelius*’ (Let us open the gate of souls), as part of an inter-school project, aimed at integrated education:

The symbolism of the calendar holidays is made more meaningful by those celebrations that take place in a natural environment, where the pupil can feel and touch the old Lithuanian world that surrounds him. (Jonas Basanavičius Pro-Gymnasium 2015.)

5. The concert programme is still extremely popular today, with concerts held almost every year.

Today, the school curricula include a course on the basics of Lithuanian ethno-culture and folklore for pupils in the upper grades, which is taught in Lithuanian language and literature classes. The Lithuanian language textbook developed at Vilnius University (Stumbrienė and Kaškelevičienė 2014) contains a task: to insert words about honouring the dead and the concept of the 'ancient' Lithuanian otherworld into the given statements, using the correct spelling. Among others, the following sentences are included:

The custom of remembering and honouring the dead in autumn has survived to this day. Lithuanians have always believed that when a person dies, the soul that separates from the body goes through the gate of souls, sits on the bench of souls, and continues to communicate with the living. (Stumbrienė and Kaškelevičienė 2014, 167; underlining added.)

The persuasiveness of the above example (textbooks always try to achieve the maximum didactic goal) can be explained by Barthes' sequence of thoughts when he analyses an example from a school textbook (1991, 114–126). In this conjugation exercise, the sentence 'Lithuanians have always believed [...] ' is, on the one hand, a grammatical example to illustrate a rule. But on the other hand, the sentence is obviously there to mean something else to the student. Its principal meaning is to impose itself as a kind of convention. Encouraged by Barthes, I can also think that here I am dealing with a larger semiological system. Myth uses a language, or its equivalent modes of representation, to create its own system – what Barthes calls the 'metalanguage'. In this case, the motifs of 'souls' are the raw material, the signifier, but it is itself made up of the sum of the signs; it contains the previous, original meaning of the sign. And for that reason, it is an example of mythical content in itself. Barthes is dealing with an example from ancient literature in a grammar textbook; the rules of grammar for Lithuanian pupils are reinforced by canonical examples from classical folklore, which 'must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there. It is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth.' (Barthes 1991, 117.)

(Re)Mythologisation of the Motifs of Laments as a Modern Folklore Practice

Most of the examples presented here illustrate the process of transformation of motifs of traditional laments in contemporary culture that are published spoken or written texts, reflecting the cultural pervasiveness of mass media sources and educational publications. They also testify to the non-elitism of the process, its universality, and its commonness in popular discourse. However, it is not the sources or even the texts themselves, but what they presuppose that allows us to explain the observed process in terms of the categories of mythology and folklore practice. Simon Bronner (2019, ix–xiv) also notes the centrality of contextual links when he outlines the steps of what he calls *praxeological* research. Even seemingly insignificant fragments of everyday colloquial speech can be used to express complex aspects of contemporary life, but at the same time can fit the definition of folklore and serve as examples that allow us to launch an inquiry into purposive, mobilising, and socially shared behaviours. A word, saying, song motif, or even a look or a gesture, caught by the sensitive eye or ear of an

observer, leads to a deeper observation of practices and behaviours. Combining the latter with historical inquiry, the connotations of it within the social frame of action are identified. Finally, the objectives of such actions are revealed, identified with their related traditions, and the consequences and ideas arising from them are analysed (ibid., x).

This tactic of steps (documenting the original source, observing the practices, exploring the historical links, the connotations of behaviour in the social environment, the consequences of the practices, and the impact on the social environment) is also relevant here. For example, during the period of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in Lithuania, the increasing flow of messages about the relationship between the living and the dead (marked by the motifs of 'souls' in this case) is inherited from the distant past. The complex of beliefs, customs, folklore, and mythology has been thoroughly discussed by Radvilė Racėnaitė in her monograph *Žmogaus likimo ir mirties samprata lietuvių folklore* (Notion of Human Fate and Death in Lithuanian Folklore) (2012). However, the customs of mass visits to cemeteries, grave cleaning and decoration, candle burning, and commemoration of the dead are currently characterised by many features that are indicative of pragmatism and the pursuit of modern order, and these customs were actually formed in the twentieth century (Žukauskaitė 2024). The modern transformation of customs also brings with it various folkloric practices. The continuous waves of repetitive and varied fragments – about the deceased sitting down on the 'bench of souls', that the mother's beloved son becomes the 'son-in-law of souls', the daughter becomes the 'daughter-in-law of souls', and that they depart through the 'gate of souls' – have today acquired the characteristics of an independent fragmentary folklore narrative. It practises knowledge through repetition and variation:

Folklore is informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures and our traditions, that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviours and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge with other people. (Sims and Stephens 2005, 8.)

This knowledge, in turn, activates trust in the cultural power of the past, or simply in tradition. This is no longer practiced through the lamenting of a deceased relative at a funeral, or the telling of fairy tales and legends during winter evenings, but rather through textbooks, assignments for schoolchildren, narratives in the media, poetry and folk-rock songs, the content of funeral ceremonies, and even in private conversations (e.g., the personal announcement of a loved one's arrival on the 'bench of souls'). The power of trust in the mythical past is transmitted when a fragment of the folkloric 'soul' narrative appears in a text devoted to reflecting on Catholic doctrine (Jasėnas 2021). A particularly striking example is the above-mentioned narrative of a public figure interviewed on a radio programme, which sensitively links the issues of the distant mythical past and the present, thus highlighting the importance of patriotic thought (soft ideology) in mobilising the nation: 'through the world of the souls we can rise again as a nation'.

To summarise, it should be noted that today, a kind of narrative, a contemporary myth, is rapidly emerging and taking root, in which the concept of the otherworld is based, among other things, on metaphorical fragments of the nostalgic laments' tradition, in which I have highlighted the so-called 'souls' motifs. In the mid-nineteenth

century, several truly impressive funeral lament texts were published. From these sources, the 'souls' motifs spread. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the motifs in question were used in various interpretations by the National Revival Movement, statehood restoration activists, professional folklore and mythology researchers, and romantically inclined amateurs – turning the 'souls' motifs into a kind of benchmark of laments today. They are found in stories about how our ancestors behaved, believed, interpreted, and imagined the otherworld. The narrative is constantly repeated, varied, and reinforced, always as a positive and nostalgic example. The strong belief expressed at the end of the nineteenth century – that in the otherworld the 'door of souls' or 'gate of souls' is open only to honourable people – the only ones supposed to sit on the 'bench of souls' – is still fully valid in today's popular articulations of the myth. Only the people who have done a great deal for culture, education, and science, that is to say the honest people and heroes, can 'sit on the souls' bench' with their closest, beloved ones.

The above-mentioned fragments of nineteenth-century laments have become fully fledged metaphors of death used in spoken language, canonical parts of funeral speeches, and messages in the media. They are interpreted in popular songs and poetry, and the lines of these laments are used in various titles for events (especially often during the period of All Souls' Day) and in articles, educational materials, projects, services, goods, etc.

In living culture, one can only find traces of the former lament tradition, but the palpable longing for it today gives rise to new forms. These new forms are born in an urban environment, where the old village tradition is heavily reduced, idealised, distanced (laments are attributed to distant antiquity, belonging to ancestors), fragmented, recreated, and compiled. A tradition that is distant to a wider audience is communicated only through various intermediaries, so the mechanisms of modern mythology, antiquating, and popular-culture communication are inevitably involved. An understanding that is quite distant from the reality of the past emerges, producing new content. This seems to be a completely organic transformation of tradition, linked to the creation of identity, to the constant need for a mythical narrative that is embedded in contemporary rituals. Such a mythical narrative unites people and creates and maintains zones of cultural security. The form of myth that emerges through cultural practices, determined by local tradition, can be described as a 'soft' means of consolidating cultural ideology. In other words, it is a means of affirming national identity, which is not dropped from above as the basis for the construction of a political ideology, but gradually emerges from below and satisfies the cultural need for identity construction. It is precisely the impact of the power of local tradition that has led to the continued recognition and acceptance of certain signs, forms of expression, symbols, and meanings in contemporary cultural practices.

The mythical thinking, recognisable through practices of folklore, is revealed in this chapter through the motifs of traditional laments (motifs of 'souls'). It is possible that it permeates many other ideological systems in the process of creating signs and values in contemporary social life. For some of them – such as political ideology – mythical thinking becomes a tool of resistance and a means of creating and maintaining a counter-ideology (the 'invisible societie' in the Soviet system); in other cases, the re-mythologisation process (activation of mythical thinking) can itself be inspired by other ideological systems (e.g., the scientific paradigm). Finally, mythical thinking is also at work in the production and consumption of popular culture (journalism, marketing, school education, popular poetry, and music), generating its own values and meanings.

References

Sources

- Gėlės ir manufaktūra. 2017. “Vėlių diena Vėlinės.” Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://gelesmanufaktura.lt/veliu-diena-velines/>
- Jonas Basanavičius Pro-Gymnasium. 2015. “Integruoto tarpmokyklinio projekto ‘Metų ratu’ šventė Karmazinių pilkapiuose ‘Atkelkim Vėlių vartelius.’” Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://basanaviciausprogimnazija.lt/integruoto-tarpmokyklinio-projekto-metu-ratu-svente-karmazinu-pilkapiuose-atkelkim-veliu-vartelius/>
- Jasėnas, Justas. 2021. “Ant aukštojo kalno prie vėlių suolelio.” *Sekundė*, November 1. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://sekunde.lt/leidinys/sekunde/ant-aukstojo-kalno-prie-veliu-suolelio/>
- Juška, Antanas, ed. 1882. *Lietuviškos dąjnos užrašytos par Antaną Juškevičę Velūnos apigardoje iš žodžiu Lietuvių dainininku ir daininikiu*. Kазань: Типография Императорского университета.
- Kazokienė, Genovaitė. 2006. “Atsisveikinant su Viktoru Semankevičiumi.” *Mūsų Pastogė* 27(2996). Accessed June 18, 2025. https://www.spauda2.org/musu_pastoge/archive/2006/2006-07-12-MUSU-PASTOGE.pdf
- KUPA. 2020. “Vėlių vartelius atkėlus.” Accessed June 18, 2025. <http://www.kupa.lt/naujienos/params/post/2264933/veliu-vartelius-atkelus>
- Plioplienė, Eglė. 2014. “Etnologė: radę ryšį su vėlėmis, gausime jų palaiminimą.” Interview by Violeta Melnikienė. *LRT*, November. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/71837/etnologe-rade-rysi-su-velemis-gausime-ju-palaiminima>
- Rauda. 2016. Concert programme ‘*Broliai*’ (Brothers) by Aistė Smilgevičiūtė and group *Skylė*. Filmed at the Sports, Entertainment and Business Centre ‘Forum Palace’ in Vilnius, Lithuania, December 3. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWKVYytFUz8>
- Skučaitė, Virginija. 2013. “Ką mes žinome apie pirmąją Lietuvos lakūnę?” *Kauno diena*, April 3. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/kultura/ka-mes-zinome-apie-pirmaja-lietuvos-lakune-209165>
- Stumbrienė, Virginija, and Aurelija Kaškelevičienė. 2014. *Nė dienos be lietuvių kalbos 2: Lietuvių kalbos vadovėlis pažengusiems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.
- Šakių rajono savivaldybės biblioteka. 2020. “Atsisveikiname su Gailute Meškevičiene (1961–2020).” Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.sakiai.rvb.lt/Naujiena/atsisveikiname-su-gailute-meskevičiene-1961-2020/>
- Trinkūnas, Jonas, ed. n.d. *Lietuvių senasis tikėjimas*. Vilnius: Romuva.
- Trinkūnas, Jonas. 2000. *Baltų tikėjimas. Lietuvių pasaulėjauta, papročiai, apeigos, ženklai*. Vilnius: Diemedis.
- 2003. *Lietuvių Pasaulėjauta: papročiai, apeigos, ženklai*. Vilnius: Diemedis.
- Velė. 2017. “Velė.” In *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1–20 (1941–2002)*: electronic version. Edited by Gertrūda Naktinienė et al. Programmed by Evaldas Ožeraitis, Vytautas Zinkevičius. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas (www.lkz.lt). Accessed June 18, 2025. <http://www.lkz.lt/?zodis=vel%C4%97&id=30053630000>
- 2017. “Velė.” In *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas 1–20 (1941–2002)*: electronic version. Edited by Gertrūda Naktinienė et al. Programmed by Evaldas Ožeraitis, Vytautas Zinkevičius. Vilnius: Lietuvių kalbos institutas (www.lkz.lt). Accessed June 18, 2025. <http://www.lkz.lt/?zodis=v%C4%97%C4%97&id=30053660000&lns=31&les=18>

Literature

- Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, Marija. 1942. *Laidosena Lietuvoje geležies amžiuje*. Diploma thesis. Vilnius: University of Vilnius.
- Barthes, Roland. 1991. *Mythologies*. Selected and translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Basanavičius, Jonas. 1884. "Ar sena ira lietuviszka 'duszia.'" *Auszra*: 131–37. Accessed June 18, 2025. http://www.šaltiniai.info/files/literatura/LG00/Auszra_1884.LG4231.pdf
- Beresnevičius, Gintaras. 1990. *Dausos*. Vilnius: Gimtinė.
- Bronner, Simon J. 2012. "Practice Theory in Folklore and Folklife Studies." *Folklore* 123: 23–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2012.642985>
- 2019. *The Practice of Folklore: Essays toward a Theory of Tradition*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. <https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496822628.001.0001>
- Eagleton, Terry. 1995. *Ideology. An Introduction*. London: Verso.
- Frog. 2018. "Myth." *Humanities* 7(1): 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h7010014>
- Giedrienė, Rūta. 1976. "Senųjų tikėjimų apraiškos xx a. Lietuvių laidojimo papročiuose." *Lietuvos TSR aukštųjų mokyklų darbai: Istorija* 16(2): 18–33.
- 1977. "Senajo nekrokulto apraiškos XX a. lietuvių kapinėse ir jų priežiūros papročiuose." In *Senieji tikėjimai naujausių tyrinėjimų šviesoje*. Vilnius: Ateizmo muziejus: 60–72.
- Girardet, Raoul. 2007. *Politiniai mitai ir mitologijos*. Translated from 'Mythes et Mythologies Politiques. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990' by Jūratė Skersytė. Vilnius: Apostrofa.
- Greimas, Algirdas J. 1992. *Of Gods and Men: Studies in Lithuanian Mythology*. Translated by Milda Newman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2979/2504.0>
- 2005. *Lietuvių mitologijos studijos*, edited by Kęstutis Nastopka. Vilnius: Baltos lankos.
- Kavaliauskaitė, Jūratė, and Ainė Ramonaitė. 2011. "Ką pasako naujas žvilgsnis į Sąjūdžio genezę?" In *Sąjūdžio ištakų paieškant. Nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia*, edited by Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė and Ainė Ramonaitė. Vilnius: Baltos lankos: 406–19.
- Krader, Lawrence. 2021. *Myth and Ideology*, edited by Cyril Levitt and Sabine Sander. Peter Lang publishing house.
- Patackas, Algirdas, and Aleksandras Žarskus. 1990a. *Gimties virsmas: gimimas ir krikščynos*. Vilnius: Kauno sekmadieninė lietuvių kultūros mokykla.
- 1990b. *Mirties virsmas: mirtis ir lydėtuvės*. Vilnius: Eksperimentinė technikos paminklų restauravimo įmonė.
- 1993. *Vestuvinis virsmas: martavimas ir vestuvės*. Prienai: Valstybinės aviacijos gamyklos leidykla.
- 2002. *Virsmų knyga: vestuvių virsmas, gimties virsmas, mirties virsmas*. Kaunas: Kauno tautinės kultūros centras.
- Putinaitė, Nerija. 2022. "Being Soviet and Lithuanian: Song Festivals as Emotional Events to Induce a Hybrid Identity." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 54(2): 223–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2022.2047082>
- Racėnaitė, Radvilė. 2012. *Žmogaus likimo ir mirties samprata lietuvių folklore*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas.
- Ramonaitė, Ainė. 2011. "Paralelinės visuomenės' užuomazgos sovietinėje Lietuvoje: katalikiškojo pogrindžio ir etnokultūrinio sąjūdžio simbiozė." In *Sąjūdžio ištakų paieškant. Nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia*, edited by Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė and Ainė Ramonaitė. Vilnius: Baltos lankos: 33–58.
- Ramonaitė, Ainė. 2015a. "Įvadas. Nematomos sovietinės visuomenės paradoksalai." In *Nematoma sovietmečio visuomenė*, edited by Ainė Ramonaitė. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys–Aidai: 8–28.
- 2015b. "Viešos nepaklusnumo demonstracijos. Etnokultūrinio sąjūdžio mobilizacinė galia." In *Nematoma sovietmečio visuomenė*, edited by Ainė Ramonaitė. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys–Aidai: 195–217.
- Razauskas, Dainius. 2006. "Etnosofai' A. Patackas ir A. Žarskus." *Liaudies kultūra* 2: 45–47.
- Sadauskienė, Jurga. 2019. "The Concept of Lithuanian Folk Song in Lithuanian Folklore, 1800–1940." In *Literary Canon Formation as Nation-building in Central Europe and the Baltics*, edited by Aistė Kučinskienė, Viktorija Šeina, Brigita Speičytė. Leiden, Boston: Brill: 86–106. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004457713_006

- 2021. “Liaudies dainos kanoninė samprata: nuo XVIII a. iki šių dienų.” *Tautosakos darbai* 61: 15–46. <https://doi.org/10.51554/TD.21.61.01>
- Sauka, Donatas. 1982. *Lietuvių tautosaka*. Vadovėlis aukštųjų mokyklų filologijos specialybių studentams. Vilnius: Mokslas.
- Sims, Martha C., and Martine Stephens. 2005. *Living Folklore. An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1984. “Ethnic Myths and Ethnic Revivals.” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 25(2): 283–305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600004276>
- 1988. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Вольтер, Эдуард Александрович. 1889. *Литовский катихизисъ Н. Даукиши*. По изданию 1595 года, вновь перепечатанный и снабженный объяснениями Э. Вольтером. Санкт-Петербург: Типография Императорской Академии наукъ. Accessed June 18, 2025. https://archive.org/details/1886_20210319/page/121/mode/2up
- Žarskus, Aleksandras. 2009. *Rėdos knyga*. Kaunas: (s.n.).
- Žukauskaitė, Lida. 2024. “Kapinių lankymo ir priežiūros papročiai.” MA thesis, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.vdu.lt/cris/entities/etd/1f5131f1-1715-4dc7-99ff-2129be252715>

Feminist Lamenting

Women for Peace and the Finnish *Itkijänaiset*

HANNAH KAARINA YOKEN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2331-6887>

ARJA TURUNEN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3589-5380>

On 3 April 1987, the front page of the Finnish tabloid newspaper *Iltalehti* prominently featured the headline ‘I Thought It Was a Child’s Cry’. The quotation was attributed to the Speaker of the Parliament of Finland, Johannes Virolainen (*Iltalehti* 1987, 1). The scene Virolainen was commenting on had played out in the parliament the day prior: while in session, fourteen female activists engaged in performative public protest. Dressed in funeral garb and crying loudly, they threw hundreds of handkerchiefs embroidered with political messages onto parliamentarians from the parliament’s lecterns. The Finnish public soon became acquainted with the group of assailants, the newly established pacifist-feminist enclave *Itkijänaiset* (Lamenting Women). The goal of the political performance had been twofold: to protest the militarisation of Finnish women into the country’s defence forces; and to oppose the construction of the country’s fifth nuclear power station (Toimintakertomus 1987, 1).

This chapter asks how and why lamenting as a practice was adopted, appropriated, and re-adapted as a form of political grassroots activism by Finnish feminists from the late 1980s into the early 2000s. In doing so, we provide the first comprehensive historical account of the Finnish pacifist-feminist organisation *Naiset rauhan puolesta* (Women for Peace), of which *Itkijänaiset* was its most radical subsection. There is a growing literature accounting for forms of modern lamenting in Finland as well as abroad. Yet, recent lament traditions tend to be studied by focusing on contemporary lamenters, and earlier adaptations of lament into political activism, such as the protest staged by *Itkijänaiset*, are rarely mentioned (see, e.g., Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2009; Silvonen and Kuittinen 2022; Hytönen-Ng and Kallonen 2024). The history of Finnish second-wave feminism has likewise captured the attention of researchers during the past two decades (see, e.g., Bergman 2002; Yoken 2020; Kurvinen and Turunen 2022; Turunen 2024; Yoken 2024; Kurvinen 2024a). However, pacifist-feminist protest in Finland has received only limited scholarly attention (Bergman 2002, 170–174; Ahlbäck 2022, 251–254; Kurvinen 2024a, 301–302), and the lamenting performed by *Itkijänaiset* remains unstudied. We argue that *Itkijänaiset* utilised lamenting as a distinctly feminist practice and approached it as a historical tradition with ties connecting it to (Finnish) women’s folklore especially. In doing so, they conceptualised it as a powerful means of feminine political protest.

Naiset rauhan puolesta was a synthesis of leftist feminism and anti-nuclear pacifism. The group was part of the broader Finnish anti-nuclear movement of the late

twentieth century, which during the first half of the 1980s was marked by large-scale public demonstrations in opposition of nuclear weapons, and in the second half began opposing nuclear power (Litmanen 1998; Kurvinen 2024b; Yoken 2025). The group's members emphasised the social, cultural, and political position women were afforded based on their gender, as the progenitors and carers of future generations. They viewed women as better equipped to engage in innovative pacifist thinking than men, who had historically wielded power under patriarchy, often with warring and destructive outcomes (Pietilä 1980; Rantanen 1981). The centring of emotions in political decision making was central to *Naiset rauhan puolesta*, both in its ideological tenets and protest tactics, and the public laments that *Itkijänaiset* staged were the most visible way in which this re-centring was executed.

A robust literature exists, which accounts for the women's peace movement of the 1980s in different national settings. However, much of the existing literature has focused on activism and protest in English-speaking countries, especially the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States (e.g., Bartlett 2011; Bartlett 2013; Culley and Angélique 2003; Feigenbaum 2015; Laware 2004; for analyses accounting for non-English speaking contexts see Branciforte 2022). In recent years, literature making transnational connections between women's peace movements has also proliferated (Eschle 2023). Some of these analyses have placed politicised emotions at their centre, providing a useful starting point for the analysis of lamenting as a pacifist-feminist praxis. For example, Margaretta Jolly (2006) has analysed how dreams and shared interpretations of them offered the British and North American women's peace movement a way to collectively confront political institutions. Moreover, these female peace activists were interested in exploring rituals and myths in 'matriarchally revised forms' and emphasised the importance of emotion (Jolly 2006, 14). This echoes the strategies that *Itkijänaiset* employed.

Another useful building block for our analysis has been the literature focused on cultural production within women's peace movements, for example zine-making, letter writing, and cinematic projects (Feigenbaum 2013; Jolly 2003; Mayer 2017). Anna Feigenbaum's (2010) work on the meaning of singing in fostering collective queer identities at the Greenham Common women's peace camp in the United Kingdom pays attention to the practice of cultural re-contextualisation. Many of the songs performed by activists at Greenham Common were reinterpretations or parodies of existing social movement music. The songs offered a way to process and express emotions, work through challenging situations, and express political messages (Feigenbaum 2010, 368). As we will demonstrate, cultural production and re-contextualisation as well as the use of emotions to relay political messages was also central to the approaches of *Itkijänaiset*.

Finally, Tina Managhan's (2007) work on the American anti-nuclear women's movement – focusing on spectacle, embodied protest and bodily enactment, and the employment of the trope of 'hysterical motherhood' – has provided a point of comparison to the Finnish *Itkijänaiset* case. Exploring how femininity was discursively juxtaposed with masculinity, Managhan emphasises dialogical gendered dynamics:

My argument is that hysterical enactments of motherhood were tactically effective to the extent that they existed in reciprocal relationship with enactments of white, middle-class masculinity that were being protested against. The subversive potential of hysterical

motherhood lay in its ability to shift the societal gaze from the dramatic displays of protesting female bodies to the bodies and performances of militarised men, rendering hegemonic masculinity and sovereign power strange [...]. (Managhan 2007, 638.)

Despite this research being focused on politicised emotions, reimagined cultural production and traditions, and embodied protest, there is a gap in the literature regarding women's peace movements and lament: no analyses connecting these two topics appear to have been written. This chapter begins to fill this lacuna.

Methodologically, this chapter is based on archival and oral history evidence. Contemporary interviews and memoirs have been collected from Anneli Pääkkönen and Lea Rantanen who were key members of *Itkijänaiset*.¹ Their personal testimonies provide a window into how protesters narrativise their past experiences. They are in dialogue with archival sources, consisting of the papers of *Naiset rauhan puolesta* housed in The People's Archives, as well as key individuals' personal collections. These documents – containing, for example, meeting minutes, communiques, and media clippings – present interpretations as they occurred at the time.²

This chapter will proceed as follows: we begin our analysis by elucidating the history of Finnish pacifist-feminist activism and place it into its broader socio-political context. We then move on to constructing a timeline of the public protests organised by *Itkijänaiset*, prior to analysing the ideological underpinnings that guided these demonstrations. *Naiset rauhan puolesta* has been active from the late 1970s to the present day. However, in this chapter we focus on the most visible and impactful protests that *Itkijänaiset* organised, limiting the temporal scope from 1987 to 2002.

Feminism and Anti-Nuclear Pacifism

Naiset rauhan puolesta was established in 1979. Several of its members were women who had previously taken part in feminist organising or did so contemporaneously (see, e.g., *Rauhannainen* 2/1982; Women for Peace in Finland 1981). Demonstrative of this continuity and connection, the organisation functioned in the premises of *Naisialiitto Unioni* (The Finnish Women's Association Unioni), a stronghold of Finnish feminism.³ The group can be understood as part of the broader second wave of Finnish feminism, which began in the mid-1960s and extended into the early 1990s. During the second half of the 1960s, Finnish political debate on gender equality was shaped by the sex role debate and the movement of the same name, which witnessed young women and men campaigning for the abandonment of traditional gender roles in favour of a more individualised and egalitarian socio-political model. The sex role debate shared the aims of 1960s pacifist movements: both criticised militarism and demanded the abolition of men's compulsory military service (Kurvinen and Turunen

1. The interviews were conducted by Arja Turunen. Quotations of the interviews have been translated into English by Hannah Kaarina Yoken. The interviewees have given their permission to disclose their names in this article.
2. Material published in Finnish has been translated into English by Hannah Kaarina Yoken.
3. *Naisialiitto Unioni*'s address was routinely printed as the appropriate correspondence address on *Naiset rauhan puolesta* bulletins, sent to its members between 1982–1988.

2022; Turunen 2024). Explicitly feminist ideologies and activism gained popularity from the mid-1970s onwards, first among Swedish-speaking activist groups and then Finnish-speaking groups of women (Bergman 2002; Ingström 2007; Yoken and Turunen 2024; Kurvinen 2024a).

Initially, feminism in Finland was closely tied to socialist ideology, but towards the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, the movement became increasingly characterised by cultural feminism. This outlook was in line with international developments, including those that took place within the feminist movements across the Nordic region (Yoken 2021, 125–128; Yoken 2022, 41–42).

Finnish cultural feminism emphasised the importance of making women's culture, history, and emotions visible. Questions related to women's personal experiences and everyday lives were brought to the forefront and divisions between the public and private were challenged. The marginalisation of women's experiences and culture under patriarchy was criticised, as were gender equality strategies that demanded women be granted the same rights as men using masculine terms (Bergman 2002, 144–152, 166–170; Turunen 2024, 162–165; Kurvinen 2024a 171–172). Some Finnish feminists subsequently oriented their activism toward cultural activities such as women's literature, theatre, music, and visual arts (Helminen 2002; Ingström 2007) and re-embraced traditional feminine styles of dress and appearance (Turunen 2018). The impact of cultural feminism on *Naiset rauhan puolesta* is evident: during the first half of the 1980s, the group produced pamphlets on pacifism in relation to women's everyday lives, which also featured essays, poetry, and illustrations by its members, some of whom were professional artists and authors (Blomstedt, Kataja, Pääkkönen and Tirinen 1981; Anttonen 1985).

In addition to its place within Finnish feminist history, the nascence and subsequent development of *Naiset rauhan puolesta* was related to global geopolitical tensions from the late 1970s onward. Notably, the NATO Double-Track Decision marked the disintegration of the détente era. In late 1979, NATO set the Warsaw Pact countries an ultimatum, demanding that they limit their new intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The stipulation stated that unless the Warsaw Pact countries limited their nuclear arsenal in Eastern Europe, NATO would deploy 572 ballistic and cruise missiles to Western Europe. Simultaneously, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan increased global fears of nuclear proxy wars and the global destruction this could unleash. These developments led to the strengthening of a transnational movement for nuclear disarmament: in the United States the movement became known as the Nuclear Freeze Campaign and in Western Europe it was called European Nuclear Disarmament (END), with local and national variants appearing globally (see, e.g., Nehring and Ziemann 2012; Becker-Schaum, Gassert, Klimke, Mausbach and Zepp 2016; Burke 2017; Intondi 2023). Some women reacted to this anti-nuclear momentum by forming their own separatist enclaves of protest. Several women's peace camps were erected, the most famous of which were at Greenham Common in England, Comiso in Italy, Pine Gap in Australia, and Seneca Falls in the United States. *Naiset rauhan puolesta* likewise staged a short-lived, women-only peace encampment in Helsinki in 1983 (Yoken 2025, 117–119).

In Finland, the women's peace movement was characterised by an essentialist discourse, which equated patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity with rationality and warmongering, whereas femininity was seen as representing an emotionally attuned

pacifism. Women were consequently deemed as better equipped to usher in a better future, free of nuclear threats and anxieties. This thinking was in large part based on a feminist reading of history, especially with regards to conflict and war. The forming of this discourse also coincided with the advent of women's studies at Finnish universities, which called into question whether research could ever be purely objective and rational (Peltonen, Strandell, and Törnroth 1979). In a statement from 1981, *Naiset rauhan puolesta* argued that women's and men's experiences of war had been historically different, since men had been the perpetrators of violence and women on the receiving end of it:

There have never been any positive outcomes of war for women; women have been raped, men have been made war heroes. Not one raped woman has been rewarded the honorary title of war hero. (*Naiset rauhan puolesta Unionissa* 1981.)

In an article published in the pacifist magazine *Ydin* (Core) the same year, *Naiset rauhan puolesta* activist Lea Rantanen (1981, 17) similarly asked what Western technology might look like if women had not been subjugated for thousands of years: 'One thing is certain, that we today would not have such insane arsenals of weapons, this type of technology, poverty and squander'. Moreover, Rantanen saw women as being more connected to their emotions, which made them more capable of humane and ethical decision-making:

The men in power say that emotions cannot be mixed with questions of war and peace. But we have seen where this masculine rationale has led humanity: there are so many weapons in this world that every living creature can be destroyed forty times over. (Rantanen 1981, 18.)

Having initially started as a group opposing nuclear energy, *Naiset rauhan puolesta* soon broadened its focus to protesting nuclear weaponry. In an English-language leaflet produced around 1981–1982, *Naiset rauhan puolesta* members introduced their aims as follows:

Our basic aims are to work for disarmament and especially to fight against nuclear arms, including a Nuclear Power Free Zone in the Nordic countries and a Nuclear Power Free Europe. We aim

- to create awareness especially among women about what is threatening all of us,
- to activate women to act in this matter instead of carrying fear and apathy in their minds,
- to offer a way to act in which everybody can participate.

(Women for Peace in Finland 1981.)

By the late 1980s, the inclusion of women into the Finnish defence forces became a key deliberation, which *Naiset rauhan puolesta* was active in opposing (see e.g. Ahlbäck 2022). The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 refocused the group's attention to risks posed by nuclear energy, while worries over nuclear arms control persisted. Accordingly, in an English-language pamphlet produced in 1987, the group described its ideological basis as opposing nuclear weapons and excessive arms expenditure, nuclear power, and the militarisation of women:

We oppose

- development, production and spreading of all kinds of weapons, especially arms for mass-destruction
- nuclear power, being conducive [sic] to nuclear arms
- the militarization of women in all different forms as well as the militarization of society at large

We demand

- that the means that are being used for the arms industry be used for education, development and public health projects

We reject

- the concept of enemy, as we know that people don't become enemies just because they live in different countries or think differently

(Finland Women for Peace 1987.)

As these last lines demonstrate, *Naiset rauhan puolesta* aimed to collaborate transnationally across Cold War-era boundaries. Throughout the 1980s, its members worked with women's peace movements in other Nordic countries and sought to build working relationships with women farther away (Yoken 2025, 112–114). *Naiset rauhan puolesta* has remained active since its inception over forty years ago and still exists today. The organisation's website lists several working groups, of which *Itkijänaiset* is one. We now turn to focus on this subgroup, first by accounting for its notable public protest laments followed by a breakdown of its ideological stances.

Female Disruptors: Lamenting as Political Protest

Itkijänaiset was formed in 1987 by women already active in *Naiset rauhan puolesta*. The working group's ideological underpinnings were largely aligned with the political goals of the broader Finnish women's peace movement. However, *Itkijänaiset* pursued an unusual and attention-grabbing form of political protest – lamenting – to overcome being ignored by decision-makers and the Finnish media (Pääkkönen 2002). They repeatedly engaged in performative and subversive lamenting acts, which could take on different forms from audible sobbing to total silence. The women relied on a plurality of approaches and techniques, sometimes appropriating lament traditions, in other instances simply crying in public or engaging in other forms of visible gendered bereavement, without a clear nod to the lamenting tradition. Rantanen recalled how *Itkijänaiset* valiantly challenged stereotypical feminine behaviour and toyed with norms related to Finnish political culture:

Itkijänaiset are the most radical form of *Naiset rauhan puolesta*. The goal is to be serious, when we present our demands. We do not join in on the opposing side's belittling [of us], and we do not behave like good little girls. As in, we don't smile, we do not accept any catering nor pleasantries. We simply state our case. Oftentimes we handed over a written statement. We refused to speak, because talking did not amount to much. The written statements weren't always useful either, and sometimes we really tried to cry, so that we'd be listened to. (Rantanen 2013.)

By dressing in formal, black funeral garb the women wanted to convey how serious the matters at hand were. This distinct, traditional style was also employed as a way for *Itkijänaiset* to distance themselves from the unformal, unkempt, and at times carnivalistic appearance typical of political demonstrations organised in the 1970s by youth movements and the radical left. Many of the group's members had lived through or participated in the past decade's cultural and political waves of protest. By the late 1980s, Lea Rantanen and Anneli Pääkkönen were middle-aged women in their forties, both of whom had become mothers in the 1960s (Rantanen 2017; Pääkkönen 2017).

On International Women's Day, 8 March, 1987, *Itkijänaiset* congregated in Helsinki city centre. The women approached passers-by, asking them to write messages to Finnish parliamentarians on handkerchiefs. Rantanen described how she was fatigued and disappointed by traditional forms of political protest and their lack of impact:

I said that at least I refuse to write another paper. We had written so many texts and declarations and sent so many writings and hand-delivered them separately everywhere. And nothing had been effective. I said, 'let's write some sorts of texts onto, for example, handkerchiefs, but no longer on paper' [...] So, then we set up a tent near the Three Smiths Statue, where there were bed sheets torn into handkerchief-sized pieces. (Rantanen 2017.)

Itkijänaiset stated to passers-by that they were protesting the militarisation of Finnish women, which made the group 'feel like crying' (*Itkijänaiset tänään eduskunnassa* 1987). More specifically, they were opposing a proposition that would have allowed women to participate in the Finnish armed forces, by employing them in military positions of a civilian nature, for example, secretarial and healthcare métiers (Ahlbäck 2022, 255). *Itkijänaiset* described the opening up of the armed forces to women as being in response to an increased number of pacifist Finnish men choosing civilian service or a prison sentence over serving conscription. They harshly countered the claim that allowing women into civilian military positions was an act to increase gender equality:

Some half-wit has publicly even said that women should 'be allowed into' the army in the name of gender equality. In war, or preparing for it, there is no sign of gender equality – both gender equality and human dignity are lost immediately when men decide to instate martial law. (*Kirjoita naistenpäivätervehdys uusille kansanedustajille* 1987.)

The campaign proved powerful, with the Finnish public addressing over 200 handkerchiefs to parliamentarians. As described at the start of this chapter, in April 1987, fourteen *Itkijänainen*-members entered the Finnish Parliament House during the first session of Prime Minister Harri Holkeri's newly formed government. The female protesters were dressed entirely in black and cried loudly, while throwing the handkerchiefs onto the parliamentarians from the lecterns. They handed out leaflets featuring a poem from the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, where Lemminkäinen's mother tries to piece together her dead son from the body parts she has raked from the river of the underworld *Tuonela* (*Itkijänaiset tänään eduskunnassa* 1987). Security guards soon removed the protesters, who continued to lament loudly as they exited the Parliament House and refused to speak to the media (*Ilta-lehti* 1987, 4). *Naiset rauhan puolesta* described the protest by referring to a historically framed, yet somewhat elusive definition of laments as women's cultural tradition:

In spring 1987 a group of ‘weeping women’ visited the Finnish Parliament on the day of opening. By this action the women took up an old cultural tradition, still living in Karelia in the Sovietunion [sic] and some Mediterranean countries. Dressed in black, weeping and throwing handkerchiefs with women’s messages for the new parliament members they protested the current plans by the Finnish authorities to incorporate women into the national defence system, this in the name of equality.

We find this is one stage of the gradual militarization of the society and against Finland’s official foreign policy towards détente and disarmament.

What we mean by equality in this respect is a society where women and men together try to get rid of the ‘enemy’ concept, creating a new way of thinking. Instead of preparing for crisis and war situations, we want to abolish the reasons for war and catastrophes in order to create a society that does not need military protection. (Finland Women for Peace 1987.)

The next act of public lamenting took place a few weeks later, when the group visited the premises of two nuclear power companies, *Teollisuuden Voima* and *Imatran Voima*. The rationale for the visit was to oppose the use and proliferation of nuclear power as an energy source, and to highlight problems regarding the long-term storage of nuclear waste. The slogan of the visit as reported in the media was ‘Human error cannot be encapsulated into bedrock.’ The women, dressed again in all-black funeral garb, brought sacrificial stones with them, which had been decorated with the names of the locations where long-term nuclear storage sites were being planned. The protesters insisted on silence, engaging in minimal discussion with industry representatives (Lehdistöille & Tshernobylin vuosipäivä 1987; Wahlström 1987). They later stated: ‘We do not wish to engage in discussion. We simply do not want to take the risk that is involved with nuclear power’ (Kansan Uutiset 1987, 27). The timing of the protest was also significant, as it marked the one-year anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union. *Itkijänaiset* emphasised the perils of relying on science and expert knowledge, while abandoning all emotion and sense of motherly nurture:

We cry today as the anniversary of Chernobyl draws closer. We cry for bread. What happened at Chernobyl should have never happened, because everything was supposed to be reliable, because we were supposed to believe what the experts had said [...] Directly after the risks taken and the disaster at Chernobyl, we were told that we were under no threat. The parsley had been planted, milk was drunk, children played in the spring ponds, children played ball games on dry sand courts knowing nothing of the radiation that they were inhaling into their lungs along with the dust [...] When we cry over nuclear power, the supporters of nuclear power want to talk about other energy sources and how they pollute life. We cry for all power that contaminates the earth and bread. (Lehdistöille & Tshernobylin vuosipäivä 1987.)

These performative laments continued throughout the late 1980s. In March 1988, *Itkijänaiset* paid a surprise visit to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, hoping to meet with minister Ilkka Suominen. The women were granted access only to his political secretary, to whom they handed a mask featuring a wolf and sheep, symbolising the two-facedness with which Suominen had acted regarding nuclear power (Toimintakertomus 1988). In October of the same year, during the United Nations Disarmament Week, *Itkijänaiset*-members travelled to Oulu, where they targeted municipal

governor Ahti Pekkala. Pekkala had organised a reception, the guests of which included top Finnish officials, media representatives, and the participants of a recently held national defence course. Problematically, according to *Itkijänaiset*, this reception overlapped with a pacifist celebration organised at Oulu's city theatre. *Itkijänaiset* handed Pekkala an invitation to the peace party and distributed pacifist leaflets to his guests (Mustonen 1988; Toimintakertomus 1988). Marking the third anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, in late April 1989, *Itkijänaiset* delivered a straitjacket to the Managing Director of the Finnish Forest Industries Federation, Matti Pekkanen. He was also gifted a marionette puppet, symbolising his tendency to dance to the tune of whomever or whatever offered the best profits (Pääkkönen 2002).



Figure 9. *Itkijänaiset* protesting the use of nuclear energy in front of the Finnish Parliament House on 26 April 2001, marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. The banner reads 'We cry on behalf of future generations'. Photo: Toivo Koivisto, The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

Itkijänaiset remained active throughout the 1990s, publicly mourning and performatively lamenting in various scenarios. In 1990, the group visited the Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority in Finland, and in 1994 they interrupted the press meeting of an urban military exercise, crying aloud whenever military personnel tried to speak. The following year, the women staged a protest in the centre of Helsinki, in opposition of French nuclear testing. In 2002, *Itkijänaiset* repeated their 1988 visit to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, this time seeking to meet with minister Sinikka Mönkäre. However, she was away on travel and the activists instead met with another figurehead of the ministry (Pääkkönen 2002). Here the women performed an original lament, written by group member and multidisciplinary artist, Anneli Pääkkönen:

<i>Vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>Vieritä hyvyttä hänelle</i>	roll goodness down their way
<i>Vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>vieritä viisauks takaisin</i>	roll the wisdom back in
<i>vieritä ahdinkoon ahneus</i>	roll greed into plight
<i>vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>ettei jätettä säteilevää</i>	so the radiating waste
<i>enää tehtäisi lapsille</i>	will no longer be made for children
<i>turmaa polville tuleville</i>	as future generations' ruin
<i>Vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>ottamaan aurinko avuksi</i>	to capture the sun to help you
<i>tuulen tuiverrus energiaksi</i>	turn the wind into energy
<i>käymään kiinni kaikin voimin</i>	To latch on with all might
<i>vaihtoehtoihin visusti</i>	with care grasp the alternatives
<i>Vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>Vieritä tuntehet takaisin</i>	roll the feelings back in
<i>vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>vieritä viisauks takaisin</i>	roll the wisdom back in
<i>vieri vieri kyyneleeni</i>	Roll, roll down my tears
<i>vieritä hyvyttä hänelle</i>	roll goodness down their way

Public Mourning: Ideology and Reception

The *Itkijänaiset* group's performative laments are reminiscent of the tactics used by women's peace movements in the United Kingdom and United States, as summarised in the introduction of this chapter. The Finnish group's members also turned to embodied protest and collective confrontation, recontextualised existing cultural traditions, subverted gendered social norms, and highlighted the importance of emotions in political decision making. A hysterically agitated and heartbrokenly solemn femininity was juxtaposed with overtly rational masculine politicking.

As an example of subverting gender norms, *Itkijänaiset* often opted to show up uninvited, without having courteously made prior arrangements with the individuals and institutions they were targeting (Pääkkönen 2002). Moreover, the activists tended to refuse any refreshments they were offered. Lea Rantanen (2017) described these as deliberately destabilising acts: 'We didn't accept any condescending blabbering or anything else, no coffee nor buns, it's always like [...] "you girls will have some of this coffee and buns" [laughs]'. The group's approach to the Finnish media was similarly stern and non-negotiable: despite *Itkijänaiset* habitually informing journalists of their public appearances beforehand, the women seldom verbally elaborated on their actions and on-site reporters' questions were met with silence (Pääkkönen 2002; *Iltalehti* 1987, 4). Rantanen (2017) recalled: 'We didn't speak at all, we gave the media a written statement about it, about why we cried and why all this was so sad'. This solemn tone was matched in the lamenters' dress, which included all-black outfits, mourning hats or scarves, handkerchiefs and lamenting cloths (Pääkkönen 2002).

The underscoring of emotion, via the act of grieving in public, audible crying, or total silence became the most distinctive aspect of *Itkijänaiset*. As Pääkkönen commented:

And since we always had the thought, that feelings ... as the politicians say, that emotions shouldn't be mixed with politics, so we on the other hand had the thought that emotions specifically need to be brought to the forefront, that because feelings affect those as well, who say that they don't have any. So that was one of those feminist thoughts, that emotions need to be made visible. (Pääkkönen 2017.)

By triggering discomfort and discomposure via lamenting in public and semi-public places, particularly spaces that held political, social or economic significance, the protesters emphasised the need to incorporate human emotion into overly rationalised political decision making. The decision to engage in public emotive protest was not taken lightly:

But the beginning was really interesting, in that way exactly, as in how the crying would be reacted to. So it caused a long period of deliberation and consideration for us of course, that what does this really mean and how are we going to proceed. And then it came, like the feeling that this is actually really important. That this specifically pinpointed also this, the power of lamenting, that it is very important. (Pääkkönen 2017.)

Crying was seen as destabilising the behavioural norms according to which the protesters had been socialised. Breaking these deeply held cultural gender norms was interpreted as a cathartic act for the activists themselves:

Crying evokes emotions, so it wouldn't otherwise [...] it is like, part of our behavioural rules, that you can't cry over everything. And what you are allowed to cry over. And then there's this old thing, exactly this, that boys don't cry and girls cry. (Pääkkönen 2017.)



Figure 10. *Itkijänaiset* mourning the Chernobyl disaster on 26 April, 2002 at Senate Square, in central Helsinki. Photo: Toivo Koivisto, The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

When *Itkijänaiset* first began staging protests, its members were disappointed by how they were depicted by Finnish mainstream media. The group had employed crying as an act of resistance, specifically because it was a peaceful means of protest. However, as Pääkkönen (2017) recalled, ‘we were accused of being almost terrorists.’ *Itkijänaiset* captured the media’s attention, yet the group’s members perceived their reportage as sensational and wilfully ignorant of the group’s pacifist-feminist ideology and aims. Pääkkönen (2017) noted how the group’s serious political ambitions were often distorted, particularly by male journalists. Yet, the public at large voiced their support for the women’s actions:

Then, of course, there was quite the swarm, from male reporters and others. So it was seen as this childish fuss, and that it’s stupid and exactly so, that feminists are stupid and childish and laughable and all this. But we also received telegrams and different letters and others, people sending thanks, saying that it was, it is a great thing. So we received both, but primarily the papers wrote about us in a negative light. You could say that most of them [did this]. (Pääkkönen 2017.)

One example of how media reportage misconstrued the group’s core message of anti-nuclear pacifism is the 1987 protest in the Parliament House. Following the protest, news coverage chose to focus on whether the safety of Finnish parliamentarians had been jeopardised. The country’s leading newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, printed an article that read:

The stunned parliamentarians had not had the time to fully crane their necks to see the cause of the ruckus, when pieces of fabric thrown by women began to fall on them [...] The scuffle was over in a minute, but the recovery time of the members of parliament took longer [...] The minds of the representatives were nagged by the disruption of the dignified plenary session. (Rautalin 1987.)

In response to the article, a core member of the group, Hilkka Pietilä (1987) argued that no ‘inappropriate words’ or ‘insults’ had been used; the only thing that *Itkijänaiset* had tarnished was the absolute authority of the Finnish Parliament. ‘Can crying really have such power?’ she asked.

Historical precedence provided *Itkijänaiset* with a sense of continuity and legitimacy, in relation to which novel protest tactics could be formulated. During the group’s first protest in the Parliament House, the handkerchief was chosen as an appropriate vehicle for delivering messages to parliamentarians specifically due to its historical significance. The handkerchief was seen as having held great symbolic weight in the past, *Itkijänaiset* argued, dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. Women were described as having been able to drop a handkerchief in order to attract the attention of a suitor or use it to wave goodbye to a family member during wartime. In a dystopian future, *Itkijänaiset* argued, a handkerchief would be used to wipe one’s nose after a nuclear accident:

Dear parliamentarians! Make sure that these handkerchiefs are used solely to wipe tears of joy! And to blow one’s nose of diseases that one can recover from, that one does not need to die from like the war sickness of men. (Kirjoita naistenpäivätervehdys uusille kansanedustajille 1987.)

Itkijänaiset seems to have been inspired by depictions of feminine mourning in well-known works of Finnish folklore, such as *Kalevala*. The group also situated itself into dialogue with Finnish, Karelian, and Ingrian lamenting practices, the name of

the group itself referencing these traditions. In 1988, the group attended the Nordic Forum conference in Oslo and performed the lament 'Viere viere kyynelyön' ('Roll down, roll down my tears'), made famous in the early twentieth century by lamenter Oksenja Mäkiselkä (Pääkkönen 2002). In one instance, the activists described the cultural traditions they were referencing as regionally and historically specific, as well as gendered:

As a tradition, laments are an age-old habit and particularly Ingria is known as a land of women's song. The song tradition has persevered despite wars and famines. Female lamenters have been seen as the keepers of balance in their communities, laments fostered connections between women and understanding across generations. (Itkijänaiset n.d.)

In another example, the group's understanding regarding the history of lamenting comes across as general or even fleeting. In 1987, Hilikka Pietilä described this history as a Finnish rather than regional tradition:

In Finland crying has a deep-rooted history, also public crying. It might truly be Finland's very own tradition. One wonders whether wives have lamented elsewhere? (Pietilä 1987.)

It appears that none of the core members of *Itkijänaiset* were of Karelian or Ingrian heritage, nor did they have direct experience of lamenting traditions, for example via familial or communal links. Moreover, the women were neither familiar with academic research on lamenting nor deeply acquainted with adjacent folklore or folk music. In addition to lamenting using words, the group engaged in performative weeping or enacted instances of mournful silence (Pääkkönen 2025). *Itkijänaiset* members seem to have become fully aware of the historical and regional roots of lamenting traditions only in the after Aili Nenola's book, *Inkerin itkuvirret. Ingrian Laments* was published by the Finnish Literature Society in 2002 (Pääkkönen 2002). Despite a lack of intricate knowledge or experience relating to lamenting, the group's interest in the tradition was fostered by a curiosity regarding women's history and a broad appreciation of women's culture, including oral poetry. For example, key activist Anneli Pääkkönen (2024) had familiarised herself with folklore traditions by reading *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar*. As an artist and poet, she viewed *Itkijänaiset* as not only recontextualising an existing historical tradition, but also as producing new forms of performative protest. In other words, the aim of *Itkijänaiset* was not so much to revive or modernise historical lamenting traditions. Instead, they sought to harness the culturally resonant image of a lamenting woman and turn it into an emblem of contemporary pacifist-feminist resistance.

Conclusion

When asked about the legacy of *Itkijänaiset* during an interview in 2017, Anneli Pääkkönen replied optimistically:

Of course it's horribly difficult to evaluate, what their [the *Itkijänaiset* group] effect was, and on what, because we do have nuclear energy, and so on. But you can never, when it comes to these things you can never know [...] you can't really measure what the effect is. So if you

consider that these [public laments] wouldn't have been, then what would the situation be. So for me it is really important to say it out loud, and to bring light to an alternative perspective. And truly it felt like, that always something happened within the people, within some of the people, when we went somewhere. (Pääkkönen 2017.)

Pääkkönen's words sum up the opaqueness surrounding the tangible effects *Itkijänaiset* protests had on Finnish politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Yet, even decades after the group's heyday, the protests it staged have been brought up in media as newsworthy glimpses into the ways in which women have challenged the status quo in the country's recent history (see, e.g., Laasanen 2012; Heino 2017).

As this chapter has demonstrated, from the early 1980s onwards, questions regarding women's role in promoting anti-nuclear pacifism gained significance within the Finnish feminist movement. Scholars have posited that this shift, which bound women's rights together with antimilitarism, helped legitimise feminism in Finland and softened its perceived ideological edge (Bergman 2002, 170–174; Kurvinen 2024a, 301–302). *Itkijänaiset* were arguably the most visible manifestation of this pacifist-feminist momentum. The group's activities were based on an understanding derived from cultural feminism, which valued women's history and creative output, and called into question the masculine-coded values like objectivity and rationality. Fatigued by traditional protest tactics which had been deemed ineffective, *Itkijänaiset* initiated a novel form of dissent that centred around performative emotion – notably audible crying, silent mourning, and lamenting. From its inception in 1987, into the new millennium, the group used these emotive tactics when staging public demonstrations as well as targeting specific influential individuals.

The lamenting that *Itkijänaiset* performed was not an act of cultural revival: until the early 2000s, the women active in the group were only nominally aware of the history of laments in Finland and its neighbouring regions. Instead, *Itkijänaiset* adopted cultural feminist approaches, especially an increased appreciation for and interest in women's history and creativity, and combined that with a curiosity regarding folklore and the ways in which mourning women had historically been depicted within it. This resulted in the idea to employ lamenting as political protest. *Itkijänaiset* precedes and differs from contemporary efforts to revive lamenting traditions as folklore and folk music, such as the association *Äänellä itkijät* (Those Who Cry with Voice) established in 2001 (Silvonen and Kallio 2023, 45). In sum, the group created its own understandings and interpretations of lamenting, and references to the tradition's deeper roots were predominantly allusions. The group's members nonetheless harnessed a socially powerful and historically recognisable symbol – a woman, most likely a mother, lamenting a future too dangerous for her offspring to survive.

Acknowledgements

Hannah Kaarina Yoken's research on *Itkijänaiset* is part of her research project, 'A Farewell to Arms': *Anti-Nuclear Protest, Emotion and Gender in Finland, 1979–1987*, funded by the Academy of Finland (decision number 348332). Arja Turunen's research on *Itkijänaiset* is a part of her research project, *How Political Became Personal*, funded by the Academy of Finland (decision number 288470).

References

Sources

Archival Sources

- Anttonen, Kaija. 1985. *Rauhanvirna*. Naiset rauhan puolesta. Gifted to Hannah Kaarina Yoken by The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.
- Blomstedt, Mai, Tarja Kataja, Anneli Pääkkönen, and Merja Tirinen. 1981. *Rauha on tapa elää Naisten rauhanpamfletti*. Naisasialiitto Unioni and Naiset Rauhan Puolesta. Gifted to Hannah Kaarina Yoken by The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.
- Lehdistölle 23.4.1987 & 26.4.1987. Tshernobylin vuosipäivä (Press release), Archive of Naiset rauhan puolesta, 1D, Dd Lehdistötiedotteet 1980–1992, 1994 (Press releases), People's Archive.
- Finland Women for Peace 1987 (English-language pamphlet), Archive of Naiset rauhan puolesta, 1D, Dj Historiikit, Historiakooste I, People's Archive.
- Itkijänaiset. n.d. (Finnish-language brochure), Anneli Pääkkönen's private collection, gifted to Arja Turunen.
- Itkijänaiset tänään 2.4.1987 eduskunnassa (Press release), Archive of Naiset rauhan puolesta, 1D, Dj Historiikit, Historiakooste II, People's Archive.
- Kirjoita Naistenpäivätervehdys uusille kansanedustajille näihin nenäliinoiniin ikkunalaudalla 8.3.1987 (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Ja Toimintaryhmä Itkijänaiset ja käärmenaiset (Working group Lamenting Women and Snake Women), People's Archive.
- Naiset rauhan puolesta Unionissa 8.3.1981 (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Db Kannanotot ja julkilausumat 1981–1989, People's Archive.
- Pietilä, Hilkka. 1980 'Keitä me olemme?' (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Da Esitteet (Brochures), People's Archive.
- 1987 'Naisten Itku' (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Dj Historiikit, Historiakooste II, People's Archive.
- Pääkkönen, Anneli. 1987 'Itkijänaiset eduskunnassa 2.4.1987'. In *Naiset Rauhan Puolesta Tiedote 2/1987* (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Dj Historiikit, Historiakooste II, People's Archive.
- Rauhannainen 2/1982* (Bulletin), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Dj Historiikit, Historiakooste I, People's Archive.
- Toimintakertomus vuodelta 1987 (Annual Report), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Dc Toimintakertomukset (Annual Reports) 1981–1992, People's Archive.
- 1988 (Annual Report), Archive of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Dc Toimintakertomukset (Annual Reports) 1981–1992, People's Archive.
- Women for Peace in Finland 1981 (English-language pamphlet), Archive Of Naiset Rauhan Puolesta, 1D, Da Esitteet, People's Archive.

Interviews

- Pääkkönen, Anneli. 2017. Interviewed by Arja Turunen, October 6, 2017. Finnish Labour Archives. — 2024. Phone interview by Arja Turunen, April 4, 2024. Notes are in the possession of Arja Turunen.
- 2025. Email correspondence with Arja Turunen, February 16, 2025. In the possession of Arja Turunen.
- Rantanen, Lea. 2017. Interview by Arja Turunen, September 5, 2017. Finnish Labour Archives.

Media Material

- Heino, Mikko. 2017. “Muistatko? Itkijänaiset yllättivät kansanedustajat 1987 – ‘Vanha konkari Virolainenkin hieman hätkähti’” *Iltalehti* online, Accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000005153200.html>
- Iltalehti. 1987. “Itkijänaisen mielenosoitus jätti edustajat äimäksi: ‘Koska alkaa lehteriltä sataa Jumalan teatteria...?’” April 3, 1987, 4.
- 1987. “Hämmästynyt Virolainen: ‘Luulin sitä lapsen itkuksi.’” April 3, 1987, 1.
- Kansan Uutiset. 1987. “Itkijänaiset muistuttivat Tshernobylistä ‘Inhimillistä virhettä ei voi sulkea peruskallioon.’” *Kansan Uutiset*, April 25, 1987, 27.
- Laasanen, Jari. 2012. “Eduskunnan lehtereillä on osoitettu mieltä monin tavoin.” YLE online. Accessed January 11, 2023. <https://yle.fi/a/3-6140685>
- Mustonen, Kari. 1988. “Itkijänaiset iskivät Ahti Pekkalan juhliissa.” *Ilta-Sanomat*, October 25, 1988, 64.
- Rantanen, Lea. 1981. “Onko rauha naisten harteilla?” *Ydin*, 5: 16–19.
- Rautalin, Sirkka. 1987. “Itkijänaiset yllättivät eduskunnan.” *Helsingin Sanomat*, April 3, 1987.
- Wahlström, Erik. 1987. “Gräteskor lade sten på kärnmännens börda.” *Huvustadsbladet*, April 25, 1987.

Web Pages

- Pääkkönen, Anneli. 2002. Itkijänaiset. www.naistrauhanpuolesta.org (Printed and archived by the authors, website no longer hosted online.) Accessed September 5, 2008.
- Rantanen, Lea. 2013. Lea Rantanen – Feminismiiä ja Rauhaa. *Naisten Ääni – Suomalaisen naisen elämää*. Accessed January 11, 2023. <https://www.naistenaani.fi/lea-rantanen-feminismia-ja-rauhaa/>

Literature

- Ahlbäck, Anders. 2022. “Changing Views on Gender and Security: Finland’s Belated Opening of Military Service to Women in the 1990s.” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47(2): 248–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2021.2011399>
- Bartlett, Alison. 2011. “Feminist Protest and Maternity at Pine Gap Women’s Peace Camp, Australia 1983.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 34(1): 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.10.002>
- 2013. “Feminist Protest in The Desert: Researching the 1983 Pine Gap Women’s Peace Camp.” *Gender, Place, and Culture* 20(7): 914–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.753585>
- Becker-Schaum, Christopher, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zepp. 2016. *The Nuclear Crisis: The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx70b>
- Bergman, Solveig. 2002. *The Politics of Feminism: Autonomous Feminist Movements in Finland and West Germany from the 1960s to the 1980s*. Åbo Akademi University Press.

- Branciforte, Laura. 2022. "The Women's Peace Camp at Comiso, 1983: Transnational Feminism and the Anti-Nuclear Movement." *Women's History Review* 31(2): 316–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2021.1984026>
- Burke, Patrick. 2016. "European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s." In *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s*, edited by Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon, 227–250. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316479742.011>
- Culley, Marci R., and Holly L. Angeli. 2003. "Women's Gendered Experiences as Long-Term Three Mile Island Activists." *Gender and Society* 17(3): 445–461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243203017003009>
- Eschle, Catherine. 2023. "Why haven't you known?" Transoceanic Solidarity and the Politics of Knowledge in Feminist Anti-Nuclear Activism." *Zeitschrift für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* 2: 195–216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42597-023-00091-1>
- Feigenbaum, Anna. 2010. "Now I'm a Happy Dyke!': Creating Collective Identity and Queer Community in Greenham Women's Songs." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22(4): 367–388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-1598.2010.01251.x>
- 2013. "Written in the Mud: (Proto)Zine-making and Autonomous Media at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp." *Feminist Media Studies* 13(1): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.647964>
- 2015. "From Cyborg Feminism to Drone Feminism: Remembering Women's Anti-Nuclear Activisms." *Feminist Theory* 16(3): 265–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700115604132>
- Helminen, Minna. 2002. *Väkevää akkaväkeä: Naisten kulttuuriyhdistys 20 vuotta*. Naisten kulttuuriyhdistys.
- Hytönen-Ng, Elina, and Emilia Kallonen. 2024. "Weeping out Loud: Embodiment in the Contemporary Lament Learning Process." *The Journal of Somaesthetics* 9(1–2)(2023): 148–162. <https://doi.org/10.54337/ojs.jos.v9i1/2.7916>
- Ingström, Pia. 2007. *Lentävä feministi ja muista muistoja 70-luvulta*. Helsinki: Schildt.
- Intondi, Vincent J. 2023. *Saving the World from Nuclear War: The June 12, 1982, Disarmament Rally and Beyond*. Johns Hopkins University. <https://doi.org/10.56021/9781421446417>
- Jolly, Margaretta. 2003. "'We are the Web': Letter Writing and the 1980s Women's Peace Movement." *Prose Studies* 26(1–2): 196–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144035032000235882>
- 2006. "Nuclear Nights: The Women's Peace Movement and the History of Dreaming." *Women: A Cultural Review* 17(1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040600628443>
- Kurvinen, Heidi. 2024a. *Feminism in Finnish Print Media, 1968–1985*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69470-7>
- 2024b. "'We want to live. We want peace': The Peace Movement in the Finnish and Swedish Print Media, 1980–1984." In *Mediated Ideologies: Nordic Views on the History of the Press and Media Cultures*, edited by Jukka Kortti and Heidi Kurvinen, 145–163. Wilmington: Vernon Press.
- Kurvinen, Heidi, and Arja Turunen. 2022. "Radical Sex Role Ideology and the Finnish Gender Role Movement in the late 1960s." *Women's History Review* 32(1): 62–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2022.2092270>
- Laware, Margaret L. 2004. "Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common." *NWSA Journal* 16(3): 18–41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4317078>
- Litmanen, Tapio. 1998. "International Anti-Nuclear Movements in Finland, France, and the United States." *Peace Research* 30(4): 1–19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23607426>
- Managhan, Tina. 2007. "Shifting the Gaze from Hysterical Mothers to 'Deadly Dads': Spectacle and the Anti-Nuclear Movement." *Review of International Studies* 33(4): 637–654. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021050700770X>
- Mattila, Kari, and Johanna Suorsa, eds. 1994. *Viattomat, vallattomat ja rohkeat*. Naisten kulttuuriyhdistys.
- Mayer, Sophie. 2017. "THAT'S WHY WE CAME HERE: feminist cinema(s) at Greenham Common." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 22(3): 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1387367>

- Nehring, Holger, and Benjamin Ziemann. 2012. "Do All Paths Lead to Moscow? The NATO Dual-Track Decision and the Peace Movement – A Critique." *Cold War History* 12(1): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.625160>
- Peltonen, Eeva, Harriet Strandell, and Christina Törnroth. 1979. "Uusi naistutkimus." *Sociologia* 16(3): 234–241.
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Emmi Kuitinen. 2022. "Mielikuvien, ruumiillisuuden ja perinteen kohtaamispiteessä: Tapaustutkimus tunteista nykyajan muusikko-itkijän itkuvirsiperformansseissa." *Elore* 29(2): 81–102. <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.121298>
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Kati Kallio. 2023. "Tradition and Ownership: Disputes about Karelian Laments in Finland." *Approaching Religion* 13(3): 40–59. <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.131229>
- Tenhunen, Anna-Liisa. 2006. *Itkuvirren kolme elämää*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Turunen, Arja. 2024. "Equality on Male Terms or Reconstruction of Gender Roles? Association 9 and the Finnish Sex Role Ideology of the 1960s." *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 32(2): 158–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2024.2320629>
- Wilce, James M. 2009. *Crying Shame. Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444306248>
- Yoken, Hannah. 2020. *Nordic Transnational Feminist Activism: The New Women's Movements in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, 1960s–1990s*. Unpublished PhD-dissertation. University of Glasgow.
- 2021. "Transnational Transfers and Mainstream Mappings: Women's Liberation Calendars of the 1970s and 1980s." In *Translating Feminism: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Text, Place and Agency (1945–2000)*, edited by Maud Bracke, Julia C. Bullock, Penelope Morris, and Kristina Schulz, 117–146. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79245-9_5
- 2022. "'Women Against the EEC!': Limits of Transnational Feminist Solidarity." *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 30(1): 35–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2021.1973096>
- 2024. "Producing and Distributing Feminist Counterpublics: Magazines of the Nordic new women's movements." In *Mediated Ideologies: Nordic Views on the History of the Press and Media Cultures*, edited by Jukka Kortti and Heidi Kurvinen, 103–121. Wilmington: Vernon Press.
- Yoken, Hannah Kaarina. 2025. "Liennytyksen puolesta, ydinsotaa vastaan: Sukupuolinäkökulma 1980-luvun kotimaisiin rauhanmarsseihin." *Lähihistoria* 4(1): 106–129. <https://doi.org/10.61559/lh.156399>
- Yoken, Hannah Kaarina, and Arja Turunen. 2024. "Transnational Influences: Finnish Feminism Between East and West." In *Transnational Feminism in Non-English Speaking Europe, c.1960–1990*, edited by Heidi Kurvinen and Agnes Andeweg, 61–82. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69138-6_4

Affective Arrangements in Laments

Emotions as a Connecting Feature and a Separator in the Contentious Field of Lament in Finland in the 2020s

VILIINA SILVONEN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7191-4956>

At present, the field of lamenting in Finland is experiencing contentious debates regarding proper practice and the meaning of lamenting, as well as the rights to use and apply laments (Silvonen and Kallio 2023). This field comprises, principally, a variety of lamenting practices, but also encompasses research and archival practices. The lamenters in this field possess divergent emphases and perceptions of lamenting and its functions, making it impossible to find common ground as the parties do not have a shared idea about laments and do not value each other's practices. For example, for some, lamenting is self-expression that aims for cathartic release, while for others, it is upholding Karelian culture.

In this chapter, I examine the different lamenting practices and the conceptions of laments in 2010s and 2020s Finland, focusing on emotionality. I compare these different conceptions to each other and to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian lamentation that most lamenters perceive to be the origin of contemporary practices. Examining emotions and the affective power of laments is a fruitful approach for the analysis of the conception of laments and lamentation, because they are a distinctive feature of lamentation, important in relation to the ritual functions and cultural meanings (e.g. Honko 1974; Stepanova 2014), and considered by many contemporary lamenters to be a fundamental feature of them. In this chapter, I argue that even though emotionality is a shared feature within all the earlier Karelian and diverse contemporary lamenting practices in Finland, interpretations of emotionality vary, and thus, the emotionality and emotions of laments represent the features that connect and separate the different practices. Furthermore, I show that the various lamenting practices and conceptions of their emotions are reflected in different ideologies and objectives, and that these differences also explain the above-described tense conditions in the contemporary lamenting field.

In this chapter, ideologies are understood as casual, often unconscious models of thinking and ways of approaching, valuing, and practising lamenting (see, e.g., Freeden 2003). I adopt Susan Gal's and Judith T. Irvine's way of approaching ideology by focusing on the '*site of ideological work*: moments and practices in social life in which experiences and ideas are swept up – drawn into ideologised interpretations' (Gal and Irvine 2019, 167, emphasis in original). In this chapter, the de- and recontextualisation and reinterpretations of Karelian lament are these kinds of sites that reveal the ideologies.

In the analysis, I focus on the conceptions of the emotions in laments in three different settings in contemporary Finland and contextualise these conceptions in relation to the ideologies they reflect. These settings are Karelian activism and reclaiming Karelian lamentation; laments as contemporary folk music and performing arts; and *hoitava itku* (healing lament¹). I provide a synthesis of the Karelian lament tradition at the turn of the twentieth century as a point of reference. I apply a theoretical model I have created, based on folkloristic performance theory (e.g. Bauman [1975] 1984; Briggs 1988; Foley 1995), informed by conceptions of practice (e.g. Bronner 2019), and sociocultural understanding of emotions and affects (e.g. Ahmed [2004] 2018; Wetherell 2012; Scheer 2012; Slaby 2019; see also Silvonen 2020; 2022a). By comparing the interpretations of laments and their emotionality in these settings, I aim at a deeper understanding of the diverse contemporary field.

This kind of comparative perspective is new among studies of lamenting in contemporary Finland. Only Anna-Liisa Tenhunen (2006) has touched on the topic in her research about lamenting from the turn of the twentieth century Karelian context until the early 2000s in Finland. She sums up that the function of this old lamenting has been to connect with the otherworld, while lamenting in the early 2000s in Finland is about personal emotional expression (ibid., 385). Since her publication, the contemporary lamenting field has diversified and I tackle this diversity here. In general, there have been very few studies about lamenting in twenty-first-century Finland until recently (see, e.g., Wilce 2011; 2017; Silvonen and Kuittinen 2022; 2023; Hytönen-Ng and Kallonen 2023; Hytönen-Ng 2023; Silvonen and Kallio 2023).

In recent years, the uses and adaptations of Karelian laments in Finland have raised a lot of discussion. This is intertwined with questions about the complex relations of Karelian and Finno-Karelian culture and identities (Silvonen and Kallio 2023). Karelians are a diverse, transnational group, characterised by varying relations with Orthodoxy and Lutheranism, as well as the Karelian and Finnish languages. They formerly lived in the border region between Finland (earlier Sweden) and Russia (earlier Novgorod, Muscovy). The shifting of state borders and governments in the region's history resulted in migration and changes in cultural influences, leading people to identify in multiple ways as Karelians. Karelian identity may be based on language, religion, geographical area, or family roots, for example.² Traditionally, lamenting was known among Orthodox Karelians, of whom most were Karelian-speakers. In the map below (Figure 11), Karelian-speaking areas are marked with shades of purple. Additionally, I have marked the area referred to as Karelia with a black dashed line and the areas that were ceded to the Soviet Union in the Moscow armistice in 1944 (the ceded Karelia) in grey with a dotted line.

1. This translation does not correspond exactly to the original but is established in research (e.g. Wilce 2011; 2017). 'Caring' or 'caressing lament' could be alternative translations. I use the Finnish term *hoitava itku*, because some feel that the English term distorts the practice.
2. About Karelian culture in Finland, see, e.g., Tarkka, Stepanova, and Haapoja-Mäkelä 2018; Stepanova 2020; see also Silvonen and Kallio 2023.



Figure 11. Map of Finnic languages and main dialects at the beginning of the twentieth century, with author's amendments focusing on Karelia. The map illustrates the complexity of Karelia and the Karelians in relation to the Finns. The black dashed line shows approximately the area referred to as Karelia and the grey area marked with a dotted line shows the areas that were ceded to the Soviet Union. The arrows indicate the migration of Karelians of Finnish nationality after the Second World War. Original map, Grünthal 2020, 6.

The research material includes ethnographic interviews as well as personal communication with contemporary lamenters in 2021–2023, observations of concerts and other public events (Kyynekanavat 2021; 2022; 2023a), panel discussions (Kalevala Society 2022; Kyynekanavat 2023b), published recordings of laments by the interviewed contemporary lamenters (Kuittinen 2020a; 2020b; Muuttujalindu 2022), and Internet material (e.g. Kallonen and Äänellä itkiäjät ry 2019). The analysis of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian laments is a synthesis of earlier research (e.g., Honko 1974; Konkka 1985; Stepanova 2014; Silvonon 2020; 2022a; 2022b; Silvonon and Stepanova 2020).

My position is defined by a scholarly background in Finnish folkloristics and personally by my Finno-Karelian background. I worked closely with lamenter-musician Emmi Kuittinen in a project called *Kyynekanavat* in 2021–2023 (see Silvonon and Kuittinen 2022; 2023; 2024), and I have taken part in public and private discussions concerning the contemporary field of laments in Finland. I recognise that my earlier research – as well as my interpretations and understanding of the contemporary field and its relations to earlier Karelian lamenting – has influenced the thinking and perspectives of some lamenters in the field.

Lamenting in Nineteenth-Century Karelia and Contemporary Finland

In the Finnic area (Figure 11), lament tradition is historically known within the Orthodox ecclesiastical sphere of influence, that is, among Karelians, Izhorians, Ingrians, Votians, Vepsians, and Setos – all ethno-linguistic minorities in the areas of present-day Finland, Estonia, and northwest Russia. There is no known historical evidence of Finnish lamenting. The lamenting in contemporary Finland is mainly based on the Karelian lament tradition. Additionally, the Ingrian tradition has been influential, especially via the collection *Inkerin itkuvirret: Ingrian Laments* (Nenola 2002). These practices have been called traditional lamenting among contemporary lamenters and are perceived as authentic, proper kinds of laments in research history (see, e.g., Fenigsen and Wilce 2012; Silvonen, forthcoming).

Karelian and Ingrian lamentation became known in Finland mostly by scholarly work. In addition to studies and written descriptions, scholars organised lamenters to perform in events on stage along with *runo*-singers in the spirit of the National-Romanticism at the turn of the twentieth century (see Figure 12). Further, migration, especially the post-Second World War population transfers from the ceded Karelia territory and the earlier exile from Viena Karelia – the northern region – following the 1917 Russian Revolution, has had a significant impact on the Karelian lament tradition in Finland. In Finland, Orthodox-Karelians living in the diaspora adapted lamenting for this new context, yet often the laments, like other predominantly Karelian cultural expressions, were hidden or downplayed because of discrimination and Russophobia, as well as the Finnicisation of Karelians in postwar Finland (Tenhunen 2006; Silvonen and Kallio 2023).



Figure 12. Irinja Tarone[n], Matjoi Plattone[n], and Matrona Kyyröne[n] performing a staged wedding lament at a song festival in 1906. The bride is under the scarf, and the lamenting women are the *itettäjä/olallinen* who laments on behalf of the bride, and the bride's mother. The men behind, Konstantin Kuokka, livana Mišukka, and livana Onoila, are other tradition-specialists performing at the festival. Photo: I.M.Wartiainen. Finnish Heritage Agency. CC BY 4.0.

The lamenting field in contemporary Finland has become diverse through the various reinterpretations of Karelian and Ingrian laments. In the background of the differing interpretations are ideological differences, varied sources of knowledge, personal experiences, and on a more general level, different transformations and adaptations of the lament tradition during the processes of modernisation and other sociocultural and political changes. (Silvonen and Kallio 2023; Silvonen, forthcoming.)

In order to discuss and analyse the practices in the contemporary field, I use the term ‘contemporary lament’ to refer to all present lamenting practices, and, following anthropologist James M. Wilce (2011; Fenigsen and Wilce 2012), I use ‘neolament’ to refer to reinterpretations, representations, and new practices of lamenting that differ in form, meaning, and/or purpose from the ones perceived as traditional.³ It is important to note that this classification is not unambiguous. Behind the need to differentiate and label the various practices is the ethics concerning minority cultures, especially Karelians in this case, and their rights to use and develop their culture. I also think that examining and conceptualising the different practices can help lamenters better understand the differing practices and avoid such confrontations that have occurred in the field.

In nineteenth-century Karelia, laments were performed by women at funerals, weddings, commemorations, and when men were conscripted (recruit laments). Lamenters also expressed more personal worries and grief through laments, and in research these have been referred to as occasional or everyday laments. Another way of classifying laments is to categorise them as ritual and autobiographical (e.g., Silvonen 2022a). While not all laments are inherently associated with rites, the genre is nevertheless characterised by these and mythic beliefs. All situations involving lamentation are characterised by the experience of separation and its resulting grief. Traditionally, laments are an improvisatory, memory-based women’s tradition, and were learned within one’s sociocultural environment. (Honko 1974; Konkka 1985; Stepanova 2014.) In the contemporary field, the contexts for lamenting are various; laments are mostly learned in lamenting courses organised by folk music professionals or participants of earlier lament courses, and the practice has widened beyond its previous gendered association. Also, contemporary lamenting is often at least partially a written practice.

Among the contemporary lamenting practices, forms and interpretations vary. Most people active in contemporary lamentation and the development of neolamenting have Karelian roots and identify as Karelians or Finno-Karelians. The most influential actors in shaping neolamenting are the folk music department at the Sibelius Academy (a music university), founded in 1983, and the lamenter association *Äänellä Itkijät* (those who cry with voice), founded in 2001. At the Sibelius Academy, lamenting is framed as folk music. Within *Äänellä Itkijät*, the most prominent interpretation of lamenting is *hoitava itku* (healing lament) with psychological and therapeutic emphases (see, e.g., Wilce 2011). These two different interpretations draw especially from occasional and everyday laments and are the most prominent publicly known practices in Finland today. During the last couple of years, a new generation of Karelians in Finland – the generation whose parents or grandparents spoke Karelian and were assimilated into Finnish culture – has been reviving and reclaiming Karelian culture,

3. Wilce uses ‘neolament’ mainly in the context of *Äänellä Itkijät ry*, which was the main actor in the lament field during his research.

including lamentation, to connect with their (partially or possibly) lost Karelian cultural roots (see also Silvonen and Kallio 2023, 50).

The characteristics of the nineteenth-century laments are adopted to varying extents in contemporary lamenting. These characteristics include a specific lament language that differs significantly from both spoken and other poetic languages with complex metaphors, formulaic expression, employing a range of specific poetic devices such as alliteration and diminutives, a vocal production that is distinct from singing and other genres of oral poetry, and audible sobbing and crying (Stepanova 2014; Silvonen 2022b; Silvonen and Stepanova 2020). Indeed, the expression, especially the language, is often described as obscure among lamenters and researchers. Behind this distinct communicative register, mythic conceptions bring their influence: laments have been primarily seen as a mode of communication with the otherworld, reflected in Karelian notions of *syndyzet* (otherworldly ones, especially ancestors and deceased relatives; also the place) and *spuassuset* (otherworldly ones, especially deities), and safeguarding such communication has led to the development of a distinct communicative register (Stepanova 2015; see also Honko 1974).

Lament performances communicate on an emotional and affective level (Silvonen 2020; 2022a). It is thought that a talented lamenter, through their performance, can provoke tears from the audience. Within the nineteenth and early twentieth century Karelian community, this ability was widely regarded as an important component of lament performances and their ritual functions, including, for example, the safe passage of the deceased to the otherworld. (Konkka 1985, 35; Stepanova 2014, 98–99.) The affective power of laments is conveyed through text, language, and music but most significantly it is the emotional display as well as the recognition of the practice with its cultural meanings that make the emotions contagious (Silvonen and Stepanova 2020; Silvonen 2022a). The emotionality and the affective power of laments are present in all lamenting practices and considered as one of the most important features. While emotions represent a fundamental aspect of laments, the way they are interpreted and the specific emotions deemed appropriate are subject to variation. This variation is observed not only across different spatiotemporal contexts but also within the diversity of contemporary practices.

The emotions in laments are both personal and collective. In rites, besides their own feelings, the lamenter channels the emotions of the community in facilitating a shared expression of grief. The collective aspect is fundamental to the emotionality of these kinds of laments, as sorrow often arises from the experience of separation from one's beloved ones (Stepanova 2014; Silvonen and Stepanova 2020; Silvonen 2022a). Consequently, Lauri Honko has described laments as the 'poetry of final parting' (1974, 9). The overpowering emotion of Karelian laments is '*apeus*'⁴ that is characterised by melancholy, desolation, longing, sadness, and grief. Other emotions such as love, a sense of communality, and gratitude are also present. The intensification of emotions in performances is referred to as '*apeutuminen*', which is a nominal form of the verb '*apeutua*' that describes getting into the state of *apeus*. Within the multifaceted domain of contemporary Finnish lamenting, *apeus* and *apeutuminen* are esteemed, yet their precise interpretations vary.

4. There is no proper translation for this.

Affective Arrangements

Affective arrangement is a philosophical concept by Jan Slaby (2019). It treats emotionally intensive sites of social life as a constellation where various things and materials, such as persons, artefacts, spaces, discourses, and expressions, merge into a 'formation of mutual affecting and being-affected' (ibid., 109). Slaby notes that the concept is also suited for empirical analysis, for example, mapping the 'production and/or continued circulation of affect' in rites (ibid., 116–117). Approaching lamentation as an affective arrangement allows us to focus on the different aspects of emotion, such as experiences and multimodal expressions. I understand affective arrangement to be a notion related to John Miles Foley's concept of 'performance arena' (1995). Both concepts emphasise the dynamic, virtual nature of interactive events. Generally, I consider lamentation as performance, one which establishes an 'interpretative frame' (Bauman [1975] 1984) that reflects a set of thoughts and beliefs – that is to say, an ideology.

When analysing lament performances in different spatiotemporal settings, I have sought to identify the constituent elements of the affective arrangement. This is done in order to compare the constellations of affective arrangement in these varying settings. The differing features, on their part, reveal differences in interpretation and values. I have separated the features into nine categories, derived from Jan Slaby's model (2019, 109). The categories are: (1) persons, (2) topic, (3) register, (4) narrative, (5) behaviour, (6) objects, (7) space, (8) emotion, and (9) interpretative frame that reflects the ideology.

In the category of (1) 'persons', there are all the parties present in the performance arena in question: the lamenter performing either as themselves or as the lament's ego (which can differ from the lamenter as themselves), and the community. In different contexts, the composition of the community and how it is referred to vary. The (2) 'topic' means the subject of the lament and can be personal, communal, or general. With (3) 'register', I focus on linguistic analysis, with questions regarding the utilisation of the Karelian or Finnish language, the employment of conventional formulaic language, and the poetic devices, as well as the broader question of whether the genre regulates the use of language. (4) 'Narrative', refers to the way the story of lament evolves and can be classified as either open-ended or a lament with a narrative arc ending in a conclusion. I interpret (5) 'behaviours' that are relevant to the affective arrangement including a bent posture that in a way turns the lamenter towards themselves, a rocking movement, and emotionality. The affectively relevant (6) 'objects' are ritual objects and the *itkuliina* ('lament cloth') with which the lamenter covers their face and creates some personal space. (Sometimes a corner of a shawl or apron could serve as the lament cloth.)

The (7) 'space' is perceived here as a concrete place differing from the entire performance arena; it can be public and open, or private and closed. Sharing of the space is another aspect, which means different things within different contexts. Moreover, in certain settings, *apeus* is understood as an abstract space, a state of mind. Into the category labelled (8) 'emotion', I have picked *apeus* – here as a named emotion –, performer's genuine emotions in the performance, the imitative expression of emotional signs, the cause of the emotions, and the intensification of emotions. The (9) 'interpretative frame' is either mythic, ritual, performing arts and music, therapy culture, cultural and ethnic identification, or more generally 'just something special', as it is sometimes described by contemporary lamenters (personal communication with lamenters and observation). There are also many other influential components, such as the lament performance as an element itself

and the musical expression, but to prevent unnecessary complexity of the already rather complex analysis, I have left these out as they are not as visible in the source material.

Affective Arrangements in Laments

In my analysis, I focus on those features of the affective arrangement that are emphasised and considered important within each of the analysed settings in relation to the affective power. Between the settings, the interpretations and nuances of what are considered the most central or important features vary individually and situationally. In instances where I examine a single lament performance – case studies of laments as music and reclaiming Karelian laments – the interpretation of the most meaningful, emphasised features were discussed with the lamenter. The other interpretations – the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Karelian lament and *hoitava itku* – are mine.

NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY KARELIAN WEDDING AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LAMENTS

This section synthesises earlier research on Finnic lamentation, including my analyses on affective arrangements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian laments (Silvonen 2020; 2022a; 2022b; Silvonen and Stepanova 2020). I draw upon Eila Stepanova's (2012; 2014) research, but also Unelma Konkka's (1985) and Lauri Honko's (1974) studies on Karelian lament, as well as Aili Nenola's (Nenola-Kallio 1982; Nenola 2002) studies on Ingrian lament. Lament studies in Finnish (e.g., Nenola 2002; Tenhunen 2006; Stepanova 2014) are widely read among contemporary lamenters in Finland.

In premodern Karelian weddings, laments were performed by the bride's family. In this culture, marriage meant separation from the childhood family, the familiar home, and carefree living and stepping into a new status in society and a new familial role. The period of transition was prone to outside influences and dangerous spirits and needed to be safeguarded with laments. The lamenter, for example, asked for protection from *syndyzet* for the bride in her new life as a wife. It was usual that an older woman, a godmother or other relative, lamented on behalf of the bride. The lamenter was called *itettäjä* (derived from the verb 'cry') or *olallinen* (derived from the word 'shoulder'). In these cases, the lamenter represented the lament's ego, in other words, the lamenter adopted the persona of the bride (see Figure 12). Besides the bride, her mother performed ritual laments on behalf of herself; here, the lamenter and the lament's ego were one and the same. Wedding laments, like any ritual lament, were always communal, as the rite changed the social order of the entire community. (See, e.g., Honko 1974; Konkka 1985.) While wedding and funeral laments were strictly regulated and socially controlled, occasional and autobiographical laments were a bit freer, yet still regulated by the genre itself. Some ritual laments also included autobiographical themes. (Silvonen 2020; 2022a; Silvonen and Stepanova 2020.)⁵

In general, the affective arrangements within the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian lamenting mirror the surrounding culture with its mythic beliefs. The

5. A selection of Karelian laments recorded in the mid-twentieth century is available on the webpages of the Karelian language revival project at the University of Eastern Finland. Numbers 24 and 28 serve as good examples, <https://blogs.uef.fi/karjalanelvytyt/itkuvirsinauhoitteet-arkistoista/>.

most salient features of this setting pertain to vernacular Orthodox and folk beliefs, which are inherently interwoven in the people's minds and lives. This world and the otherworld are considered parallel and constantly interactive. A strong sense of community is a characteristic feature of the culture, with *syndyzet* being an integral part of it and present in everyday life. (See, e.g., Stepanova 2012.) The community oversees the proper conduct of the rites (e.g. Honko 1974; Stepanova 2014). *Apeus* and *apeutuminen*, as well as the emotionality in general, are more generally interpreted through ritual and mythic framing, and seen as organic mediums that execute the mythic communicative functions.

In the affective arrangement formed in the performance of wedding laments, the persons (1) are the lamenter as herself and as a lament's ego, the village community, and *syndyzet*. The topic (2) of the lament is communal, but it also has personal nuances. The register (3) and behaviour (5) are regulated, and the performance follows conventional poetic, linguistic, musical, and other expressive devices; the posture is usually bent and the lamenter and the bride are hugging (Figure 12). Narrative (4) follows the fixed, ritual thematic structure but may also include autobiographical themes, and with them a relatively open ending. The ritual objects (6) depend on the exact rite. For instance, the bride's hair, comb, and hair ribbons are central to the rite in which the bride's hair is ceremonially combed. Furthermore, the *itkuliina* ('lament cloth', Figure 13) is an affectively influential object (6). The rite makes the space (7) private and closed, as it is exclusively available to a specific community. It is conducted within private households, which are not generally accessible to the public in the same manner as, for instance, a concert performance. *Apeus* is present in the virtual performance arena. The rite and the practice in their totality set the expectations for a certain kind of emotionality, and one of the most salient features of laments is the affective power that takes over the performer and the audience (Silvonon 2020; 2022a). Emotions (8) are both real felt experiences and imitatively expressed. The intensification of emotions is also present.



Figure 13. A collage of lamenters posing with *itkuliina*, the 'lament cloth', for musicologist Armas Otto Väisänen. This kind of pose has become iconic, and it also appears in the pictures of contemporary lamenters. Lamenters from left: Paraske Mitrune, Suojärvi, Karelia, 1917; Irinja Tarone[n], Suistamo, Karelia, 1910s (no exact date); and Tatjana Terone[n], Korpiselkä, Karelia, 1917. Photos: Armas Otto Väisänen, The Finnish Heritage Agency, Helsinki. CC BY 4.0.

Based on earlier research, I interpret that the emphasised features in this arrangement are the lament's ego (the bride); the community, because the marriage influences everyone; *syndyzet*, since the core aim of lamenting is to communicate with them; and the register. Indeed, the right performance allows the lament to be heard in the otherworld. As a ritual practice, the communal topic and rite as a performance arena are also emphasised. Furthermore, *apeutuminen* – the intensification of the emotions – is considered important for the ritual functions to be realised, and so it is one of the emphasised features. From these emphasised features, I interpret the ritual space, register, and *syndyzet* to be the most important in the affective arrangement of wedding laments.

The affective arrangement of an autobiographical lament differs little from the ritual one. The persons (1) are the same, yet here the lament's ego and the lamenter are the same, and the community is more in the background. The topic (2) is personal and freer than in ritual laments, like the narration (4) too, since there is no obligatory content. As already mentioned, the lament may end with the lamenter falling into deep emotions, and thus it may have an open ending. The register (3) and behaviour (5) do not differ much from a ritual lament, only that the lamenter is usually alone. The *itkuliina* (6) is considered elemental in this setting also. The space (7) is private, being closed on a more personal level than in ritual laments. The emotions (8) are similar to the arrangement of ritual laments, yet attached to individual experiences rather than communal ritual transformations.

The emphasised features here are the lamenter herself; the *syndyzet*, comprising the primary and possibly only audience of an autobiographical lament; the personal topic; and the privacy of the space. Like ritual laments, the specific register is emphasised, and the nature of the practice is ritualistic. I regard that the most important features of affective arrangement within this setting are the regulated register and practice, the *syndyzet* as an addressee, and the personal topic.

In both settings, the interpretative frame (9) is mythic and ritual, and the lamenting is seen differently from other sociocultural practices. Even though the context for autobiographical laments is not (always) a rite, the rituality of the tradition is present through cultural meanings and connotation. A therapeutic aspect could be seen as an element in this affective arrangement, albeit with some reservations, as the modern therapy discourse in general appeared decades later.

RECLAIMING KARELIAN LAMENTS

In recent years, a new kind of Karelian activism has appeared in Finland and has also reached the field of laments. It focuses on the recognition of Karelians, the status of Karelian language, and the possibility to represent Karelian identity as separate from Finnish. The activists are mostly the third or fourth generation of Karelian refugees or evacuees. As part of a wider Karelian language and culture revival, some activists are reclaiming Karelian laments. They refer to the practice described above as traditional and say they are seeking the traditional forms and meanings, and ways to bring these practices into contemporary society. This reclaiming has the fundamental premise that lamenting, as well as other features of past Karelian culture and language, is something that belonged to Karelians but was taken away during processes described as 'Finnicising' Karelian culture within Romantic Nationalism in the nineteenth century, and assimilation and discrimination in postwar Finland. These processes have

made it hard to represent Karelian identity as non-Finnish. (For more, see Silvonen and Kallio 2023.)

This analysis is based on interviews and personal communication with Mirva Haltia-Holmberg (2023a; 2023b; 2025), a Karelian ‘artist’ (artist and activist). I also use her artistic material published by the name *Muuttujalindu* in social media. In an interview where we discussed the affective arrangement of laments, I asked her to think of a single lament performance (Haltia-Holmberg 2023b). The lament analysed here is one at the opening of an art exhibition by a different Karelian artist. The lament was done for and on behalf of the artists; for inviting *syndyzet* to the event. Haltia-Holmberg also laments privately and uses laments to communicate with her Karelian ancestry. Depending on context, the affective arrangement of her laments is formed in various ways. However, this case study works as an illustration of the setting of reclaiming Karelian lament.

The ideological frame of reclaiming Karelian laments, and the Karelian activism of the 2020s in general, draws from the global de- and postcolonial discourses and the struggle of Indigenous people (Silvonen and Kallio 2023, 52). Minority discourses – especially ethnic (BIPOC+) and sexual (LGBTQIA+) ones – also form part of the background. Unequal power relations and majority privileges are pointed out, as well as solidarity between all minorities. In the ideologies behind the reclaiming and activism, some culturally relativistic ideas can be found. Lamenting is understood as something particularly characteristic to Karelians. It is considered a closed culture, as the practice is connected to religious or otherwise profound mythic ideas about how the world is constructed. Therefore, lamenting is permitted only within the Karelian community, is reserved exclusively for them, and is considered meaningful only to them. Lamenting is also a means of searching for and expressing cultural and ethnic identity on a personal level. For Mirva Haltia-Holmberg, reclaiming laments has been an important part of reconnecting with her Karelian roots and heritage. As she explains, ‘Without Karelian and the language of laments a part of me was lost. I was voiceless in a way I didn’t know until I reconnected to it’ (Muuttujalindu 2022).⁶

The affective arrangement of the lament at the opening of an art exhibition reminds of the arrangements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian laments. The persons (1) of this arrangement are the lamenter performing as herself and as the lament’s ego on behalf of the Karelian artist, the community, and *syndyzet*. The topic (2) is communal in this case, yet the personal aspect is also in the background. The performance overall appears to align with cultural norms that are regarded as traditional such as the bend posture, rocking movement (5), the linguistic register (3) in Karelian lament language with poetic devices, and the use of lament formulas. The openness or conclusiveness of the narrative pattern (4) is not seen as specifically relevant. *Itkuliina* (6) marks the lament genre and tradition, and creates the right kind of atmosphere, although Haltia-Holmberg herself does not use a separate *itkuliina*; in her family, the corner of the headscarf was used. In this case, the space (7) is virtual, and as such, it is shared, private, and closed – a space for the Karelian community where the profound meaning of lamenting is understood. At the same time, the space may be public and open; in a concrete space – such as an opening event at an art gallery – there might be

6. Listen to Muuttujalindu’s poem song (runo-song) and a lament about Karelian lamenting tradition on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Whn1Bxmn0f0>.

people who are not Karelians, and therefore not part of the virtual space. For Haltia-Holmberg, *apeus* (which is a concept that she recognises but does not use to describe her personal experience) presents itself as a focused state of mind that is needed for lamenting and connecting with *syndyzet*. Intensification of emotions, *apeus*, and genuine emotions (8) are present. The interpretative frame (9) that is influential in this affective arrangement is that of cultural and ethnic identification as well as the mythic and ritual nature of the tradition. Lamenting is also perceived as something special.

The emphasised features are the lament's ego, community, *syndyzet*, and the communal topic – the performance is explicitly addressed to the community. Also emphasised are the regulated register in Karelian poetic lament language, the lamenter's genuine emotions, and the frame of Karelian identity. For Haltia-Holmberg, the most important elements in relation to this specific context are the community, which includes *syndyzet*, the cultural and ethnic identification as the frame, and the regulated register.

LAMENTS AS CONTEMPORARY FOLK MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS

To define which lamenting practices can be considered music and performing arts or primarily considered an artistic practice is not simple since all laments can be viewed as verbal art and lamenters as (vernacular) artists. In this study, to view laments as music and performing arts means mainly laments and lamenting that are: 1) primarily composed and planned to be performed for an audience in a concert or similar situation where the audience is not comprised of other lamenters (like in lament courses); and 2) understood as a genre of music and as musical expression instead of, for example, ritual practice or therapeutic, cathartic self-expression.

Interpretations of laments as performing arts, like any other lamenting practices, are situational. Thus, the same lament can be seen differently in a variety of contexts. The contexts for laments as performing arts vary from concerts to private events, like cocktail parties or funerals, where a professional musician is hired to perform laments, and from academic conference presentations to demonstrations. Furthermore, there are published recordings (Kuittinen 2020b) and YouTube videos of laments as performing arts (e.g. Kuittinen 2020a),⁷ and staged artistic reinterpretations of rites described in research (e.g. Kyynelkanavat 2021). Some performing-arts laments may be similar to commemorative ones, such as when a lamenter lamented at the grave of a family member during an art event organised at a graveyard (Kyynelkanavat 2021).

This case analysis, illustrative of the setting of performing arts and music, is based on the interpretations and thoughts of lamenter-musician Emmi Kuittinen (2022; 2023; see Figure 14). Kuittinen performs replicas of archived early twentieth-century laments and her own laments that resemble these in expression. She has also made songs and other music inspired by laments. This analysis is about a lament performed in the context of a concert. In the interview, I asked Kuittinen to think of a single concert performance of a lament (Kuittinen 2023). The affective arrangement would be a bit different in other situations.

7. Emmi Kuittinen's lament for worries about COVID-19 is available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XQmb8qM7Cs>.



Figure 14. Emmi Kuittinen posing with a lament cloth. The pose resembles that of the lamenters photographed in Karelia during the 1910s (see Figure 13). Kuittinen says that with her lament art, she wants to raise awareness about traditions and create space for sorrowful emotions in contemporary society. Photo: Sini Suomi 2022, used with permission.

In the context of music and performing arts, the approach to laments is inclusive, and lamenting is seen as a genre of folk music. In this case, the starting point for lamenting is poetics or other aesthetic values. The underlying ideology emphasises creative artistic work. (See also Hill 2009; Silvonen and Kuittinen 2024.) The conception of and ideas about what laments are and how they can be used and applied come from contemporary folk music, and these practices are also discussed as revivals (see, e.g., Hill 2009; Bithell and Hill 2014; Haapaja 2017). As Juniper Hill (2009) has shown, the Finnish contemporary folk music field is strongly influenced by the left-wing political movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Liberal global ideals about multicultural sharing and music as something that universally connects people are present. These are connected to larger political ideologies that reflect global solidarity and the anti-racist, anti-patriotic discourses of twenty-first-century urban musicians (Hill 2009; Haapaja 2017). Also, musicians are motivated by the desire to provide an alternative to commercial Western popular music and to increase knowledge about local music traditions (e.g. Silvonen and Kuittinen 2023).

As music, the affective arrangement of a lament performance consists of the lamenter (1) lamenting primarily as herself, but sometimes the lament's ego may be someone else. Moreover, the audience (1) is elemental, and *syndyzet* (1) is always somehow present in Kuittinen's performances, although the interpretation of what *syndyzet* means differs from the conventional Karelian conceptions, along with her worldview. Kuittinen thinks that in public performances, the topic (2) needs to be recognisable for everyone. Even though there might be personal worries and sorrows subtly present, she does not make them explicit. Kuittinen also values the traditional poetic devices of lamentation, as she calls them, but applies them in the Finnish language (3).

Even though the register follows these devices, it is aesthetically oriented, not regulated by ritual norms like in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian laments but by models of contemporary folk music. The narrative pattern (4) is not determined by tradition but adapted to fit each situation and need. The behaviour (5) refers to what is thought to be traditional. The *itkuliina* as an object (6) is present, indicating the lament genre and tuning up the emotional atmosphere. Kuittinen describes that it also eases performing and crying by giving privacy on stage. The space (7) of these laments is public and open, and in general, the role of the performing artist is central. The audience forms the community, and the lamentation is an on-stage performance, not a ritual one. In the performing arts context, *apeus* is present as a general emotional atmosphere. With her laments, Kuittinen seeks to connect with other people. For her, empathy is an important part of *apeus*, so the collective aspect is present, too. The emotional expression (8) is imitative, and that may instigate the actual feelings. Emotions and *apeus* are considered fundamental to lamenting; however, they do not have similar cultural functions as in ritual laments. Instead, they are expressive and part of the aesthetics of laments. The interpretative frame (9) is performing arts and music; however, notions of mythic conceptions that Kuittinen perceives as traditional in laments are present too. Kuittinen considers laments as something special, as a practice that originally had ritual functions and can communicate with the otherworld.

As music and performing arts, the emphasised features of the affective arrangement of laments are the presence of an audience, the context of staged performance, and a general topic. Kuittinen thinks that the topic of the lament needs to be relevant to the listeners in order for it to touch them, but it also needs to be true to her as the performer. For her, it is significant to separate laments from other song genres with the specific poetic devices that include the intensification of emotions. Nevertheless, she has said that in some situations, the performance may rely only on imitative emotions, but even these performances may touch the audience. The most important feature concerning the concert context is the audience since the entire performance, situation, and lament itself exist because the performer wants to communicate something to the people who are present. Furthermore, the use of the specific poetic devices is important for Kuittinen as it is aesthetically central and also the way to communicate with *syndyzet*.

HOITAVA ITKU

Hoitava itku (healing lament) is linked to the *Äänellä Itkijät* association. One of the founders, long-time chairperson Pirkko Fihlman (Figure 15) was influential in the formation of this lamenting practice in the late 1990s (Tenhunen 2006; Silvonen and Kalio 2023). Most lament courses and workshops are organised within this setting, and during the last twenty years, *Äänellä Itkijät* has been the most visible representation of lamentation – represented also as ‘traditional’ lamenting – in the media and elsewhere. Within the association, there exists a spectrum of interpretations of lamentation. For instance, while some individuals have affiliations with neoshamanism and may adopt shamanistic interpretations of lamenting, others categorically reject the notion of it. Even though there is no shared absolute understanding of the practice, it is possible to define some general trends and shared interpretations about lamenting.



Tunteiden ilmainen sanoin ja melodioin -itkuvirsikurssi 26.-27.3.

26.03.2022 10:00 - 27.03.2022 16:00 | Helsinki, Karjalatalo, Käpyläänkuja 1

Figure 15. An online advertisement, 'Expressing emotions with words and melodies lament course'. In these courses, participants are encouraged to explore or reflect on their personal emotional processes while creating their laments. In the picture, Pirkko Fihlman adopts a pose similar to lamenters in early twentieth-century ethnographic photographs (see, e.g., Figure 13). Photo: A screenshot from the The Finnish Karelian League's webpage taken by the author on May 15, 2025, <https://www.karjalanliitto.fi/tapahtumat/tunteiden-ilmaisu-sanoin-ja-melodioin-itkuvirsikurssi-26.-27.3..html>.

This analysis of the *hoitava itku* is based on interviews and personal communication with Pirkko Fihlman (2022), former chairperson Emilia Kallonen (2022; 2025), and Tuomas Rounakari (2023; 2025) an active course instructor. I also take into account observation and discussions at public events, and a manifesto article published on the *Äänellä Itkijät* association's webpage (Kallonen and Äänellä itkijät ry 2019). Kallonen later distanced herself from the association (Kallonen 2025).

Like laments as music and performing arts, *hoitava itku* arises from liberal ideologies that emphasise the individual perspective and creative freedom, yet it also cherishes the ideal of communality. The *Äänellä Itkijät* association regards its practices as a form of cultural work and has framed it also as a revival of Karelian lament (Tenhunen 2006). Concurrently, *hoitava itku* can be seen as part of a wider 'post-secular culture of healing' (Utriainen 2017, 253), referring to the variety of new spiritual or religious practices in contemporary society aimed at individual wellness and can be seen as 'alternative therapies' (ibid.; see also Wilce 2017). Therefore, another ideological framework underpinning this form of lamentation is the therapeutic ethos. This ethos has been present in Western society since the early twentieth century; however, it has attained greater authority within religious institutions towards the end of the century (see, e.g. Illouz 2008). Altogether, lamenting is seen as a process and a means of seeking and achieving personal relief.

In the affective arrangement of *hoitava itku*, the persons (1) present are the lamenter performing as themselves and the community referred to often as the witness, meaning someone hearing and seeing the lament and the lamenter's emotions. The witness does not need to be a person, for example, for Rounakari the witness of a lament can

be a nature object, like a tree. *Syndyzet* might also be part of the affective arrangement, but this aspect is not present for everyone, and lamenting can be seen detached from the Karelian beliefs and worldview. Topics (2) emphasise personal matters. The linguistic register (3) is freer than in the other analysed settings. The language is often Finnish, and the idea of using ‘one’s language of the heart’, as the lamenters call it, is appealing. Although this description is ambiguous, it is regarded as suitable by lamenters. The lament text needs to be comprehensible to the listeners; consequently, the conventional, rather obscure lament language with poetic devices is not employed as such. Fihlman and Kallonen describe lament forming a narrative arc with some kind of conclusion (4). The behaviour (5) follows the mode that is seen as traditional: a bent posture, a rocking movement, and the presence of emotionality. The lamenting cloth, *itkuliina*, is seen as a needed object (6). The space (7) is shared, private, or closed within the lament course group or lamenting circle. *Apeus* is seen as a strong emotional experience or as a more focused way of being. For some, it is the state of mind that lamenting requires; for others, it is a path to the relief that lamenting brings. In the ‘emotions’ category (8), there are genuine emotions, the cause of emotions, intensification of emotions, and *apeus* interpreted as a named emotion. Emotionality is not that much about the valence (positive/neutral/negative) but to feel touched by something; besides sadness, a lament can be about happiness. The interpretative frame (9) builds around wellness and therapeutic aspects, and the lament is thought of as something special that is open for anyone who needs emotional relief (see also Silvonen and Kallio 2023).

The emphasised features are the lamenter performing as themselves with their genuine feelings, the personal topic, and dealing with the cause of emotions by writing a lament. The narrative arc that has a conclusion and the witness of a lament are considered significant for the healing or caressing power; a coherent storyline with an optimistic, somehow bright ending and the lamenter’s experience of being seen and heard all guide the lamenter towards emotional relief (e.g., Kallonen and Äänellä itkijät ry 2019). The most important elements of *hoitava itku* are the personal topic, genuine emotions, and frame of therapeutic emotional self-expression, as well as the presence of a witness. The idea of witnessing is unique to this setting. However, it can be seen connected to the idea that lamentation is a ‘meta-affect’ (Urban 1988, 386); in addition to – or instead of – the explicit affect, sorrows and grief, it indicates a desire for sociability, as Greg Urban (1988) argues. This kind of desire is not as clearly present in other settings, as I see it.

Comparative Analyses of the Affective Arrangements

In the first comparative analysis of the affective arrangements, I examine the relations of the features considered as most important in each setting (Table 1). This analysis shows not only the connections and closeness but also the differences between these settings. While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century lamenting and the setting of reclaiming Karelian laments are most clearly connected with each other, neolamenting practices, lamenting as performing arts and healing lament, are distinctly different.

Table 1. Comparative analysis 1: the most important features of the affective arrangements of each analysed setting of lamentation.

	Karelian wedding laments	Karelian autobiographical laments	Contemporary Karelian activism, reclaiming laments	Performing arts and music, neolaments	Healing lament, neolaments
Persons	<i>Syndyzet</i>	<i>Syndyzet</i>	<i>Syndyzet</i>		
			(Karelian) Persons present		
				Audience	
					Witness
Topic		Personal			Personal
Register	Regulated by the genre	Regulated by the genre	Regulated by the genre		
				Traditional poetic devices	
Space	Ritual				
Interpretative frame	Ritual				
		Mythic			
			Cultural, ethnic identification		
				Music & performing arts	
					Wellness & therapy culture

The ritual and autobiographical lamentation and Karelian reclaiming practices both consider *syndyzet* and conventional register as the most important features of lamenting. However, the underlying ideology setting the interpretative frame differs. For ritual laments, it is the ritual discourse; for autobiographical laments, it is more about the mythic conceptions; and for reclaiming laments, in addition to the mythic conceptions, the most relevant frame is cultural and ethnic identification. In laments as performing arts and music, as well as *hoitava itku*, the most important features differ. The setting of folk music emphasises aspects of the performing arts: aesthetic values, and the presence and expectations of the audience. The importance of the specific poetic devices links this to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian lamenting as well as to the reclaiming practices. Yet, the basis of the importance is different: for these Karelian practices it is about sociocultural regulation, whereas in the setting of music and the performing arts, it is the aesthetics of the tradition. In the context of *hoitava itku*, personal emotions and the healing or caressing effect are most significant. The personal aspect connects this practice with the past Karelian autobiographical lamentation. In general, most of these features that are considered central for lamenting and its meanings and functions are also present and emphasised in lament research. This shows how strong the influence of research has been on the lamenting practices from the late twentieth century onwards.

The second comparative analysis focuses on the shared features of the affective arrangements (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative analysis 2: columns represent the analysed features of each category. The features of affective arrangements shared among the analysed practices are marked in bold. The features that are not shared but have been analysed appear in light grey.

1) PERSONS	2) TOPIC	3) REGISTER	4) NARRATIVE	5) BEHAVIOUR	6) OBJECTS	7) SPACE	8) MOTION	9) INTERPRETATIVE FRAME
Lamenter as herself	Personal	Regulated by the genre	Open-ended	Posture	<i>Itkuliina</i> (lamenting cloth)	Public & open	<i>Apeus</i>	Mythic
Lament's ego	Communal	in Karelian	With conclusion	Rocking movement	ritual objects	Private & closed	Genuine emotions	Ritual
Community: persons present	General	in Finnish		Emotionality		Shared	Cause of emotions	Music & performing arts
Community: syndyzet		'Language of one's heart'				Ritual	Intensification of emotions	Therapy culture
Community: audience		Trad. poetic devices				Stage performance	Imitative expression	Cultural & ethnic identification
Community: witness						<i>Apeus</i>		' Something special '

In all the settings analysed in this chapter, there is a lamenter and a community, yet the interpretation of the role of them differs. It is possible to include *syndyzet* as a community to these shared elements; however, it is not clearly shared with all the settings (as we see with *hoitava itku*), and at least the interpretation of what it means that the *syndyzet* are present is not shared.

While it is also shared that the laments follow a specific register of the genre, the devices vary between the settings discussed here. There are a narrative and a clear topic, yet opinions about the right kind of narrative pattern and topics differ. *Apeus* is also one of the shared features, but as already discussed, its interpretation varies. In these different settings *apeus* and *apeutuminen* are interpreted as low-spirited emotions, intensification of emotions, changed awareness, stepping into a more focused state of mind, or just a propitious atmosphere for lamentation.

The elements that these lamenting practices truly have in common include behaviour with a bent posture and rocking movement, the presence of emotionality, the *itkuliina* as a necessary object for the performance, and the idea of a shared space. The number of common features between all the settings is rather small, and they are so generic that they do not create a genuine connection and an actual feeling of sharedness. It is particularly noteworthy that none of the most important, emphasised elements are among the shared ones.

Shared Emotionality, Differing Values and Ideologies

I have shown that the emotions of a lament represent the feature that connects different performances, practices, and representations of laments in contemporary Finland and nineteenth and early twentieth-century Karelia. Nonetheless, the interpretations and the meanings of emotions vary along with the sociocultural and spatiotemporal

contexts as well as individual needs. Behind this variety are differing values and ideologies. Thus, on one hand, emotionality connects the differing lamenting practices and, on the other, it separates them.

In this chapter, I have charted the formation of affective arrangements of wedding and autobiographical laments in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian culture, in addition to lamenting in contemporary Finland in the context of reclaiming Karelian culture, contemporary folk music, and *hoitava itku*. Even though opinions vary individually and situationally within these practices, the analysed cases reflect general trends and show the diversity of this field of lamenting on practical and ideological levels. The cultural meanings and practices of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian lamenting are based on vernacular Orthodox and pre-Christian mythic conceptions. Reclaiming Karelian laments applies these conceptions to a contemporary secularised society. This practice is also connected to minority and Indigenous activism and post- and decolonial ideologies. Lamenting in the context of folk music and the performing arts has its background in liberal ideologies that emphasise artistic freedom and creativity, global solidarity, and multicultural sharing. *Hoitava itku* is also based on liberal ideas and the wellness and therapy culture that has been prevailing in Western societies for several decades now.

Within the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian and contemporary lamenting practices in Finland ideas about emotions are varied. Understandings vary in terms of suitable emotions, the conception of whose emotions laments are about, or what their purpose is. Especially within neolamenting (performing arts and *hoitava itku*), emotions are not necessarily so much about grief as about feeling touched by something or even feeling and showing gratitude, happiness, and empathy. These are new interpretations compared to the lamenting in Karelia at the turn of the twentieth century. Even though there is nuanced caring warmth and love in these Karelian laments, the overpowering emotional content is that of being torn up by grief. These laments are primarily ritual communication and speaking to the otherworld, and the collective aspects and ritual functions of emotionality are emphasised. Furthermore, the performer's personal emotions and experiences are not at the core, even though they are present and important in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Karelian laments. On the contrary, especially in *hoitava itku*, individual emotions have become the centre and the starting point for lamentation. For some, the most important element of the laments' emotions is the genuine emotion, authentic inner feeling, whereas for others, the affective expression and the conveyance of the emotions are more relevant than the lamenter's personal feelings, and yet for others emotionality is an important expressive modality in the ritual tradition.

This comparative study reveals that the contemporary field of laments in Finland is characterised by divergent interpretations of lamenting and its purpose – whether it is about connecting with *syndyzet*, releasing emotional burdens, creating aesthetic experiences, or something else. The diverging views reflect broader ideological and cultural differences that shape each practice. I have shown that the central features in each of the analysed lamenting practices are not shared and valued by the other practices. While emotions remain the shared thread linking the various lament practices, it is the contrasting understanding and values attached to emotions that generate tensions and disagreement within the field.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to all those who have generously dedicated their time to this study and shared their valuable insights on lamenting. Additionally, gratitude is extended to Karina Lukin and Eila Stepanova for their invaluable contribution to the improvement of this chapter through their insightful editorial comments, as well as to the anonymous referees for their constructive feedback. The individuals discussed in detail here have had the opportunity to comment on the manuscript. The study is funded by the Kone Foundation project 'Kyynelkanavat: Laments in contemporary Finland' (2021–2025), and the Research Department of the Finnish Literature Society has provided me with a supportive working environment.

References

Sources

Interviews and personal communication

- Fihlman, Pirkko. 2022. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 8 December 2022.*
Haltia-Holmberg, Mirva. 2023a. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 13 January 2023.*
— 2023b. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 12 May 2023.*
— 2025. Personal communication, a written comment on the manuscript via email, 2 June 2025.
Kallonen, Emilia. 2022. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 11 November 2022.*
— 2025. Personal communication, a written comment on the manuscript via email, 1 June 2025.
Kuittinen, Emmi. 2022. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 16 September 2022.*
— 2023. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 12 May 2023.*
Rounakari, Tuomas. 2023. Ethnographic interview with Viliina Silvonen, 16 February 2023.*
— 2025. Personal communication, a written comment on the manuscript via email, 24 and 25 May 2025.

*Ethnographic interviews will be archived at the archives of Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki, Finland.

Panel discussions and events

- Kalevala Society. 2022. ‘Karjalainen itkuvirsiperinne ja sen moninaiset muodot nyky-Suomessa.’ Panel discussion. Joensuu, streamed, 20.5.2022.
Kyynekanavat. 2021. An event combining art and research. Ilomantsi, 17–19 July 2021.
— 2022. An event combining art and research. Ilomantsi and Joensuu, 17–19 July 2022.
— 2023a. Laments lost or alive and well. International Conference of the Lament Tradition. Helsinki, 15–17 May 2023.
— 2023b. Laments and laments in contemporary Finland. The interrelation of Karelian and Finnish cultures and the interpretations of laments. Panel discussion in Laments lost or alive and well. International Conference of the Lament Tradition. Helsinki, 17 May 2023.

Laments and music albums

- Selection of archival lament recordings from The Tape Archive of the Finnish Language at The Institute for the Languages of Finland and Tampere University Culture and Research Archive available on the webpages of the Karelian language revival project. Accessed May 19, 2025. <https://blogs.uef.fi/karjalanelvytyts/itkuvirsinauhoitteet-arkistoista/>
Muuttujalindu 2022. Itkunaiga – Poem song about the Karelian lamenting tradition. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Whn1Bxmn0f0>

- Kuittinen, Emmi. 2020a. Emmi Kuittinen: Itku koronahuolista. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XQmb8qM7Cs>
- 2020b. Emmi Kuittinen and Ikuisen ikävän orkesteri: *Itken ja laulan* [music album, CD, also available as an digital album]. Kaustinen: Kansanmusiikki-instituutti.

Internet sources

- Kallonen, Emilia and Äänellä itkijä ry 2019. "Äänellä itku on sielun sivistystä". Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://itkuvirsi.net/onewebmedia/%C3%84%C3%A4nell%C3%A4itku.on.sielun.sivistyst%C3%A4..pdf>

Literature

- Ahmed, Sara. (2004) 2018. *Tunteiden kulttuuripolitiikka*. [Cultural Politics of Emotion]. Translated by Elina Halttunen-Riikonen. Tampere: niin&näin.
- Bauman, Richard. (1975) 1984. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press.
- Bithell, Caroline, and Hill, Juniper, eds. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Briggs Charles L. 1988. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bronner, Simon J. 2019. *The Practice of Folklore: Essays toward a Theory of Tradition*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. <https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496822628.001.0001>
- Fenigsen, Janina, and James M. Wilce. 2012. "Authenticities: A Semiotic Exploration." *Semiotic Inquiry* 32(1–3): 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027774ar>
- Foley, John Miles. 1995. *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Freeden, Michael. 2003. *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192802811.001.0001>
- Gal, Susan, and Judith T. Irvine. 2019. *Signs of Difference. Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108649209>
- Grünthal, Riho. 2020. "The Spread Zones and Contacts of Medieval Finnic in the Northeastern Baltic Sea Area: Implications for the Rate of Language Change." *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 6(2): 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsl-2019-0029>
- Haapoja, Heidi. 2017. *Ennen saatuja sanoja: Menneisyys, nykyisyys ja kalevalamittainen runolaulu nykykansanmusiikin kentällä*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki and Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology. Accessed February 11, 2022. <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/172662>
- Hill, Juniper. 2009. "The Influence of Conservatory Folk Music Programs: The Sibelius Academy in Comparative Context." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18(2): 205–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411910903141882>
- Honko, Lauri. 1974. "Balto-Finnic Lament Poetry." In *Finnish Folkloristics I*, edited by Pentti Leino with Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Urpo Vento, 9–61. *Studia Fennica* 17. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Hytönen-Ng, Elina. 2023. "Miulla on vahva perintö Karjalasta." Nykyitkijöiden Suhde Karjalaisuuteen Suomessa. *Musiikki* 53(4): 56–86. <https://doi.org/10.51816/musiikki.142334>
- Hytönen-Ng, Elina, and Emilia Kallonen. 2023. "Lament is Like a Safe Lap": Lamenting Circle's Meaning for the Participants. *GRIEF: Sonic Expressions of Loss, Pain, and Sadness. Special issue of Seismograf Peer*. <https://doi.org/10.48233/SEISMOGRAF2906>
- Illouz, Eva. 2008. *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520941311>
- Konkka, Unelma. 1985. *Ikuinen ikävä: Karjalaiset riitti-itkut*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Nenola-Kallio, Aili. 1982. *Studies in Ingrian Laments*. FF Communications 234. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

- Nenola, Aili. 2002. *Inkerin itkuvirret. Ingrian Laments*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Scheer, Monique. 2012. "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)?": A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion." *History and Theory* 51(2): 193–220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2012.00621.x>
- Silvonen, Viliina. 2020. "Apeus välittyvänä, kuunneltuna ja koettuna: Affektiiviset kehät ja itkuvirsien tunteiden ilmeneminen arkistoaänitteillä." *Elore* 27(2): 62–90. <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.97359>
- 2022a. *Apeus arkistoaänitteillä: Äänellä itkeminen performanssina ja affektiivisena käytäntönä Aunuksen Karjalassa*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki. Accessed February 11, 2022. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-7818-3>
- 2022b. "Formulaic Expression in Olonets Karelian Laments: Textual and Musical Structures of the Composition of Non-Metrical Oral Poetry." In *Weathered Words: Formulaic Language and Verbal Art*, edited by Frog and William Lamb, 363–384. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Forthcoming. "Genre, Authenticity, and Changing Tradition: Traditional Karelian Laments and Diversity of Lamenting in Contemporary Finland." In *Song Genres in Social and Cultural Contexts*, edited by Venla Sykäri and Kati Kallio. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Kati Kallio. 2023. "Tradition and ownership: Disputes about Karelian laments in Finland." *Appropriation as a Perspective and Topic in the Study of Religion and Spirituality*, edited by Linda Annunen and Terhi Utriainen. Special issue of *Approaching Religion* 13(3): 40–59. <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.131229>
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Emmi Kuittinen. 2022. "Mielikuvien, ruumiillisuuden ja perinteen kohtaamispaikissa." *Elore* 29(2): 81–102. <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.121298>
- 2023. "Creating grief and lamenting on stage." *GRIEF: Sonic Expressions of Loss, Pain, and Sadness*, edited by Meri Kytö and Sanne Krogh Groth. Special issue, *Seismograf Peer*. <https://doi.org/10.48233/SEISMOGRAF2906>
- 2024. "Collaboration between an Artist and a Researcher in the Field of Laments in Finland." In *Joint Knowledge Production and Collaboration in Research*, edited by Kendra Stepputat and Felix Morgenstern, 57–77. Graz Studies in Ethnomusicology 29. Graz: Institute for Ethnomusicology University of Music and Performing Arts Graz.
- Silvonen, Viliina, and Eila Stepanova. 2020. "Language, Music and Emotion in Lament Poetry: The Embodiment and Performativity of Emotions in Karelian Laments." In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Emotion*, edited by Sonya Pritzker, Janina Fenigsen, and James M. Wilce, 203–222. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855093-12>
- Slaby, Jan. 2019. "Affective Arrangements." In *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, edited by Jan Slaby, and Christian von Scheve, 109–118. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351039260-9>
- Stepanova, Eila. 2012. "Mythic elements of Karelian laments: the case of syndzyet and spuassuzet." In *Mythic Discourses: Studies in Uralic Traditions*, edited by Frog, Anna-Leena Siikala, and Eila Stepanova, 257–287. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- 2014. *Seesjärveläisten itkijöiden rekisterit: Tutkimus äänellä itkemisen käytänteistä, teemoista ja käsitteistä*. Helsinki: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura.
- 2015. "The Register of Karelian Lamenters." In *Register of Communication*, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, 258–274. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvvgx2qk.18>
- 2020. "Karelian Cultural Heritage in Finland's Folklife Sphere." *Western folklore* 79(4): 377–399.
- Tarkka, Lotte, Eila Stepanova, and Heidi Haapoja-Mäkelä. 2018. "The Kalevala's Languages: rReceptions, Myths, and Ideologies." *Journal of Finnish Studies* 21(1 & 2): 15–45. <https://doi.org/10.5406/28315081.21.1.2.02>
- Tenhunen, Anna-Liisa. 2006. *Itkuvirren kolme elämää*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Urban, Greg. 1988. "Ritual Wailing in Amerindian Brazil." *American Anthropologist* 90: 382–400. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1988.90.2.02a00090>

- Utriainen, Terhi. 2017. "Healing Enchantment. How Does Angel Healing Work?" In *Spirit & Mind: Mental Health at the Intersection of Religion and Psychiatry*, edited by Helene Basu, Roland Littlewood, and Arne S. Steinforth, 253–273. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Wetherell, Margaret. 2012. *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*. Los Angeles and London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250945>
- Wilce, James M. 2011. "Sacred Psychotherapy in the 'Age of Authenticity': Healing and Cultural Revivalism in Contemporary Finland." *Religions* 2(4): 566–589. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel2040566>
- 2017. "Tradition, Emotion, Healing and the Sacred: Revivalist Lamenting in Finland in Relation to Three Authenticities." In *Spirit & Mind: Mental Health at the Intersection of Religion and Psychiatry*, edited by Helene Basu, Roland Littlewood, and Arne S. Steinforth, 227–252. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Lamenting Through Time

Unravelling the Metacultural Evolution of Irish Mourning

LARISSA MULDER

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0236-601X>

Performed acts of remembering opposed the imagined horror of forgetting. They simultaneously renew and potentially amplify both the sociability and solidarity forged by participation, and the emotional exhaustion, enmity, and antipathy forged by contemplating loss. (Feld and Fox 1994, 40.)

Steven Feld and Aaron Fox describe lament with the above quote as they consider the musical, linguistic, and anthropological elements of lament as a genre. Their article, 'Music and Language', looks broadly at similarities between speech and song, and in doing so presents an overview on the literature and theories around the global lament. The quote above highlights the cultural and social significance of communal mourning; lamentations performatively embody and express sociocultural issues and connect to larger discourses on the gendered labour of mourning. This understanding of lament as a performative and communal tradition naturally extends to its role in shaping cultural memory.

In Ireland, lament functions as a metaculture of memory where participation is key to sustaining tradition. As Greg Urban (2001, 2) defines it, culture is 'socially learned and transmitted'. Though often intangible, culture is embedded into material objects that facilitate its survival across time and space. The transformation of lament from ritual to song exemplifies this process as oral traditions shift through replication, reinterpretation, and reinvention.

This chapter is an overview of Irish lament's history and its movement across time. Many Irish scholars including Jenny Butler (2008), Patricia Lysaght (1997), and Narelle McCoy (2007; 2009) discuss the historical practice of lament in Ireland, but there is little analysis considering how lament has adapted and been sustained within Irish communities over time. Urban describes metaculture as simply 'culture about culture' (2001, 3), the study of the discourse and judgements of both emic and etic observers as they evaluate the similarities and differences between a newly transmitted object and tradition.

Genres are not fixed categories, but fluid frameworks shaped by social practice, interpretation, and communicative context. Finnish folklorist Lotte Tarkka (2017) similarly describes oral poetic traditions as evolving through intertextual dialogue, where past performances influence contemporary expressions. This perspective helps contextualise Irish lament's transformation – not as a disappearance but as a

reconfiguration through changing performance contexts and social reception. As linguistic anthropologist William Hanks notes, genres remain ‘open-ended and only partially specified’, allowing them to be continuously reinterpreted (1987, 688). His chapter examines the transformation of Irish lament from its historical roots as a mourning ritual to its recontextualisation as a musical genre in response to social and political upheaval. I explore how factors such as Catholic Church suppression, famine-induced migration, and globalisation have shaped lament’s adaptation, culminating in its revival by contemporary artists. Through archival research, scholarly analyses, and personal interviews, I argue that while lament has evolved, it remains a vital form of cultural expression rather than a lost tradition.

This study engages with scholars such as Oona Frawley (2011), Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (1992; 2003), James M. Wilce (2009), and Greg Urban (2001) to explore three key avenues: memory studies, genre theory, and cultural adaptation. Frawley’s edited volume discusses memory studies and the significance of collective memory as a representation of the past in the present. The endurance of keening in Irish communities is largely due to the preservation of its memory despite historical oppression. Remembering is made more tangible through the movement of lament from sacred ritual into musical space. Wilce discusses ‘that the sharing of memories requires a shared genre – and not just any genre, but one imbued with “mystical power,” a genre that by its very nature “links the living and the dead”’ (2009, 7). Urban (2001) and Bauman and Briggs (1992, 147) build upon the idea of genre studies by noting how genre provides a powerful means of shaping oral traditions into bounded texts that allows for a tradition to move flexibly through time and space. The orienting framework of genre studies shows the deritualisation and recontextualisation of traditional practices of lament. While the significance of memory and genre studies is considered throughout my analysis on lament in Ireland, it becomes more poignant when considered on a global scale and I conclude my analysis with this broader consideration.

This chapter relies upon a variety of terms to discuss the performance of grief and its movement from ritual to secular spaces. *Caoineadh* – keening – is used to refer to the traditional ritual of Irish mourning while ‘lament’ refers more broadly to expressions of grief in any context. Songs of lament are structured, lyrical compositions that convey sorrow but may not always be tied to ritual contexts and *sean-nós* (old style), is a specific style of unaccompanied Irish singing that, while distinct from keening, shares stylistic and emotional qualities with lament traditions. Not all songs of lament are in the *sean-nós* style and likewise not all *sean-nós* is lament. I argue that the intersection of these musical practices – *sean-nós* songs of lament – is a pivotal space for the recontextualisation of keening that more intentionally represents the traditional ritual.

Lament’s Historical Tradition

Keening is a type of lament involving wailing or screeching in long, connected tones to weep for the deceased and has been an important ritual of the Irish wake. Derived from the Irish word *caoin* (‘to cry’), the keen was a eulogy to highlight the virtues of the deceased and mourn their loss, punctuated by intense wails. Much of what is known about keening comes from twentieth-century, first-hand accounts recorded in the National Folklore Collection archives in Dublin. These consist of interviews of elderly

individuals who recalled hearing women keen at funerals during their youth. These oral histories provide invaluable insights into the performance and context of the tradition. Church documentation and folklore manuscripts from as early as the eleventh century also provide some descriptions of keening women and traditional funerary customs. Drawing from both primary and secondary sources spanning centuries, modern scholars have reconstructed narratives of the funeral wake and the sounds of lamentation that once accompanied it.

Irish communities situated both their funeral practices and ideas of death in the domestic domain, centring many of the responsibilities and methods for preparing the deceased on the woman of the house (Butler 2008, 109). Because the body was prepared and displayed in the home and visitors were hosted for vigil-related festivities, these practices became highly gendered. This association between women and death rituals is further reflected in Irish mythology through figures like the goddess Brigid and the *bean sídhe* (banshee). Brigid is described as a triple goddess – a deity archetype with three distinct aspects, often the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. Brigid's forms are linked to fertility, healing, and smithcraft and she is believed to have shaped the idea of a spiritual realm where a maternal figure re-absorbs the soul into her womb for rebirth (McCoy 2009). She was also believed to be the first woman to keen the loss of her son, shaping the tradition of women as primary mourners in keening rituals. Noel Kissane's extensive book on Brigid notes that during the Age of Conversion in the fifth century, Irish society went through a transition from paganism to Christianity that included the Christianisation of the goddess, though she continued to be venerated now in the guise of a saint (2017, 86). The saint retained many of the miracles and stories associated with the pagan goddess but now they were framed as divinely enacted. Although her transformation from goddess to saint was part of the Church's broader effort to replace pagan practices, her Christianisation was more seamless than other elements, allowing her to remain a prominent figure in Irish culture.

Brigid is said to have influenced the mythology surrounding the banshee – a wailing woman with messy hair and torn clothes whose cry was said to be an omen of death within the community. While the banshee would keen to foretell death for the community, the mortal keener was instead lamenting the loss of the person after they had passed. This distinction is viewed cyclically as 'the supernatural female symbolically cries death into the community, the banshee's warning screech an omen of imminent death of a community member, while the human female's cry or dirge symbolically cries death out of the community again' (Butler 2008, 116; see Lysaght 1997 and Ó Cruailaoich 2003). Musicologist Narelle McCoy (2009, 211) describes the keening woman as embodying a state of 'divine madness', occupying a liminal space essential for guiding souls to the otherworld. Though often perceived by audiences as mad with grief – tearing their clothes and pulling their hair – keeners were deeply respected for their profound spirituality. Through wailing and movement, the keener provided the collective with an embodied expression of sorrow, leading the mourning. As a goddess mother laments for her lost son, the mortal mother laments for the lost life within the community.

There is little recorded evidence of traditional keening, largely because of a taboo of recording during a funeral but also because of dwindling numbers of performers when audio equipment was developed. The rarity of recorded keening is also partly due to the decline of the practice coinciding with the development of recording technology.

This shift was further fuelled by religious and social pressures, which transformed traditional lament into more structured expressions of grief.

However, in 1957 Sidney Robertson Cowell produced a collection of field recordings called *Songs of Aran*. One of these is a song entitled ‘Caoineadh na Marbh’ (Keening the Dead) by an anonymous Aran singer (Cowell 1957). Interestingly, this recording of keening has been documented in various archives under different names, leading to some confusion about the actual number of available recordings. The only other audio I have encountered is from Phyllida Anam-Áire, recorded during an interview by Maeve Gavin in 2017. However, this recording is presented within a narrative describing keening, followed by an example (Gavin 2017).

The decline of keening in Ireland was driven by a combination of religious, social, and historical pressures. As early as the sixteenth century, church ordinances explicitly condemned keening, with some rulings even threatening excommunication for those who practiced it. The Catholic Church viewed it as excessive, disruptive, and tied to pre-Christian customs, advocating instead for controlled, church-sanctioned mourning. Over time, this suppression contributed to the shift from ritualised lament to structured musical expressions of grief.

The Great Famine (1845–1852) further accelerated the disappearance of traditional funeral practices. As Niamh Ann Kelly notes in *Ultimate Witnesses* (2017), the sheer scale of death meant that people could not maintain funerals, keening, or other mourning rites, leading to their decline. Additionally, colonial policies, modernisation, and mass emigration altered Irish cultural practices. British rule imposed linguistic and social shifts that weakened Irish oral traditions and labelled traditional practices like keening as belonging to the poor. These factors together led to its decline and resulting scholarship to analyse it as a historical, static tradition.

Mourning to Music

So, is this the end? Did keening die away due to the assimilation of Irish tradition into Christian culture and the failure of these practices to replicate and transmit themselves? Some scholars (Butler 2008; Lysaght 1997) write that this is the case, claiming the lament for the dead is itself dead. Yet traditions rarely end abruptly; they often persist in altered or recontextualised forms. As Tarkka (2017) emphasises, genres are not static but exist in a dialogue of references and cross-references to previous discourses. I argue, alongside McCoy (2009) and Bourke (1988; Bourke et al. 2002) that rather than disappearing, keening has engaged in a process of intergeneric translation, shifting from embodied ritual into musical expression all the while retaining its core expressive function. What some see as the death of lament is, instead, a transformation – a movement across genres that has ensured its survival in new contexts. The linguistic anthropologist James Wilce similarly calls us to,

jettison old ways of speaking about ‘cultures’ (as though they were bounded and stable) and inquire instead about the dynamic relationship between culture (processes, ideas, products) and *metaculture* (cultural forces that reflect on, and thus influence, cultural processes and products and their circulation) (Wilce 2009, x; emphasis in original).

The essence of the keen was transformed into a new cultural object to transmit itself as tradition: music. Part of this transformation across time resulted in a deritualisation and recontextualisation necessary for its continuation.

Keening, already recognised as an oral poetic genre, underwent recontextualisation as it moved into song traditions, retaining musical qualities and characteristics despite not being explicitly classified as music by scholars. The structure of keening had a ‘musical line marked by a characteristic intonational contour’ (McCoy 2007, 120) often in a free metre that allowed for more improvisation before ending on a choral cry or *gol* (Lysaght 1997). Another common textual feature was the use of ‘och’ or ‘ochone’ as exclamations of grief. These improvised oral lamentations of the nineteenth-century laments were recorded and published, highlighting the poetic and artistic characteristics. One of the more notable examples of this written form is Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonail’s *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (The Keen for Art O’Leary) published in 1773 and translated by Sean Ó Tuama in 1963. Tarkka (2017) describes this process as “intergeneric translation,” in which oral traditions shift from one expressive form to another while carrying their past meanings as an ‘echo’ or ‘fragrance’ of previous performances. As keening moved into musical traditions, it retained many of its defining vocal characteristics, including the free rhythm, extended melodic phrasing, and tonal ornamentation even as the ritual setting changed.

Typically, one woman would serve as the lead keener, structuring the process while other women would join in at appropriate moments in a call-and-response performance. Renowned Irish folklorist and collector Seán Ó Súilleabháin, in *Irish Wake Amusements* (1967), describes the structure of a traditional Irish keening ritual as a coordinated, communal performance. The lead mourner at the head of the body would begin the keening with an opening cry, followed by another mourner at the foot, echoing the phrase. Finally, the entire group of family and friends would join in a collective chorus at the end of each stanza, following the melody set by the lead keener, often either the mother or other female relative or a hired professional keener. This structured participation allowed for both personal expression and communal grief, reinforcing the social and ritual significance of keening. Through this musical layout, women were able to improvise lyrics appropriate to the deceased and create a repetitive structure to invite amateur participation. The lead keener would add embellishments while those present would interject with cries and wails of grief.

One of the ways in which keening became recontextualised as a musical genre is most prominently understood through *sean-nós*. While not a direct continuation of keening, this genre provides an important framework for understanding how keening practices influenced Irish musical traditions and adapted to new performance contexts. *Sean-nós*, a fairly newer term, translates to mean ‘old style’ and is used to describe unaccompanied songs in the Irish language. While the practice of traditional Irish singing predates recorded history in the country, the title of *sean-nós* was given to this style around the 1940s. When researching *sean-nós* singing, scholar and performer Julie Henigan (1991) notes how she encountered difficulty in obtaining a definition of the term. She comments that it is left to individual interpretation and that attempts to define it would reduce the genre to an oversimplification of what is really a complex subject (1991, 97). However, definitions can sometimes help clarify the terms and concepts used in relation to performance. For the sake of this paper, *sean-nós* will be used according to the definition most accepted by researchers, though it may not

encompass every aspect of the practice. Tomás Ó Canainn (1978, 49) defines *sean-nós* most simply as a 'rather complex way of singing in Gaelic [...] unaccompanied and has a highly ornamented melodic line.' Other notable characteristics include nasalisation, brief pauses initiated by glottal stops or glissandi, long extended phrases, and a tendency to breathe after a conjunction instead of at the end of a phrase (Williams and Ó Laoire 2011).

Of the various characteristics used to describe *sean-nós*, the two most consistent and important are rhythmic freedom (often in the form of *rubato*) and melodic ornamentation. While these elements can vary by region, ornamentation in *sean-nós* singing typically involves bending notes or deliberately straying from the pitch (Henigan 1991). In keening, the wail-like vocal quality prioritises emotional expression over pitch accuracy, a characteristic also reflected in *sean-nós* singing more so than the other styles and genres. Aurally, there are similarities in the tone quality and extended melodic lines present in both keening and *sean-nós*. Performances of songs like 'Lament of the Irish Mother' by Ruth Clinton or 'Keen for a Dead Child' by Kitty Gallagher feature notable nasalisation and a downward motion at the end of phrases that are reminiscent of the contour of the keening recorded by Cowell.

There are also textual connections between *sean-nós* songs of lament and the keening tradition. In her studies of early *sean-nós* and interview with a singer, Henigan described *sean-nós* not solely as a display of technical skill but also as a form of artistic expression that tells a story. One singer she interviewed comments that there is some sort of story attached to every song 'and you must put that story across in your singing' (Henigan 1991, 99). This practice of musical storytelling is closely tied to the function of the lamenter, who describes the deceased's beauty, bravery, and skills before transitioning from praise to grief and ultimately to acceptance and hope for the passing to the beyond. 'A Farewell to Patrick Sarsfield', 'Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire', and 'The Keening Song', feature the ochone often used in keens while songs such as 'Anach Cuain' and 'Amhrán Mhuínse' directly reference keening within their lyrics.

The transition from ritual to music is not a large step. Wilce (2009, 1) describes lament as tuneful, texted weeping, framing it as inherently musical. In Ireland, however, there has historically been a clear distinction between keening and songs of lament – the former being a ritual performance tied to a specific setting, the latter a structured musical genre of emotional expression. These distinctions were once useful for understanding how local communities sustained their traditions, but as Hanks (1987) argues, genres are not static categories; they emerge from and adapt to social practices over time. Keening was not always classified as music, but over time, music has recontextualised its function as the ritual tradition declined. Rather than viewing its decline as a loss, we can see it as part of a process of adaptation, where the social function of lament remains, even as its form is reinterpreted and repurposed in new social spaces.

While *sean-nós* did not evolve directly from keening, both share a social function as spaces for emotional processing and community engagement. Tarkka (2017) describes this as a 'dialogue of genres,' where different traditions interact and borrow from one another, creating spaces where past and present forms of expression coexist. Much like keens performed at wakes, *sean-nós* emphasises individual improvisation, long melodic lines, and deep emotional expression. This suggests that rather than being

wholly separate traditions, these practices are engaged in a continuous intertextual conversation, ensuring that lament remains a living, evolving tradition rather than a static relic of the past. Wilce (2009, 26) notes the commonality of how ‘all speech genres – even ritual genres – tend to slip out of their original settings, to be quoted, played with, or used in other settings for quite personal, non-ritual purposes’. Women who were no longer permitted to keene could still sing; they sang in remembrance of the dead and of the tradition itself. This recontextualisation of lament within musical spheres highlights the lament genre as a site of cultural negotiation, linking past and present, ritual and artistic performance, in an evolving continuum.

The Emigrant’s Lament

Sean-nós songs allowed for the cultural object of lament to continue its presence in Irish communities. This was crucial to the survival of the tradition as it would see another reimagining during the mid-1800s. Keening regained prominence during periods of emigration, as the lament shifted from mourning physical death to expressing the sorrow of separation felt by those forced by circumstance to leave their country (McCoy 2009). While emigration from Ireland has happened at many different points in time, this research is specifically looking at emigration in response to the Great Famine between 1845 to around 1855. Due to starvation, disease, and emigration, the population fell by thirty per cent in that decade, with twenty to twenty-six per cent of the loss to emigration. Of those who left Ireland between 1846 and 1921, around five million – or approximately eighty-five per cent of the emigrants – went to the United States (Brophy 2010, 278).

Because of this, American immigration and Irish depopulation became a general part of communal consciousness and were ritualised most notably in what became called the ‘American Wake’ (Brophy 2010, 278). Cross-culturally, the dead are often described through the language of journeys. Since those who left Ireland were only rarely seen again, songs of emigration and farewell practices adopted the practice of lament (Porter 2013, 15). The term ‘American Wake’ was coined to refer to a ritual farewell gathering held on the night before the emigrant’s departure. These farewell gatherings primarily happened between 1830 and 1920, when emigration to the United States from Ireland was at its peak.

While overall descriptions of American Wakes are relatively similar between different scholars and accounts, it should be noted that there is great ambiguity surrounding the practice of keening at these events. Some scholars (Brophy 2010; McCann 2017) reference how women specifically keened emigrants’ departures at them to articulate and ritualise the sadness of such partings. Other scholars argue that women would not have keened during American Wakes as corpses were needed to be present for keening. Joyce, for example, claims that, instead, representations or modifications of the keene were the only performances at these wakes (2021). This chapter does not seek to determine definitively whether keening or simply a representation was performed at American Wakes. Regardless of the historical certainty surrounding the practice, the association between emigration and mourning shaped how communities expressed loss. The cultural object may have been modified, but it would have been recognisable and relevant to the heritage it was carrying with it.

The concept of lament in other countries has often extended beyond physical death, serving to express the collective trauma of the community in response to various types of loss. Similarities in context, structure, and emotion between the American Wake ceremonies, the already-established *sean-nós*, and the structure of the keen meant that ‘songs began to become more commonplace as an accessible expression of grief at American Wakes’ (McCann 2017, 76). As keening declined in the nineteenth century, its elements – such as internal rhyme, narrative, and emotive language – were incorporated into emigration songs. With the shift from the Irish language to English, these songs borrowed phrases and stylistic features from the keen, including Irish and Anglo-Irish terms like ‘acushla’ (Irish: *a chuisle* – ‘my darling’) and ‘mavourneen’ (Irish: *mo mhuirín* – ‘my beloved’) as well as the previously mentioned ochone. Over time, songs replaced keening as a more accessible form of mourning, particularly at American Wakes where lament songs expanded beyond eulogising the dead to express the grief of emigration. This layering of past poetic forms onto new cultural expressions mirrors what Tarkka (2017) calls the echo of previous performances, where motifs and structures retain traces of their earlier contexts even as they are repurposed for different social realities. Other links between keening and emigration ballads included the repetitive, intertextual nature of each form, incorporation of farewells to family, and the use of form as means of ‘leave-taking from the beloved native land’ (McCann 2017, 76). Many emigration songs focused on the loneliness parents felt without their children as well as other familial themes such as mothers grieving and the felt sense of abandonment. Songs such as ‘A Stór Mo Chroí’ and ‘Leaving Dear Old Ireland (Three Leaves of Shamrock)’ provide textual examples of these narratives.

Modern ‘Saviour’, Modern Death

Beyond the reintroduction of keening in American Wakes, there is a lack of research around the question of where the cultural object moved to next. The gendered tradition of oral lament has not been destroyed during the time from then to now, and more work needs to be done to tease out the remnants of the practice in Ireland and abroad, though this lies outside the scope of this chapter. The next notable impact of lament practices appears in the twenty-first century with contemporary artists. Urban (2001) discusses how the theory of the motion of culture is crucially shaped by metacultural understanding and the preservation of cultural self-awareness across generations. There are two types of metacultural movement in Urban’s descriptions: one of tradition, and one of newness.

A metaculture of tradition values the replication of the cultural objects themselves – the transmission of the whole elements with valued reproducers being those who have mastered the elements and demonstrated their ability to recreate them, thereby contributing to their passage through time. In contrast, a metaculture of newness values cultural objects that are not simply replicas of ones that have come before them but instead are ‘new’ in important ways. (Urban 2001, 108.)

The movement of the cultural object is transmitted through either more direct replication of the original or through an informed reproduction within a new context.

Sociologist Barbara Misztal, writing with Oona Frawley (2011), notes the recent interest in memory and the effort to uncover cultural roots that help bind communities and identities together. For Misztal, ‘collective memory, understood as memory shared by a group, is the *representation* of the past in the present’ (2011, 5; emphasis in original). It is therefore commonly shared and collectively commemorated. Early Irish lament was partially a collective memory of the deceased amongst mourners. *Sean-nós* songs of lament serve a dual role of commemorating the dead and being a metacultural commemoration of early traditions. Collective memory as a repository of tradition is unbounded and often enacted as performance. Frawley (2011) refers to memory as an imaginative reconstruction of an original, based on collective commemorations and constructed identities.

Christopher Smith, musician and Irish researcher, in his article ‘Reclaiming the Commons’, focuses on ideas of ‘conflict between commodification and community in the practice of handling traditional music’ (Smith 2006, 9). He calls for scholars to be more active in the community through a recovery of the common resources – agrarian, intellectual, and vernacular (2006, 10). Smith asserts that if we do not recover these – that is, if we do not regain the personal, local, and communal way of sharing or being – then the connected world will keep slipping away. Smith looks at how processes of making art can be an act of resistance to the models of commodification of mass culture and presents various arguments to support his claims. Two artists I have worked with, Alanna O’Kelly and Ceara Conway, are reflective of both a metaculture of tradition and of newness, and demonstrate what Urban, Frawley, and Smith argue about representation and reclamation. O’Kelly and Conway have both leveraged their art to reclaim the common elements of keening, communal expressions of grief, and of community-driven support and activism.

Alanna O’Kelly is an Irish visual artist who focuses on the relationship between people, their natural environment, and the construction of memory within Irish culture. Although primarily a visual artist, she became interested in exploring the power of the voice to facilitate connections between people and land. O’Kelly is often credited as being one of the first contemporary artists to reintroduce the practice of keening in sonic spaces. Throughout her works, she has recovered the practice of keening as a strategy to remember and overcome the colonial and patriarchal oppression that denied keening, its documentation, and other cultural practices to Irish women.

During our interview, O’Kelly mentioned her first interaction with keening during the protests at Greenham Commons women’s peace camp in Berkshire, England in the early 1980s. Greenham Commons was being used by British and American governments to hold nuclear weapons and cruise missiles. To protest the wars and reclaim what was once a fruitful communal space, between 30,000 and 50,000 women gathered around the base and made sounds of lament every hour on the hour. One of O’Kelly’s earliest works is titled *Chant Down Greenham* (1984) and is an embodied performance of protest to fuse grief and anger from silenced cultural memories and spaces. This work utilises cries and silences, operating as breaths and silenced voices, taking inspiration not only from Irish keening but also Inuit throat singing. In her early work, she began to discover her own powerful voice of lament. However, she was careful to note that the sounds she creates are not traditional keens, but rather her own personal laments and a form of discovery, much like the early women may have experienced.

As she continued to explore the practice of keening, O’Kelly wanted to use the voice to express collective memory and bring to light topics and issues of dislocation, diaspora, and famine that she found many people were largely ignorant of during her time in England and Ireland. She feels that the keen, or what she refers to often as the ‘calling voice’, can serve to wake the world up and to be used to make a statement about memory, community, and loss (O’Kelly 2021). So, throughout her career O’Kelly has not only reclaimed a marginalised vocal sound by leveraging her performances to subvert repressive historical narratives but also has reinvented it as a culturally specific performance that remediates memories of Irish identities and traditions. Her careful study of the sounds of keening and the intent behind the use of her voice within these spaces is a remembrance of the cultural object through a metaculture of tradition.

The other artist I have had the pleasure of working with is Ceara Conway, an Irish contemporary vocalist and visual artist from the *Gaeltacht* region of Connemara in County Galway. She creates experiential performance works that utilise traditional and contemporary song, performance, and visual art to explore social issues including the ecological crisis, the diaspora, and feminist concerns. Her 2022 album, *CAOIN*, focuses specifically on lament blended with the traditional *sean-nós*. Working with producer Seán Mac Erlaine, cellist Kevin Murphy, fiddler Ultan O’Brien, and pianist Francesco Turrisi, Conway arranged nine songs exploring themes of longing and loss found in lullabies, laments, and love songs. This collection of *sean-nós* songs reimagines traditional grief through haunting melodies and heartfelt lyrics.

During our interview, Conway mentioned how grief is an emotion that has been present and held closely in her heart for much of her life. She has often felt drawn to incorporating and expressing these themes within her work. Her socially engaged project, *Making Visible* (2015), aimed to bring to light the difficulties asylum seekers experience in Ireland and to express their grief. Conway created ritual performances where each woman seeking asylum chose a lament and location for it to be performed. In this project, she was interested in remembering and reconnecting with the *bean caoineadh* (keening woman) whose role was to ask for help, support, and release for those in the community who do not have a voice themselves. Paralleling this traditional figure with the reality of asylum seekers’ silenced voices provided a powerful reclamation and reimagining of the use of the keen as advocacy and activism. Conway’s *Rebel Yell* (2017) featured similar sounds and themes of feminist activism through music and lament.

As themes of lament wove through her work, Conway realised that most of her projects were collaborative or socially engaged. She sought to create an album that felt truly her own, rooted in her cultural upbringing and passions. *CAOIN* was born out of a desire to produce a work to express the collective loss the world has struggled with through the pandemic as well as her personal grief. Conway chose *sean-nós* as the style for the album because of a belief that there is power in the voice as a conduit for such collective grief. These themes of vocality and lament were the foundations of traditional keening practices and have been revived within her work.

Conway leverages her position as an artist to pull these deeper emotions out of her audience, forcing them to confront their own vulnerability. In doing so, she acts within the role of the *bean caoineadh* in the modern context. She does not necessarily view her work as a direct representation of how historical keens likely sounded, however, as she believes it doesn’t need to be. She views her work in art as more of a revitalisation

or recontextualisation. Conway looks back to the suppressed tradition of keening for inspiration and creates art that is a reflection and celebration of those practices. The influence of keening reimagined into a new space of memory is an example of Urban's metaculture of newness – something new informed by something traditional.

While Conway's work offers a stylized, contemporary interpretation, other scholars and musicians have continued the tradition by attempting to replicate historical keening practices more closely. While I have not directly interacted with these artists, Phyllida Anam-Áire's and Mary McLaughlin's work with the online organisation *Weaving Remembrance* provides workshops on the history of keening and guided practices for finding one's own voice. Michelle Collins (2021) produced a collaborative art piece with the Marymount University Hospital and Hospice that worked with residents to create their own laments based around songs of significance to themselves, songs of lament, and a recording of a keen. Further research could be conducted to analyse the context and replication of keening in these spaces in comparison to historical practice, but some element of continuation of the traditional genre may still persist well into the twenty-first century.

Lament as Genre: A Broader Look

Today we can analyse this cultural object in space rather than time. The trajectory of Irish lament appears to have been shaped by a combination of location, performance characteristics, and new social and technological opportunities. To understand this evolution, it is essential to consider how tradition, genre, globalisation, and modernity shape cultural practices. Examining these frameworks within Irish history offers insight into how lament has changed over time and how it connects to comparable practices in other cultures.

It is widely documented that the tradition of lament is not unique to Irish culture, as is well established by the other chapters of the present book. Yoruba scholar Bade Ajuwon (1979, 272) refers to lament as a 'living folk tradition in several parts of the world' and Jane Bowers (1998, 136) provides an overview of how funeral laments have been found in almost all parts of the world including, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia, and the Americas. The embodiment and gendering of global lament practices are further connecting points in the structuring of discourses on lament. The Irish tradition refers to the liminality of women keeners as they embody the grief in a way that positions them between the spiritual and the earthly, but this is not unique to Ireland. Elizabeth Tolbert (1990) describes the most prominent role of the lamenter in Karelian communities – the older woman – as a mediator between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Margaret Alexiou (2002) details a similar structure within the Greek lament traditions and Kofi Agawu (1988) notes how the main goal of mourners of the Akpafu was extrapolation from the material world and speculation with the spiritual. Women weep; their words function as imperative speech acts with communicative power. This power, blended with the collective participation of those gathered, allows tradition to shift from immaterial to material through the embodied practice of memory.

Lament, in its various forms, has often been framed as a tradition in decline, a practice that once held a vital role in communal mourning but has since faded into memory.

This perception aligns with what folklorist Pertti Anttonen (2005) critiques as the modern construction of tradition, in which certain cultural practices are categorised as ‘disappearing’ precisely because they have been surpassed by something new. But traditions do not simply vanish; rather, they are continually reshaped and recontextualised within newer frameworks. If we move beyond the binary model of tradition versus modernity, we can recognise lament not as a lost ritual, but as an evolving genre that has been strategically adapted to new social and artistic spaces.

The fluidity of genre clarifies how both keening and *sean-nós* can be described under the category of lament as a cultural object within Irish communities. Often, dramatic and traumatic events lead to an instability of a cultural practice which is then transformed into a new-but-similar setting. Anttonen (2005) critiques the assumption that modernity erases tradition, arguing instead that tradition is continuously redefined as part of a comparative discourse – one that positions the modern against what it deems traditional. Applying this to Irish lament, we see that keening did not simply vanish but was reframed through new cultural and social lenses, particularly within musical forms like *sean-nós* and contemporary artistic practices.

John Tomlinson defines globalisation as the ‘rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterise modern social life’ (1999, 2). With its increase of the modern and the technical, globalisation means not just a movement away from one’s locality but also experiencing displacement that global modernity can bring to one’s home. Anttonen (2005) highlights that the construction of tradition is deeply tied to modernity’s process of comparison, where certain cultural elements are ‘discovered’ as non-modern at the very moment they are being transformed through modern discourse. In this light, the shifts in Irish lament must be understood not as losses but as cultural reconfigurations shaped by the conditions of modernity, migration, and shifting social structures. The idea of death and lament changed when emigration became the ritual; a language of calling to the dead had to be reshaped to understand separation as a form of familial death.

Aiding in this global movement was the rising desire for the modern, placed in opposition to the traditional. The rise of modernity is balanced by the decline of tradition – or rather, by the discursive construction of tradition as something that is in decline (Anttonen 2005). Modernity does not merely replace tradition but actively defines what is seen as ‘traditional’ by framing it as something that has been surpassed. As Anttonen points out, what disappears is not necessarily the tradition itself, but the perception of its relevance within a shifting cultural landscape. Modernity and ‘meta-cultures of tradition or of newness accelerate cultural objects into circulation [...] [T]oday flux is assumed, and it is stability for which we must account’ (Noyes 2009, 239). Instead of viewing keening as having been erased, we should recognise that its perceived disappearance is part of the process through which modernity constructs tradition as something belonging to the past.

I do not wish to delve too deeply into the fears that early scholars had of the disappearance of tradition or homogenisation because of modernity. However, thinking alongside scholars such as Pertti Anttonen (2005), Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2003), Dorothy Noyes (2009), Lotte Tarkka (2017), and John Tomlinson (1999) allow for a more nuanced understanding of tradition as something that is not lost but reconfigured. Oral traditions persist through a continuous process of intertextual

reference and adaptation, where older forms provide the foundation for new creative expressions. Rather than existing in opposition, tradition and innovation function in dialogue, ensuring that the cultural weight of lament endures even as its form evolves. My case study of Irish lament has shown that modernity and globalisation have had their hand in reshaping the tradition of keening. But the persistence and presence of *sean-nós* songs of lament showcase intertextuality and intergeneric qualities. Lament, rather than being a lost tradition, has been continuously adapted to its contemporary contexts, demonstrating the ongoing negotiation between cultural memory, artistic practice, and social change.

Our cultural object sits and waits for the next movement in its life. The traditional object of lament started as a gendered, embodied practice of communal grieving. Through its need for survival, we see it solidify from folk ritual into a genre of musical lament in face of church oppression. We then see it re-emerge in its traditional form, though slightly altered, to grieve the starvation and emigration of people. It travels abroad with them, in ways not yet researched in this project, but also sits and simmers on the Irish shores. It is then picked up, gently brushed off, and held with care by contemporary musicians seeking to make reparations for its trials by intentional imitation within these modern spaces. As we continue to seek answers for why we lament, why women lament, and how women lament today, I find it necessary to keep these lines of analysis open and connected to the multitude of traditions happening within the world. Only through interdisciplinary, intertextual, and intercultural study will the answers begin to be uncovered.

References

Sources

Music and Artwork

- Clinton, Ruth. "Lament of the Irish Mother." *A Collection of Songs in the Traditional & Sean-Nós Style*. Nyahh Records, 2024. Compact disc.
- Conway, Ceara. *CAOIN*. All songs traditional / copyright control. Arranged by Seán Mac Erlaine and Ceara Conway, March 30, 2022. Compact disc.
- *Rebel Yell*. Performance art. 2017. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.cearaconway.ie/rebel-yell>
- *Making Visible*. Performance art. 2015. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://www.cearaconway.ie/making-visible-2014>
- Cowell, Sidney Robertson. "Caoineadh na Marbh." *Songs of Aran*. Folkways Records, 1957. Vinyl LP.
- Gallagher, Kitty. "Keen for a Dead Child." *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music: Ireland*. Collected and edited by Alan Lomax. Columbia Masterworks, 1955. Vinyl LP.
- O'Kelly, Alanna. "One Breath," *Lament*. Real World Records, 1993. Compact disc.
- *Chant Down Greenham*. Performance art. Artwork and recording displayed at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1984. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://imma.ie/collection/chant-down-greenham/>

Interviews

- Anam-Áire, Phyllida. Interview by Maeve Gavin, Edinburgh 2017. "The Keening Tradition." *The Keening Wake*. Accessed June 18, 2025. <http://www.keeningwake.com/keening-tradition/>
- Conway, Ceara. Interview with Larissa Mulder, July 2022.
- Joyce, Sandra. Interview with Larissa Mulder, February 2021.
- O'Kelly, Alanna. Interview with Larissa Mulder, December 2021.

Workshops and Lectures

- Anam-Áire, Phyllida and Mary McLaughlin. 2024. "Keening: A Living Tradition – 8-Week Ritual Immersion Course." *Weaving Remembrance*, online course. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://weavingremembrance.org/keening/>
- Collins, Michelle. 2021. "A Journey through the Ritual of Lament & Caoineadh." Cork County Council's Library and Arts Service and Marymount University Hospital and Hospice, remote workshops. Accessed June 18, 2025. <https://hospicefoundation.ie/our-supports-services/ihf-in-the-community/arts-and-creativity/seed-grants/seed-grant-projects-2021/journey-through-the-ritual-of-lament-and-caoineadh/>

Literature

- Agawu, Kofi. 1988. "Music in the Funeral Traditions of the Akpafu." *Ethnomusicology* 32(1): 75–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/852226>
- Ajuwo, Bade. 1979. "Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition." Paper presented at the VII Congress for Folk Narrative Research, Edinburgh.
- Alexiou, Margaret. 2002. *The Ritual Lament in the Greek Tradition*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Anttonen, Pertti. 2005. *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 15. Finnish Literature Society. <https://doi.org/10.21435/sff.15>
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles Briggs. 2003. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486647>
- Bourke, Angela. 1988. "The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process." *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 4: 287–91.
- Bourke, Angela, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd, and Clair Wills, eds. 2002. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume IV: Irish Women's Writings and Traditions*. Cork University Press.
- Bowers, Jane. 1998. "Women's Lamenting Traditions Around the World: A Survey and Some Significant Questions." *Women and Music* 2: 125–46.
- Briggs, Charles, and Richard Bauman. 1992. "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2(2): 131–72. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1992.2.2.131>
- Brophy, Christina. 2010. *Keening Community: Mná Caointe, Women Death and Power in Ireland*. Boston College.
- Butler, Jenny. 2008. "Symbolic and Social Roles of Women in Death Ritual in Traditional Irish Society." In *Women, Pain, and Death: Rituals and Everyday Life on the Margins of Europe and Beyond*, edited by Evy Johanne Håland, 108–22. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Feld, Steven, and Aaron Fox. 1994. "Music and Language." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.23.100194.000325>
- Frawley, Oona. 2011. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Memory in an Irish Postcolonial Context." In *Memory Ireland Vol 1: History and Modernity*, edited by Oona Frawley, 18–34. Syracuse University Press.
- Hanks, William. 1987. "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice." *American Ethnologist* 14(4): 668–92. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1987.14.4.02a00050>
- Henigan, Julie. 1991. "Sean-Nós in Donegal: In Search of a Definitions." *Ulster Folklife* 37: 97–105.
- Kelly, Niamh Ann. 2017. *Ultimate Witnesses: The Visual Culture of Death, Burial, and Mourning in Famine Ireland*. Cork University Press.
- Kissane, Noel. 2017. *Saint Brigid of Kildare: Life, Legend, and Cult*. Open Air Publishing.
- Lysaght, Patricia. 1997. "Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp: The Lament for the Dead in Ireland." *Folklore* 108(1–2): 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1997.9715938>
- McCann, Christopher. 2017. *Singing Exile: Music in Irish Emigration Literature*. Master's thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle).
- McCoy, Narelle. 2007. "Echoes of the Banshee: The Changing Voice of Irish women" In *Music on the Edge: Selected Papers from the 2007 IASPM Australia/New Zealand Conference*, edited by Dan Bendrups. 120–4. International Association for the Study of Popular Music.
- 2009. "Madwoman, Banshee, Shaman: Gender, Changing Performance Contexts and the Irish Wake Ritual." In *Musical Islands: Exploring Connections Between Music, Place, and Research*, edited by Elizabeth Mackinlay, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, and Katelyn Barney, 207–19. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Misztal, Barbara. 2011. "Memory and History." In *Memory Ireland Vol 1: History and Modernity*, edited by Oona Frawley, 3–17. Syracuse University Press.
- Noyes, Dorothy. 2009. "Tradition: Three Traditions." *Journal of Folklore Research* 46(3): 233–68. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfr.2009.46.3.233>

- Ó Canainn, Tomás. 1978. *Traditional Music in Ireland*. Ossian Publishers.
- Ó Cualaoich, Gearóid. 2003. *The Book of the Cailleach: Stories of the Wise Woman Healer*. Cork University Press.
- Ó Súilleabháin, Seán. 1967. *Irish Wake Amusements*. Mercier Press.
- Ó Tuama, Seán (ed). 1963. *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*. An Clóchomhar Tta.
- Porter, Gerald. 2013. "Grief for the Living: Appropriating the Irish Lament for Songs of Emigration and Exile." *Humanities Research* 19(3): 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.22459/HR.XIX.03.2013.02>
- Smith, Christopher. 2006. "Reclaiming the Commons, One Tune at a Time." *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 10(4): 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2006.0074>
- Tarkka, Lotte. 2017. "The Field of Song and the Four-Legged Horse: On the Dialogue of Genres in Kalevala-Meter Poetry." In *Singers and Tales in the 21st Century: The Legacies of Milman Parry and Albert Lord*, edited by David F. Elmer and Peter McMurray. Special Issue, *Classics@14*. Center for Hellenic Studies: Harvard University. <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/classics14-tarkka/>
- Tolbert, Elizabeth. 1990. "Magico-Religious Power and Gender in the Karelian Lament." In *Music, Gender, and Culture*, edited by Marcia Herndon and Susanne Ziegler. 41–56. Florian Noetzel Verlag.
- Tomlinson, John. 1999. *Globalization and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- Urban, Greg. 2001. *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Wilce, James M. 2009. *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament*. Blackwell Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444306248>
- Williams, Seán, and Lillis Ó Laoire. 2011. *Bright Star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish Song-Man*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195321180.001.0001>

Authors

MADIS ARUKASK is Associate Professor of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu. His research focuses on the folk belief, songs, and epics of the Finnic peoples. Madis Arukask has written studies on the folklore of the Veps, Vote, Seto, and Estonians and has been conducting extensive fieldwork in northwest Russia for over twenty years.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7929-996X>

CHARLES L. BRIGGS is the Alan Dundes Distinguished Professor of Folklore and Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley and former Chair of the Graduate Folklore Program. His books include *The Wood Carvers of Córdoba, New Mexico*, *Learning How to Ask*, *Competence in Performance*, *Voices of Modernity* (with Richard Bauman), *Making Health Public* (with Daniel Hallin), *Stories in the Time of Cholera* and *Tell Me Why My Children Died* (both with Clara Mantini-Briggs), *Unlearning: Rethinking Poetics, Pandemics, and the Politics of Knowledge*, and *Incommunicable: Toward Communicative Justice in Health and Medicine*. He has received many awards and honours, including being elected in 2023 as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2023-3285>

FROG is Associate Professor of Folklore at the University of Helsinki, Associate Professor of History of Religions at Stockholm University, Editor-in-Chief of Folklore Fellows' Communications, and Chair of the Folklore Fellows' Executive Committee. He is currently a Core Fellow of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and the principal investigator of the Kone project Materialities, Verbal Art, Mythic Knowledge, and the Lived Environment (2021–2025). He has published approximately 100 scientific articles and twenty-five (mostly edited) scientific books.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5967-6281>

LARISSA MULDER is a scholar whose research bridges folklore, women's studies, and ethnomusicology. She examines the transnational evolution of musical practices, focusing on how Irish lament adapts amid modernisation and migration. Her dissertation research explores women's roles in performed lament, analysing gendered spaces in traditional and contemporary music. She is also developing a global database on women's

involvement in communal grieving and shared vocal markers across cultures. Mulder's past ethnographic research has explored musical adaptation in diverse settings. She has presented and published on Ecuadorian *pasillo* and its role in shaping national identity, using interviews with residents of Quito to examine how music reflects generational change. Through historical and contemporary analysis, her work highlights the resilience of musical traditions and the ways they mediate cultural memory.

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0236-601X>

VILIINA SILVONEN is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland and is a Research Fellow at the Finnish Literature Society's Research Department. Her research is situated at the intersection of folklore studies and ethnomusicology, covering topics from the emotions and affectivity of historical lament performances on archival audio tapes to contemporary adaptations of laments in Finland. Her interests also include postcolonial discourse and minority perspectives related to Karelian culture in Finland.

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7191-4956>

EILA STEPANOVA is a Finnish folklorist specialising in Karelian and more broadly in North Finnic lament poetry. She received her doctoral degree from the University of Helsinki in 2014. She is an expert on Karelian laments and in Karelian culture more generally, with a wide range of fieldwork experience. Stepanova is currently the Executive Director of the Karelian Cultural Society (*Karjalan Sivistyseura*).

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0704-6362>

ARJA TURUNEN is Senior Research Fellow of Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä. She defended her thesis in Ethnology in 2011 (University of Jyväskylä) and was awarded the Title of Docent (Associate Professor) in Ethnology in 2019 (University of Turku). Her main research topics include the history of the Finnish second-wave feminist movement, dress history, oral history, and the history of Finnish women's magazines.

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3589-5380>

HANNAH KAARINA YOKEN is an Academy of Finland Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research focuses on anti-nuclear protest, gender, and emotion in 1980s Finland. She is the principal investigator of an Emil Aaltonen Foundation funded project exploring the history of the publishing house Lehtimiehet oy. Yoken defended her doctoral thesis on transnational Nordic feminist activism at the University of Glasgow in 2020. Her research interests include gender history, media history, oral history, and the history of emotion.

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2331-6887>

AUŠRA ŽIČKIENĖ serves as a Leading Research Fellow at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. She defended her Ph.D. thesis 'Lithuanian Laments in the Context of Northeast European Lament Culture' in 2001. Her current interests include historical research on traditional music, singing as an activity and a process, the study of musical behaviour, and the role of songs and singing in the rituals of contemporary communities.

🔗 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4940-7835>

Abstract

Living Lament: Explorations in Shifting Ideologies

This edited volume opens new approaches to lament research by analysing the intersections between ideologies and lament traditions, providing advancements in methodologies and the knowledge of domains that emerge at this intersection.

In this book, laments are mainly discussed as a form of verbal art that conveys strong emotions, while ideology is regarded as broad and flexible, including not only formal systems but also more informal, unconscious models of thinking that shape people's approaches, interpretations, discussions, and practices of laments.

The book offers a multidisciplinary, multicultural view on laments, drawing from folklore studies, ethnomusicology, history, anthropology, and religious studies, covering regions from Northern Europe to indigenous cultures in Venezuela.

Charles L. Briggs discusses laments as an example of incommunicability. Frog clarifies the historical Scandinavian lament tradition. Madis Arukask, Aušra Žičkienė, Viliina Silvonen, and Larissa Mulder analyse the changing tradition and the new meanings of laments. Hannah Kaarina Yoken and Arja Turunen focus on laments as a tool in feminist protest.

The book shows how ideologies may valorise, elevate, subjugate, or erase laments, and that ideologies form the lens that exoticises or stigmatises laments, or that surrounds them with romantic nostalgia.

Index of Persons and Places

- Africa 24n, 151
Agawu, Kofi 151
Ajuwon, Bade 151
Akpafu 151
Alexiou, Margaret 151
Americas 15, 24, 151
Anam-Áire, Phyllida 144, 151
Anttonen, Pertti 8, 12, 152
Arukask, Madis 9, 12–13, 16–18
Aubrey, John 25, 37
Australia 100, 102, 151
- Barthes, Roland 85, 93
Basanavičius, Jonas, Jonas Basanavičius Pro-
Gymnasium 86, 92
Bauman, Richard 25, 142, 152
Bendix, Regina 25
Beresnevičius, Gintaras 86–87
Bergen 42, 44–45, 48, 55
Berkshire, England 149
Boisen, Frederik Engelhardt 49–50, 54
Bowers, Jane 151
Briggs, Charles L. 14–15, 17–18, 142, 152
Bronner, Simon J. 11, 85–86, 93, 118
Buskerud 48
Böckel, Otto 12, 45–47, 51
- Chávez, Hugo 32
Chonaiill, Eibhlín Dubh Ní 145
Clinton, Ruth 146
Clover, Carol J. 47
Collins, Michelle 151
Connemara Gaeltacht region 150
Conway, Ceara 149–151
County Galway 150
- Delta Amacuro 24, 27–28, 32, 35–36
Denmark 44, 45, 52–55, 57
Du Bois, W.E.B. 38
- Eagleton, Terry 63, 82
England 102, 149–150
Estonia 12, 16, 47, 51, 64–66, 69, 120, *see also*
Republic of Estonia
Europe 8, 15, 65, 102–103, 151, 159
- Fanon, Frantz 36, 38
Feigenbaum, Anna 100
Feld, Steven 23, 141
Fenigsen, Janina 23
Fihlman, Pikko 130–132
Finland 9, 12, 16, 18, 46, 99, 101–104, 106–107,
111–112, 117–121, 124, 126, 134–135
Foley, John Miles 62, 123
Fox, Aaron 141
Frawley, Oona 142, 149
Freud, Sigmund 22
Frog 14–15, 17–18
- Gal, Susan 117
Gavin, Maeve 144
Germany 45, 53
Giedrienė, Rūta 86
Gimbutienė, Marija (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė,
Marija) 86
Girardet, Raoul 85
Gómez, Norvelis 28, 32, 38
Gómez, Tirso 28, 32, 38
Greimas, Algirdas Julius 85
Grimm, Jacob 25, 38
Grimm, Wilhelm 25, 38
Gulf of Riga 51

- Hagberg, Louise 51–52
 Hagu, Paul 65–66, 76
 Halland 51–52, 55
 Haltia-Holmberg, Mirva 127–128
 Henigan, Julie 145–146
 Hill, Juniper 129
 Hodne, Bjarne 45, 48, 55
 Holkeri, Harri 195
 Honko, Lauri 9, 22–23, 26, 31, 36, 46, 76, 122, 124
 Hurt, Jakob 65
 Hymes, Dell 26, 29n

 Ingria 111
 Ireland 141–142, 144, 146–148, 150–151
 Irvine, Judith T. 117
 Ithaca 43

 Jasėnas, Justas 94
 Jolly, Margaretta 100
 Juška, Antanas 82–84, 86–87, 89

 Kallonen, Emilia 131–132
 Karelia 9, 70, 106, 118–121, 125, 129, 134, 135
 ceded Karelia 118–120
 Russian Karelia 9
 Kaškelevičienė, Aurelija 93
 Kavaliauskaitė, Jūratė 84
 Kelly, Niamh 144
 Kissane, Noel 143
 Konkka, Unelma 124
 Krader, Lawrence 85
 Kuittinen, Emmi 119, 128–130
 Kyyröne[n], Matrona 120

 Leganger, Hans 44, 48–50, 56
 Liorentaitė, Antanina 91
 Lithuania 18, 83, 86–87, 89n, 90–91, 94
 Locke, John 24–27, 36
 Loorits, Oskar 69–70
 Lotman, Yurij 69

 Mac Erlaine, Seán 150
 Macotera, Florencia 31–34, 37, 38
 Managhan, Tina 100–101
 Mangested 48
 Mantini-Briggs, Clara 27, 32, 34, 36, 38
 Mauss, Marcel 63
 McLaughlin, Mary 151
 Mediterranean Sea 43
 Middle East 151

 Misztal, Barbara 149
 Mitrune, Paraske 125
 Moraleda, Conrado 27, 38
 Moraleda, Enrique 38
 Moraleda, Librado 31
 Muaina 28, 30–32, 34, 38
 Mukoboina 27
 Mulder, Larissa 9, 17–18
 Mundal, Else 47
 Murphy, Kevin 150
 Muscovy 118
 Muuttujalindu 119, 127, *see also* Haltia-Holmberg, Mirva
 Mäkiselkä, Oksenja 111
 Mönkäre, Sinikka 107

 Narva 67
 Nenola, Aili 11, 23, 66, 111, 120, 124
 New Guinea 23
 Nordland 48
 North America 100, 151
 northwest Russia 120, 157
 Norway 44–51, 53–55, 57
 Novgorod Russia (Novgorod Republic) 64, 118
 Noyes, Dorothy 152

 Ó Canainn, Tomás 146
 Ó Súilleabháin, Seán 145
 O'Brien, Ultan 150
 O'Kelly, Alanna 149–150
 Olearius, Adam 67

 Paredes, Américo 25
 Patackas, Algirdas 87, 89
 Pekkala, Ahti 107
 Pekkanen, Matti 107
 Pietilä, Hilikka 100, 110, 111
 Pizarro, Dalvi 29, 31–33
 Pizarro, Mamerto 28–29, 31–33
 Pizarro, Melvi 29, 31–33
 Plattone[n], Matjoi 120
 Plioplienė, Eglė 89–90
 Pompeii 43
 Primiano, Leonard 63
 Pskov Province 64–65
 Puerto Ordaz 31
 Putinaitė, Neringa 84
 Pääkkönen, Anneli 101–102, 104–105, 107–112

- Racénaitė, Radvilė 94
Ramonaitė, Ainė 84
Rantanen, Lea 100–101, 103–105, 108
Razauskas, Dainius 87
Republic of Estonia 65–66
Robertson Cowell, Sidney 144
Røldal 55
Rounakari, Tuomas 131
Runö/Ruhnu 51
Russia 64, 65, 84, 118, 120
Russian Federation 64, 66
- Sadauskienė, Jurga 84
Sauka, Donatas 87
Setomaa 66, 69, 74, 77
Shange, Savannah 25
Silvonen, Viliina 9, 12, 16–18
Simankevičius, Viktoras 91
Skučaitė, Virginija 91
Slaby, Jan 118, 123
Slovakia 46
Småland 51, 55
Smith, Anthony D. 8
Smith, Christopher 149
Soviet Union 65, 66, 106, 118, 119
Spillers, Hortense 25
Stepanova, Eila 23, 44, 47, 124
Stumbrienė, Virginija 93
Suldal 55
Suominen, Ilkka 106
Sweden 44, 51, 53–55, 57, 118
- Tacitus 45
Tarkka, Lotte 141, 144–148, 152
Tarone[n], Irinja 120, 125
Telemark 48, 51, 55
Tenhunen, Anna-Liisa 9, 118
Terone[n], Tatjana 125
Tidström, Anders 51–52, 54–55
- Tolbert, Elizabeth 11, 151
Tomlinson, John 152
Torres, Elbia Rivas 34–35, 38
Trinkūnas, Jonas 88–89
Troels-Lund, Troels Frederik 45, 52–54
Trump, Donald 7
Tsarist Russia 84
Turrisi, Francesco 150
Turunen, Arja 14, 16–18
- United Kingdom 100, 108
United States 18, 25, 100, 102, 108, 147
Uppland archipelago 51–52, 54
Urban, Greg 26, 132, 141–142, 148–149
Urbancová, Hana 46n
- Valk, Ülo 62, 75
Vatican 63
Veliuona district 84
Venezuela 23–24, 28–31
Vilnius 92–93
Virolainen, Johannes 99
Volteris, Eduardas 86
Väisänen, Armas Otto 125
- Warao 22, 29, 33, 36–37
Welhaven, Johan Sebastian 42–50, 53–55, 57
Wilce, James M. 8, 23, 121, 121n3, 131, 142, 144, 146–147
Wolfram, Richard 46n, 48, 55
- Yoken, Hannah Kaarina 14, 16–18, 101n
- Žarskus, Aleksandras 87, 89
Žilys, Gediminas 92
Zipes, Jack 38
Žičkienė, Aušra 9, 16–18
Žukauskaitė, Lida 94

General Index

- A Farewell to Patrick Sarsfield (song, *sean-nós*) 146
- A Stór Mo Chroí* (song) 148
- activism 16, 88, 89, 95, 99–102, 118, 126–127, 135, 149, 150, *see also* activism
- affective arrangement 123–134
- affective power 117, 122, 124, 125
- Age of Conversion 143
- All Saints' Day (*Visų šventųjų diena*) 89n4, 90, 94
- All Souls' Day (*Vėlinės*) 89n4, 90–95
- alliteration 23, 122
- Amaranthes' *Frauenzimmer-Lexikon* 45n, 53n
- American Wake 147–148
- Amhrán Mhuínse* (song, *sean-nós*) 146
- Anach Cuain* (song, *sean-nós*) 146
- animatism 70
- animism 70, 74
- anthropology, anthropologist 15, 23, 26, 43, 66, 121, 141–142, 144
- anti-Soviet Lithuanian freedom struggles (1944–1953) 92
- apeus* 122–123, 125, 128, 130, 132, 134
- apeutumineni* 122, 125–126, 134
- archaic beliefs 71
- archaism 84
- archival sources, materials 16, 48, 101, 117, 137, 142
- art
(contemporary) artistic practices 128, 152, 153
performing arts 17, 84, 89, 118, 123, 128–131, 132–133, 135
verbal art 7–8, 12–13, 17, 47, 51, 55–57, 128
- artist 102, 107, 111, 127–128, 130, 142, 148–151
- artistry 57, 84
- artivism 133
- assimilation 126, 144
- asylum seekers 150
- audience 23, 44, 46, 95, 122, 125–126, 128–130, 133–134, 143, 150
- authenticity 8, 9, 12, 13–14, 18, 25, 43, 54, 57, 84, 87, 120, 135,
- Baltic faith 82, 88, 89
- banshee (*bean sidhe*) 143
- bean caoineadh* (keening woman) 150
- bean sidhe* (banshee) 143
- beliefs 10, 16, 23, 63, 69, 71, 72, 74, 76, 86–87, 94, 121, 123–125, 132, *see also* folk belief
- Beowulf* 47
- Book of Lamentations in *Bible* 7
- Black feminist theory 25
- canonisation 84, 91, 93, 95
- CAOIN (music album) 150
- Caoineadh* (keening) 142
- Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (The Keen for Art O'Leary, keen) 145
- Caoineadh na dTrí Mhuire* (song, *sean-nós*) 144, 146
- Catholic 43, 53, 64, 65, 82, 94, 142, 144
- C. Church 64, 142, 144
- C. funerals 82
- cemetery 28, 32, 48, 55, 67, 74, 83, *see also* graveyard
- Chant Down Greenham* (artistic work, performance) 149

- charms 14, 56
 Chernobyl disaster 103, 106–107, 109
 Christ 46
 Christianity 49, 76, 143
 Christianisation 143
 church oppression 153
 Circum-Baltic 44, 47, 50, 52
 Cold War-era 104
 collection of Lithuanian songs 82
 collective, collectivity
 aspect 18, 67, 122, 130, 135
 function 63, 66
 identity 65
 nature 67
 colonialism 15, 25, 36, 144, 149
 commemoration 46, 62, 68–70, 73–74, 94,
 121, 149,
 communicability 14, 15, 22, 24–27, 36–38
 communication 14–15, 18, 22, 24, 26, 37, 68,
 77, 85, 88, 95, 122, 135,
 communicative power 151
 community 67, 68–69, 71, 88–89, 123–128,
 130–131, 134, 143, 146, 148–150
 of the dead/deceased 68, 71
 of the living 68–69
 Romuva c. 88–89
 comparative analysis 17, 46, 132–135
 concerts 82, 92, 119, 125, 128–129
 contemporary artistic practices *see* art
 contemporary artists *see* artist
 contemporary culture 82–82, 88, 93
 contemporary folk music 118, 128–130, 135,
 see also folk music, folk song
 context
 decontextualisation 18, 24, 117
 recontextualisation 18, 100, 108, 111, 117,
 142, 144–147, 151–152
 corporeality 11, 31, 63, 65–66, 69, 76
 corpse 29, 48, 53, 64, 72, 76, 147
 courtly commemoration poetry
 (commemorative court poetry) 46–47
 crying 14, 26, 34, 45, 49, 51, 56, 99, 104–112,
 121–122, 124, 130, 142–143, 145
 cultural object 145, 147–148, 150–153
 cultural practice 86, 90, 95, 126, 144, 149,
 151–152

 Danish 47, 52, 54–56
 decolonisation 38, 135
 decontextualisation *see* context
 demonstration 67, 100–101, 105, 112, 128

 deritualisation 142, 145
 diaspora 120, 150
 diminutives 23, 52, 56, 69, 122
 discrimination 120, 126, *see also* oppression
 dislocation 9, 37, 151
 documentation of the tradition *see* folklore
 ecological crisis 150
 education 26, 36, 66, 90, 92–93, 95, 104
 embodiment 63
 emigration 144, 147–148, 152–153
 emotions, emotional
 collective (aspect of the) e. 122, 130, 13,
 143, 150
 demonstrative emotionality 67
 e. display 49, 57, 122
 e. expression 14, 18, 50, 67, 76, 118, 130,
 146
 emotionality 17–18, 49, 67, 76, 117–118,
 122–123, 125, 132, 134–135
 emotive tactics 112
 genuine, real e. 67, 123, 128, 132, 134–
 135
 imitative (expression of) e. 123, 125, 130
 lamenter's e. 63, 131
 politicised e. 100–101
 epic 45–47, 105
 epidemic 26, *see also* pandemic
 epidemiology 28, 32, 34
 Estonian Folklore Archives 69
 Estonian War of Independence 65
 Estonians 64–65, 68
 ethno-cultural movement 84
 ethnographers 65
 ethnographic interviews 119
 ethno-linguistic minorities 120
 ethnomusicology, ethnomusicologist 15, 48
ethnosophists 87
 Eumenides 42–43
 euphemisms 69
 European nations 84
 European Nuclear Disarmament (END) 102
 evacuees (Karelians) 126
 exhumation 75–76
 exoticism 15, 18, 43, 49, 53, 65

 faith 36, 82, 88–89
 family roots 118
 famine 111, 142, 144, 147, 150
 feminism 14, 16–18, 25, 99–102, 109–112,
 150
 Black f. theory 25

- cultural f. 102
 f. activism 101, 150
 Finnish f. movement 101–102, 112
 leftist f. 99
 pacifist-f. 16–18, 99–101, 110–112
 pacifist-f. resistance 111
 femininity 100, 102, 108
 Finnic, Balto-Finnic 23, 40, 47n, 62–64, 66–70, 72–74, 119–120, 124
 Finnic peoples 62–64, 66–70, 73–74
 Eastern Finno-Ugric peoples 74
 Estonian people *see* Estonians
 Finnish people *see* Finns
 Ingrian people *see* Ingrians
 Izhorian people *see* Izhorians
 Karelian people *see* Karelians
 Seto people *see* Setos
 Vepsian people *see* Vepsians
 Votic people *see* Votians
 Finnicisation (of Karelians) 120, 126
 Finnish 46, 99–108, 110–112, 118–124, 126, 129, 132, 141, *see also* Finno-Karelian
 Finnish Parliament House 105, 107
 Finns 65, 68, 119, *see also* Finno-Karelian
 Finno-Karelian 47n5, 118, 119, 121
 folk beliefs 125
 folk culture 65, 68, 77
 folk dances 84, 88
 folk music 111–112, 118, 121, 128–130, 133, 135
 contemporary folk music 118, 128–130, 135
 folk songs 65–66, 68, 75, 84, 88–92
 Estonian 75
 necromantic 75
 folklore
 concept of f. 9, 12
 Finnish f. 110
 f. collecting, collectors 9–10, 13–14, 43–44, 56, 65, 143, 149
 f. ensemble 84
 f. practice 12, 82, 84–85, 89, 93
 Lithuanian f. 89, 94
 Seto f. 65
 women's f. 72, 99
 Folklore Fellows 46
 folklorisation 66
 folkloristics 7, 23, 26, 38, 62, 66, 84–85, 87, 119
 folklorists 25–26, 37–38, 65–66, 69, 84, 141, 145, 152
 formulae, formulaic expression, language 16–17, 47, 62–63, 66, 76, 122–123, 127
 funeral game 89
 funerals 23, 37, 46n, 52–53, 56, 68, 74, 82, 87, 122, 128, 143–144, *see also* wake
 Furies 43
 Gaelic 146
 gender 11, 26, 43, 100–102, 104–105, 108–109, 111, 121, 14, 143, 148, 151, 153
 gender norms 108–109
 genders studies 11, 26
 genre 8, 11, 14–15, 37, 46–47, 55, 62–63, 77, 92, 123–124, 141–142, 144–147, 151–153
 German occupation 65
 Germanic 44–45, 47, 51, 57, 70
 Germanic funerary songs 42
 (Indo-)Germanic loan 69–70
 Global North 10
 globalisation 17, 142, 151–153
 goddess Brigid 143
 'golden age' 83
 grassroots activism 99
 grave 42, 67–76, 89n, 90–91, 94, 128
 graveyard 72, 128, *see also* cemetery
 Great Famine 144, 147
 Greek Catholic Church 64
 Greek lament 151
 Greenham Common women's peace camp 17, 100, 102, 149
 grief, sorrow 8–9, 12, 14, 16, 22, 28, 32, 43, 46–47, 49–55, 57, 67–68, 121–122, 129, 132, 135, 142–151
 healing lament, *hoitava itku* 17, 118, 121, 130–135
 healing power 132–133
 hegemonic masculinity 102
Helsingin Sanomat (Finnish newspaper) 110
 heritage 9, 12, 16–17, 46, 56–57, 90, 111, 127, 147
 heritage-construction projects 16, 46, 57
 hired, paid, compensated lamenter 42–43, 48, 50, 53–54, 128, 145
 honorific register 69
 human body 12, 16, 63, 77
 hymns 43, 88–89
 'hysterical motherhood' 100
 icons of crying 26
 idealisation of the past 84

- identity 16, 26, 65, 84, 86, 89, 95, 100, 118,
123, 126–128, 133, 149–150
- ideologies 7–18, 22–26, 38, 43–44, 63, 82, 95,
117, 123
- antimilitarism 112
- anti-patriotic discourses 129
- anti-racism 129
- counter-i. 95
- cultural i. 83, 86, 95
- dominant i. 10, 12, 15–17, 24, 44, 54, 57
- feminist i. 16, 102, 110
- globalism, globalisation 17, 129, 135, 142,
151–153
- language, linguistic i. 14, 23
- left (as political i.) 99, 105,
- liberalism 129, 131, 135
- Lutheran ideology *see* Lutheranism
- multiculturalism 129, 135
- national i. 84–85
- National-Romantic i. 8, 17, 43, 57, 120
- pacifist-feminist i. 16, 110
- political i. 86, 95, 129
- postcolonialism 127, 135
- semiotic i. 22, 43
- site of i. work 117
- socialist i. 102
- Soviet i. 84, 87
- ideological work 22, 38, 117
- illiteracy 8, 65
- Iltalehti* (Finnish tabloid newspaper) 99
- immateriality 85, 151
- improvisation 44, 47, 56, 121, 145–146
- incommunicability 15, 18, 22, 24–27, 32,
35–38
- independence 65, 66, 86, 88
- Indigenous knowledge 27
- Indigenous people 22, 36, 127
- individualisation 66
- Ingrians 23, 75, 120
- Inkerin itkuvirret. Ingrian Laments* (lament
collection) 111, 120
- interpretative frame 123, 126, 128, 130, 132–
133
- Inuit throat singing 149
- invisibility 16–17, 42–57
- invisible society 84, 95
- Iron Age Scandinavia 43
- Itkijänaiset* (Lamenting Women) 16, 99–101,
104–112
- itkuliina* (lament cloth) 123, 125–127, 130,
132, 134
- Izhorians 120
- Kalevala* 105, 110–111
- Kanteletar* 111
- Karelian culture, tradition 18 117–118, 120–
122, 126, *see also* Karelian lament, Finno-
Karelian
- Karelian identity 118, 126–128
- Karelians 118–121, 126–128, *see also* Finno-
Karelian
- keen, keening 142–153
- keening woman (*bean caoineadh*) 150
- The Keening Song (song, *sean-nós*) 146
- Khanty 74
- Kraken 43
- KUPA, apiary 92
- laments, lamentation, lamenting
- autobiographical l. 124, 126, 133, 135
- burial l. *see* funeral l.
- conscription, recruit l. 66, 121
- contemporary l. 99, 117–125, 135, *see also*
neolaments
- Danish l. 52
- everyday l. *see* occasional l.
- Finnic l. 23, 124
- Finnish l. 120, 122
- funeral, burial l. 17, 62–65, 67–69, 76–77,
82, 84, 95, 124, 151
- Germanic l. tradition 47, 51
- hoitava itku*, healing l. 17, 118, 121, 130–
135
- Ingrian l. 110, 120–121, 124
- Irish l. 17, 141–142, 149, 151–153, *see also*
Caoineadh, keen, keening
- Karelian l. 9, 12, 15, 17–18, 23, 37, 76,
117–120, 122–124, 126–127, 130–133,
135, 151
- l. course 121, 128, 130–132
- l. language, language of l. 23, 63, 122, 127–
128, 132
- l. motifs 69–70, 73–75, 82–84, 86–95, *see*
also souls' motifs
- l. research 8, 42, 44, 133
- l. tradition 8–12, 15, 17, 151
- l. circle 132
- l. cloth *see* *itkuliina*
- lament's ego 123–129
- Lithuanian l. 16, 18, 47n, 83
- neolaments 17, 121, 121n, 132, 135
- North-Russian l. 75

- Norwegian l. 48, 53–54, 56
 occasional l. 121
 recruit l. *see* conscription l.
 ritual l. 124, 126, 130, 133
 ritual wailing 7
 Russian l. 70
 Scandinavian l., traditions 15, 42, 44, 46–47, 53
 Seto l. 12–13, 63, 65–66, 69–70, 73, 75–76
 staged l., stage performances 46, 120, 128, 130
 Swedish l. 51
 traditional l. 76, 82, 86, 88, 93, 95, 120, 130, 144
 Vepsian l. 70, 75
 wedding l. 66, 120–121, 124–126, 133, 135
- Lament of the Irish Mother (song, *sean-nós*) 146
- lamenters 9–11, 17–18, 26, 29, 31–32, 36–37, 42–57, 63, 70, 76, 83, 108, 117, 119–125, 128–129, 131–132, *see also* mourning
 women, keening woman, *bean caoineadh itettäjä/ollallinen* (lamerter lamenting on behalf of the bride in Karelian wedding rite) 120, 124
 lamerter-musician 119, 128
- langue* 26
- Leaving Dear Old Ireland [Three Leaves of Shamrock] (song) 148
- leelo*, Seto *leelo* 66
- Lemminkäinen's mother 105
- Leviathan 43
- linguistic anthropology 23, 43, 144
- linguistic ideologies 14, 23
- Lithuanian 17, 82–84, 88–93
- Lithuanian nation 87
- Lietuvių senasis tikėjimas* (*Lithuanian Old Faith*, publication, book) 88
- Lithuanian Songs* (publication, book) 82, 86
- local tradition 9, 86, 95, 129
- location of the deceased/dead/corpse 64, 69, 76
- loss (of lament tradition) 8–9, 18, 47, 77, 82–83, 142, 146, 152–153
- love songs 150
- lullabies 10, 150
- Lutheranism, Lutheran theology, Lutheran ideology 61, 57, 65, 68, 118
- lyricism 67
- Maidan 92
- Making Visible* (art project) 150
- marginalisation, marginal 9, 17–18, 56–57, 65, 102, 150
- Mari tradition 70
- masculinity 100–102
- materiality 22, 64, 85, 94, 141, 151
- Marymount University Hospital and Hospice 151
- media
Helsingin Sanomat (Finnish newspaper) 110
Iltalehti (Finnish tabloid newspaper) 99
 social media 7, 127
Ydin (magazine) 103
 YouTube 127n, 128
- melody 9, 49, 55, 131, 145–146
- memory
 collective m. 89, 142, 149–150
 cultural m. 89, 141, 153
 social m. 16
- memory-based tradition 121
- meta-affect 132
- metaculture 18, 141, 144, 148–152
- metalanguage 93
- metaphors, metaphorical language 23, 36, 47, 91, 94–95, 122
- metempsychosis 86–87
- Middle Ages, medieval 44–47, 51, 55–57
- migration 18, 51, 66, 118–120, 142, 144, 147–148, 152–153
- minorities 120–121, 127, 135
- modernisation 17, 63, 65–66, 76, 121, 144
- modernity 8–11, 13–18, 25, 43, 57, 151–153, *see also* non-modern
- Moscow armistice (1944) 118
- motif 16, 69–70, 73–75, 82–84, 86–95, 148, *see also* souls' motifs
- mourning 22, 31–34, 37, 51, 54, 107–110, 112, 141–144, 147–148, 151
- mourning woman, mourner 22, 53–54, 67, 112, 143, 145, *see also* lamenters
- Muscovite 67
- musician 119, 128–129, 149, 151, 153
- myth 82–87, 89, 93–95
- mythic beliefs 121, 124
- mythic conceptions 122, 130, 133, 135
- mythical thinking 95
- mythological narration 69
- mythology 85–86, 93–95, 143
 re-mythologisation 82, 95

- Naisiasialiitto Unioni* (The Finnish Women's Association Unioni) 101
- Naiset Rauhan Puolesta* (Women for Peace) 99–105
- National Museum of Denmark 53
- national revival, National Revival Movement 89, 95
- National-Romantic literature 42
- National-Romanticism *see* ideologies
- NATO 102
- neolaments 17, 121, 121n, 132, 135
- neoshamanism 130
- new spirituality 131
- non-modern, non-modernised 8–9, 11, 14–17, 152
- Nordic countries, region 102–104
- Nordic Forum conference 111
- Norwegian 45, 48–50, 52–57
- nostalgia 18, 86
- nuclear
 - anti-n. momentum 102
 - anti-n. movement 99–100
 - anti-n. pacifism 99, 101, 110, 112
 - anti-n. protest 103
 - European Nuclear Disarmament (END) 102
 - n. accident 110
 - n. energy 103, 107, 111
 - n. power 99–100, 103–104, 106
 - n. proxy 102
 - n. testing 107
 - n. war 102
 - n. waste 106
 - n. weapon 100, 103, 104
- oppression 142, 149, 155, *see also*
 - discrimination
- oral folklore 69–70, 76
- oral poetry 111, 122, 141, 145
- Orthodoxy 65, 68, 70, 118, 120, 125, 135
 - Greek Catholic O. *see* Greek Catholic Church
 - O. Finnic peoples 70, 120
 - vernacular O. 125, 135
- otherworld 90, 93–95, 118, 122, 125–126, 130, 135, 143
- pacifism 16–18, 99–101, 103, 105, 107, 110–112
 - anti-nuclear 99, 101, 110, 112
 - feminist 16–18, 99–101, 110–112
- paganism 66, 143
- pandemic 150, *see also* epidemic
- participation 11, 27, 35, 55, 141, 145, 151
- patriarchal oppression 149
- patriarchy 100, 102, 149
- peace movement *see* women's peace movement
- Pentecost week (the week of rusalkas) 68
- performance 9, 11, 27, 118, 123
- performance arena 123
- performing arts 17, 84, 89, 118, 123, 128–131, 132–133, 135
- personal sentimentality 67
- poetic devices 122–123, 127, 129–130, 132–133
- poetic language 63, 122
- poetic text 63, 89
- poetics 13–14, 22–23, 32, 36, 38, 129
- political decision making 100, 108–109
- popular music 129
- postcolonialism 127
- post-modern 64
- post-secular culture of healing 131
- postulates 88
- power 15, 22, 36, 38, 66, 85–86, 89, 100, 127
- practice
 - folklore practice 12, 82, 84–85, 89, 93
 - praxeological research 93
 - praxis 85, 100
- prayers 88
- pre-Christian 43, 66, 76, 82n, 86–88, 92, 135, 144
- pre-Reformation 43, 49
- procession 51, 53–55, 56n
- propaganda 66
- Soviet atheist propaganda 66
- protest 16–18, 99–112, 149
 - anti-nuclear 103
 - performative 111
 - political 99, 104–105, 112
- public displays of grief 54
- rabies 34, 34n6, 37
- racialisation 35, 38
- racialised health inequities 27
- Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority in Finland 107
- Rebel Yell* (art, vocal performance) 150
- reclaiming 118, 121, 124, 126–127, 132–133, 135, 149–150

- recontextualisation *see* context
 refugees 126
 register 23, 69, 72, 87, 122, 125–128, 130, 132–134
 reinterpretation 16, 76, 100, 117, 121, 128, 141–142, 146
 religion 63, 76, 87, 118
 non-institutionalised, vernacular 70
 re-mythologisation 82, 95
 replication 141, 148, 151
 re-traditionalisation 37
 revitalisation *see* revivals
 revivals 16, 83, 86, 111–112, 121, 126, 128, 142, 150
 rites 26, 71, 88–90, 121–126, 128, 144
 ritual wailing *see* laments
 ritual washing 71
 Roman Catholic Church 64
 Romuva, Baltic faith community 88–89
 runo-singers 120
 Russian cultural sphere 65
 Russophobia 120

 sacred 68, 142
 sadness *see* grief 7, 122, 132, 147
 Scandinavian 14, 16–17, 45–46, 57, *see also* Scandinavian lament
 schoolbooks, textbooks 42, 93
sean-nós (old style) 142, 145–150, 152–153
 Second World War 6, 69, 74, 119–120
 semiotic ideology 22, 43
 Seto folklore 65, *see also* Seto laments
 Setos 62, 64–66, 120
Setukeste laulud (Songs of the Seto) 65
 shamanism 130
 Sibelius Academy 121
 Siebenburg Saxons 49
 silence 15, 37, 52, 54, 106, 108, 149–150
 silent grieving 54
 Eastern Slavic people 68
 Slavs 74
 sobbing 104, 122
 social life 63, 82, 85, 95, 117, 123, 152
Sogn og Fjordane 48–49
 song festival 120
Songs of Aran 144
 Songs of lament 142, 146, 149, 151, 153
sørgkvinder (mourning-women) 53–54
 sorrow *see* grief

 soul visiting home 73
 souls' motifs 83–84, 86, 88–89, 91, 94–95
 'bench of souls' 83, 87–91, 94–95
 'door of souls' 82–83, 88, 90, 95
 'gate of souls' 82–83, 86, 88–95
 Southern Estonian language 64
 'Soviet folk art' 84
 Soviet occupation 65–66, 83–84
 Soviet propaganda
 'authentic tradition' 84
 'folk art' 84
 Soviet atheist propaganda 66
 Soviet society 84
 Soviet-era, Soviet period 66
 spectacle 43, 50–51, 54–55, 57, 87, 100
 Sphinx 43
 spirit dolls 74
 state of mind 123, 128, 132, 134
 stigmatisation 54, 57
 Swedish 45, 47, 51–52, 56, 102
 symbol 85–86, 95, 112
syndyzet, spuassuset (otherworldly ones) 122, 124–130, 131–135

 taboo 69, 143
 talisman 75
 Tartu Peace Treaty 65
 therapy, therapy culture 121, 123, 126, 128, 131–133, 135
 traditional culture 8–9, 16, 66–68, 77, 84
 traditional music 146
 Transylvanian Saxons 46n
 travelogues 43, 51
 tribal kinship 68

 Ukrainian resistance 92
 United Nations Disarmament Week 106
 utopianism 72

Vëlë (a soul) 82n
 Vepsians 74, 120
 verbal art 7–8, 12–13, 17, 47, 51, 55–57, 128
 vernacular 25, 63, 65, 125, 135, 149
Viere viere kynnelyön (lament poem) 111
 Virgin Mary 46
 voice 15, 55–56, 127, 150
 voice (human voice, sound) 26, 28–29, 34, 36–37, 56, 146, 149–150
 Votians 120

- wailing *see* lament
- wake 33, 34, 37, 55n, 142–143, 146, *see also*
 American Wake, funerals
- war 6, 65, 69, 102–106, 110, 119–120, 149
 Cold War-era 104
 Estonian War of Independence 65
 nuclear war 102
 Second World War 6, 69, 74, 119–120
- Warsaw Pact 102
- wedding customs 76
- wellness 131–133, 135
- Western societies 7–9, 131, 135
- Western cultural sphere 64
- White supremacy 25
- Whitsun eve 67
- witness (of a lament) 131–133
- women's peace movement 100–102, 104,
 108
- women's tradition 47, 56–37, 121
- worldview 10, 12, 62, 65–66, 76–77, 84, 86–87,
 129, 132
- Ydin* (magazine) 103
- Yoruba 151
- YouTube 127n, 128
- Zipser Germans 46n
- Äänellä Itkijät ry*, lamenter association 112,
 121, 130–131

**Studia Fennica
Anthropologica**

On Foreign Ground

*Moving between Countries and
Categories*

Edited by Marie-Louise Karttunen
& Minna Ruckenstein
Studia Fennica Anthropologica 1
2007

Beyond the Horizon

*Essays on Myth, History, Travel
and Society*

Edited by Clifford Sather &
Timo Kaartinen
Studia Fennica Anthropologica 2
2008

TIMO KALLINEN

Divine Rulers in a Secular State

Studia Fennica Anthropologica 3
2016

**Dwelling in Political
Landscapes**

*Contemporary Anthropological
Perspectives*

Edited by Anu Lounela,
Eeva Berglund & Timo Kallinen
Studia Fennica Anthropologica 4
2019

**Responsibility and Language
Practises in Place**

Edited by Laura Siragusa &
Jenanne K. Ferguson
Studia Fennica Anthropologica 5
2020

Studia Fennica Ethnologica

LAURA STARK

The Limits of Patriarchy

*How Female Networks of
Pilfering and Gossip Sparked the
First Debates on Rural Gender
Rights in the 19th-century
Finnish-Language Press*

Studia Fennica Ethnologica 13
2011

Where is the Field?

*The Experience of Migration
Viewed through the Prism of
Ethnographic Fieldwork*

Edited by Laura Hirvi &
Hanna Snellman
Studia Fennica Ethnologica 14
2012

LAURA HIRVI

Identities in Practice

*A Trans-Atlantic Ethnography of
Sikh Immigrants in Finland and in
California*

Studia Fennica Ethnologica 15
2013

EERIKA KOSKINEN-KOIVISTO

Her Own Worth

*Negotiations of Subjectivity in
the Life Narrative of a Female
Labourer*

Studia Fennica Ethnologica 16
2014

Transnational Death

Edited by Samira Saramo,
Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and
Hanna Snellman
Studia Fennica Ethnologica 17
2019

**The Culture of the Finnish
Roma**

Edited by Airi Markkanen &
Kai Åberg
Studia Fennica Ethnologica 18
2024

Contested Knowledge

*Political Dimensions of European
Ethnology and Folklore Studies
in Post-War Europe*

Edited by Konrad J. Kuhn,
Lauri Turpeinen and
Hanna Snellman
Studia Fennica Ethnologica 19
2026

Studia Fennica Folkloristica

CORNELIUS HASSELBLATT
Kalevipoeg Studies
The Creation and Reception
of an Epic
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 21
2016

Genre – Text – Interpretation
Multidisciplinary Perspectives on
Folklore and Beyond
Edited by Kaarina Koski, Frog &
Ulla Savolainen
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 22
2016

Storied and Supernatural Places
Studies in Spatial and Social
Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas
Edited by Ülo Valk &
Daniel Sävborg
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 23
2018

Oral Tradition and Book Culture
Edited by Pertti Anttonen,
Cecilia af Forselles and
Kirsti Salmi-Niklander
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 24
2018

Rhyme and Rhyming in Verbal
Art, Language, and Song
Edited by Venla Sykäri &
Nigel Fabb
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 25
2022

Living Lament
Explorations in Shifting Ideologies
Edited by Viliina Silvonen &
Eila Stepanova
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 26
2026

Expressions and Impressions
Personal and Communal Aspects
of Traditional Singing
Edited by Taive Särg &
Mari Väina
Studia Fennica Folkloristica 27
2025

Studia Fennica Historica

Fibula, Fabula, Fact
The Viking Age in Finland
Edited by Joonas Ahola and
Frog with Clive Tolley
Studia Fennica Historica 18
2014

Novels, Histories, Novel
Nations
Edited by Linda Kaljundi,
Eneken Laanes & Ilona Pikkanen
Studia Fennica Historica 19
2015

JUKKA GRONOW &
SERGEY ZHURAVLEV
Fashion Meets Socialism
Fashion Industry in the Soviet
Union after the Second World
War
Studia Fennica Historica 20
2015

SOFIA KOTILAINEN
Literacy Skills as
Local Intangible Capital
The History of a Rural Lending
Library c 1860–1920
Studia Fennica Historica 21
2016

Continued Violence and
Troublesome Pasts
Post-war Europe between
the Victors after the Second
World War
Edited by Ville Kivimäki and
Petri Karonen
Studia Fennica Historica 22
2017

Personal Agency at the Swedish
Age of Greatness 1560–1720
Edited by Petri Karonen &
Marko Hakanen
Studia Fennica Historica 23
2017

PASI IHALAINEN
The Springs of Democracy
National and Transnational
Debates on Constitutional
Reform in the British, German,
Swedish and Finnish Parliaments,
1917–1919
Studia Fennica Historica 24
2017

On the Legacy of Lutheranism
in Finland
Societal Perspectives
Edited by Kaius Sinnemäki,
Anneli Portman, Jouni Tilli and
Robert H. Nelson
Studia Fennica Historica 25
2019

Handwritten Newspapers
An Alternative Medium during
the Early Modern and Modern
Periods
Edited by Heiko Droste and
Kirsti Salmi-Niklander
Studia Fennica Historica 26
2019

Lake Ladoga
The Coastal History of
the Greatest Lake in Europe
Edited by Maria Lähteenmäki
and Isaac Land
Studia Fennica Historica 27
2023

Colonial Aspects of Finnish-
Namibian Relations, 1870–1990
Cultural Change, Endurance and
Resistance
Edited by Leila Koivunen and
Raita Merivirta
Studia Fennica Historica 28
2024

YRJÖ KAUKIAINEN
Shipping and Commodity
Flows on the Late Eighteenth-
Century Baltic
Studia Fennica Historica 29
2026

Studia Fennica Linguistica

Planning a new standard language

Finnic minority languages meet the new millennium

Edited by Helena Sulkala & Harri Mantila

Studia Fennica Linguistica 15
2010

LOTTA WECKSTRÖM

Representations of Finnishness in Sweden

Studia Fennica Linguistica 16
2011

TERHI AINIALA, MINNA SAARELMA & PAULA SJÖBLOM

Names in Focus

An Introduction to Finnish Onomastics

Studia Fennica Linguistica 17
2012

Registers of Communication

Edited by Asif Agha & Frog
Studia Fennica Linguistica 18
2015

KAISA HÄKKINEN

Spreading the Written Word

Mikael Agricola and the Birth of Literary Finnish

Studia Fennica Linguistica 19
2015

Linking Clauses and Actions in Social Interaction

Edited by Ritva Laury, Marja Etelämäki &

Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen

Studia Fennica Linguistica 20
2017

On the Border of Language and Dialect

Edited by Marjatta Palander, Helka Riionheimo & Vesa Koivisto

Studia Fennica Linguistica 21
2018

Conversation Analytic Perspectives to Digital Interaction

Practices, Resources and Affordances

Edited by Aino Koivisto, Heidi Vepsäläinen &

Mikko T. Virtanen

Studia Fennica Linguistica 22
2023

The Finnish Case System

Cognitive Linguistic Perspectives

Edited by Minna Jaakola &

Tiina Onikki-Rantajääskö

Studia Fennica Linguistica 23
2023

Sociolinguistic Variation in Urban Linguistic Landscapes

Edited by Sofie Henricson, Väinö Syrjälä, Carla Bagna & Martina Bellinzona

Studia Fennica Linguistica 24
2024

Studia Fennica Litteraria

The Emergence of Finnish Book and Reading Culture in the 1700s

Edited by Cecilia af Forselles & Tuija Laine

Studia Fennica Litteraria 5
2011

Nodes of Contemporary Finnish Literature

Edited by Leena Kirstinä

Studia Fennica Litteraria 6
2012

White Field, Black Seeds

Nordic Literary Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century

Edited by Anna Kuismin & M. J. Driscoll

Studia Fennica Litteraria 7
2013

LIEVEN AMEEL

Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature

Urban Experiences in Finnish Prose Fiction 1890–1940

Studia Fennica Litteraria 8
2014

Novel Districts

Critical Readings of Monika Fagerholm

Edited by Kristina Malmio & Mia Österlund

Studia Fennica Litteraria 9
2016

ELISE NYKÄNEN

Mysterious Minds

The Making of Private and Collective Consciousness in Marja-Liisa Vartio's Novels

Studia Fennica Litteraria 10
2017

Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden

Edited by Satu Gröndahl & Eila Rantonen

Studia Fennica Litteraria 11
2018

Versification

Metrics in Practice

Edited by Frog, Satu Grünthal,
Kati Kallio & Jarkko Niemi
Studia Fennica Litteraria 12
2021

ANNA OVASKA

Shattering Minds

*Experiences of Mental Illness in
Modernist Finnish Literature.*

Studia Fennica Litteraria 13
2023

Genetic Criticism in Motion

*New Perspectives on Manuscript
Studies*

Edited by Sakari Katajamäki &
Veijo Pulkkinen
Studia Fennica Litteraria 14
2023

Arctic Hysteria and Other

Strange Northern Emotions

Case Studies in Finnish Literature

Edited by Riikka Rossi,
Sarianna Kankkunen &
Elise Nykänen
Studia Fennica Litteraria 15
2024

SARIANNA KANKKUNEN

**Terrains of Imagination
in Contemporary Finnish
Literature**

*Harassing Habitats in Maarit
Verronen's Fiction*

Studia Fennica Litteraria 16
2024