Symposium

Indigenous Ontologies: Reassessing Human and Non-Human Relations

Abstracts

University of Tartu, Estonia
July 29–30, 2014

Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC),
University College Cork, National University of Ireland
Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore,
University of Tartu

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The symposium is organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu and the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC), University College Cork (UCC), National University of Ireland, in co-operation with the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory (CECT).

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"Indigenous Ontologies: Reassessing Human and Non-Human Relations" The Second International MEWSC Symposium University of Tartu

July 29–30, 2014

Ülikooli 16–212

Tuesday, July 29th

9.45 Opening

10.00 Graham Harvey (The Open University):
New Approaches to Animism: Foregrounding Relationality (key-note lecture)

11.00 Coffee/ tea

11.30 Stefano Beggiora (University Ca' Foscari):
Salpo and *Mahua* (the Drinks of the Gods) in Shamanic Tradition: Social and Ritual Use of Alcohol in Indigenous Communities in Odisha

12.00 Prakruti Ramesh (Aarhus University):
Remaking a Buffalo Sacrifice: Assertions of Indigeneity in a Threatened Environment

12.30 Uwe Skoda (Aarhus University):
Stranger King, Peacock and Tree. Notes on the Royal Chronicles in Bonai

13.00 Lidia Guzy (University College Cork):
Boil and *Nag Bacca* – Trance Mediums as Non-Human Agents. Two Examples from Western Odisha, India

13.30 Lunch

15.00 Deborah Nadal (University of Verona):
"In This House They Don't Want to Enter": the Reorganisation of Living Spaces among the Birhors of Jharkhand and Odisha

15.30 Gregory D. Alles (McDaniel College):
Ontological Bits and Pieces from Eastern Gujarat: Observations on Time, Space, and Species in Rathva Cultural Productions

16.00 Dagnosław Demski (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences):
The Ritual Practices of Rabari Community, Gujarat

16.30 Coffee/ tea

17.00 Meenaxi Barkataki-Ruscheweyh (University of Göttingen):
The Dynamics between Spirituality and Politics in a Newly Reformed Indigenous Religion – a Case Study of Rangfraism amongst the Tangsa in North-East India

17.30 Claire Scheid (University College Cork):
The Post-Human *Uyu*: Adi Entities of the Recently Dead

18.00 Margaret Lyngdoh (University of Tartu):
Storyworlds and Alternative Realities in the Folklore of the Weretigers among the Khasis

18.30–19.00 Ülo Valk (University of Tartu):
The Last Weretigers of Mayong: Vernacular Beliefs about Human-Animal Transformations in Assam

19.15 Dinner at the University Café (Ülikooli 20)

Wednesday, July 30th

10.00 James A. Kapaló (University College Cork):
The Prey of Demons: Perspectives on the Ontology of Human and Non-Human Persons in Gagauz Healing Charms

10.30 Gillian Watts (University College Cork):
Human Rights and Human/ Non-Human Relationships

11.00 Sean McKnight (University College Cork):
The Deconstruction of Christianity: The Example of the Mukyokai

11.30 Coffee/ tea

12.00 Art Leete (University of Tartu):
Dogs and Humans in the Komi Hunting Worldview

12.30 Eva Toulouze (University of Tartu/ National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Paris)):
A Living Indigenous Religion in the Contemporary World: the Udmurt Religion in Bashkortostan

13.00 Frog (University of Helsinki / The Kalevala Society):
Are Trolls, Bears and Sámis People too? – Considering the Mythic Ethnography of Old Norse Culture

13.30 Lunch

15.00 Merili Metsvahi (University of Tartu):
Place Legend about the Origin of a Lake and the Changes in Estonian Kinship Structures

15.30 Madis Arukask (University of Tartu):
Touching the Dead. About Physical Contact between the Living and the Dead among Baltic-Finnic Peoples

16.00 Eila Stepanova (University of Helsinki):
Synty in Finno-Karelian Kalevalaic Poetry, Laments and Yoiks

16.30 Ergo-Hart Västrik (University of Tartu):
Categories of Animistic Spirits in the Vernacular Religion of Votians: Vocabulary and Comparison of Dominant Notions

17.00 Closing of the symposium

Preface

The Indigenous Ontologies: Reassessing Human and Non-Human Relations symposium is organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu and the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC), University College Cork (UCC), National University of Ireland, in co-operation with the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory (CECT).

Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre has been established at University College Cork, Ireland, to promote the study of contemporary endangered cultures, religions, worldviews, religious cultures, and minority religions. Cultural expressions – both tangible and intangible – and the worldviews of marginalised, endangered and persecuted peoples, social groups and indigenous communities are the focus of MEWSC. At the heart of the centre's mission is the desire to encourage counter-hegemonial perspectives on peripheral cultural and religious voices and promote the incorporation of such perspectives into mainstream scholarship.

The hosting institution, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, shares a scholarly agenda, which is close to MEWSC. With its roots in the 19th century scholarship on European peasant cultures and oral traditions of the colonised peoples, folkloristics has expanded its scope of research to study the expressive forms of contemporary urban vernacular cultures, the Internet and mass media, alternative religious movements of the New Spirituality and other realms of creative practices at grassroots levels. Itself a marginal discipline on the edges of the humanities and social sciences, folkloristics has a long history of documentation and research of the marginalised and subjugated cultures under the shadow of the dominant Others. Among other topics, folklorists at the University of Tartu work on vernacular religion and traditional beliefs in Estonia, among the Baltic-Finnic ethnic minorities, such as the Votes and the Vepsians, and do fieldwork among the Assamese and the Khasi people in North-East India.

The Indigenous Ontologies: Reassessing Human and Non-Human Relations symposium addresses the recent ontological turn in anthropology (Descola 1992, 2013 [2005], Viveiros de Castro 1998) as well as the discourse on neo-animism (Harvey 2005). We question hegemonic anthropocentric perspectives and emphasise the need for understanding ontological alterities and pluralisms. Our goal is to study diverse forms of existence by examining human and non-human relations in indigenous Indian Adivasi and Finno-Ugric contexts, cross-cultural ontological alterities in international folklore and minority religions. The symposium addresses a variety of ethnic and religious traditions, ranging from Odisha to Gujarat and from Japan to Moldova and various peoples of the North.

We welcome you all to our symposium!

Lidia Guzy,
University College Cork, National University of Ireland

Ülo Valk,
University of Tartu

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Descola, Philippe 1992. Societies of Nature and the Nature of Society. *Conceptualizing Society*. Ed. by A. Kuper. London, New York: Routledge. 107–126.

Descola, Philippe 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original: Descola, Philippe 2005. *Par-delà nature et culture*. Paris: Gallimard.)

Harvey, Graham 2005. *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. London: Hurst.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo 1998. Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1998). 469–488.

Plenary lecture

New Approaches to Animism: Foregrounding Relationality

Graham Harvey (The Open University, UK)

New approaches to animism are revitalising ethnographic studies of lived religion and culture in many contexts, especially among indigenous peoples. Rather than defining religion as 'belief systems' focussed on non-empirical reality, the new animism focuses attention on relational epistemologies and ontologies. At its most radical, animism labels thoroughly relational ontologies. Here, personhood is not an interior quality or possession of human individuals, but an emergent performance of encounter between persons (human or other-than-human). That is, personhood, or being a person, is an act of relationship with others. In this presentation I outline recent 'new animism' research and illustrate connections with 'actor network theory', 'meshwork', inherent symbiosis between apparently separate species, and other ways of foregrounding relationality in research. While I will largely focus on ethnology, the discussion necessarily draws on ethology too because humans (and other species) are inseparable from all our relations.

Dr Graham Harvey is the head of the department of Religious Studies at the Open University and President of the British Association for the Study of Religions. His "Animism: Respecting the Living World" (2005) has contributed significantly to re-thinking animism. His edited "Handbook of Contemporary Animism" (2013) demonstrates the interdisciplinary reach of these new approaches.

Ontological Bits and Pieces from Eastern Gujarat: Observations on Time, Space, and Species in Rathva Cultural Productions

Gregory D. Alles (McDaniel College, USA)

Both in terms of numbers and cultural influence, the Rathvas are the dominant ethnic group in the eastern half of the new district of Chhotaudepur in Gujarat state, India. Traditionally they have been subsistence farmers or day labourers (or both) with limited access to formal education and literacy, but the situation is changing. With access to formal education – colleges were founded in the immediate area in 1964 and 1992 – many have opted for jobs in various professions as well as in some businesses. The result has been the exacerbation of a cultural divide that had been present for some time, a divide between those Rathvas who join caste-Hindu *sampradayas* because they feel they are more civilised, and those who remain aloof from such *sampradayas* and so count as traditional. Some but not all who join the *sampradayas* subsequently renounce their traditional arts and rituals as 'uncivilised'.

In this paper I want to explore what I am calling ontological bits and pieces in cultural productions associated with Rathva traditionalists. Although it would be difficult to identify ontology among Rathva traditionalists in the sense of an explicit account of being such as one finds with some Indian and European philosophers, for example Adisankaracarya, Nagarjuna, or Heidegger, it is possible, I think, to tease out ontological implications from what Rathvas have traditionally said and done. I am particularly interested in Rathva conceptualisations of time, space, and speciation. Among possible sources for such views I will briefly examine Rathva paintings (which have started to become available on the international art market), ritual activities, religious constructions, and stories. To use a spatial metaphor: in all three areas Rathva conceptualisations seem to bend the rather rigid structures associated with Euclidean,

Newtonian, and Linnaean conceptions of the universe that many North Americans and Europeans unreflectively presume are 'normal'.

Touching the Dead. About Physical Contact between the Living and the Dead among Baltic-Finnic Peoples

Madis Arukask (University of Tartu, Estonia)

In the Western world the dead body and contact with it has become taboo for most people. The reason for this seems to be the hygienic view for everything 'unclean', but also an instinctive wish not to have any contact with the dead/dead body – which can be treated as the primal fear of the corpse. When studying this issue in traditional culture we can see another logic – contact with the dead is sometimes needful and has its function(s). In this paper I bring forth the main functions of this contact: communicative, identity formational and protective magical.

The communicative contact can be seen first of all in post mortal commemoration practices where it has to do with the physical items representing the location of the deceased. Here we talk about ritual touching, sweeping, etc., of the burial mound, cross or memorial column that is especially typical for the lamenters, but also for ordinary people. Lamenting as communicative act and the physical/bodily aspect of this are also expressed in the Baltic-Finnic lament texts, including the desire to touch the deceased.

Together with the communicative contact the identity on the both sides is specified. The physical touching that takes place at the farewell ceremony or at the 'get-together' at the commemoration events and ceremonies can be taken as the establishment of a borderline – as all we unconsciously do when saying hello or good-bye to each other in everyday life. In communication with a dead person this has a more critical meaning caused by fear of the dead and their unwilling returns that can be handled in terms of protective magic. The protective magical function can also be seen in the practices that relate to the individual overcoming the fear of the dead.

Supposedly, today the aspects mentioned here are mixed together and a strong dose of modern individualism has merged with them. Despite this, real contact with the deceased has not entirely vanished in corresponding practices even now.

The Dynamics between Spirituality and Politics in a Newly Reformed Indigenous Religion – a Case Study of Rangfraism amongst the Tangsa in North-East India

Meenaxi Barkataki-Ruscheweyh (University of Göttingen, Germany)

Tangsa is an umbrella term for a collection of small ethnic communities (related to the Naga) who have migrated to North-East India from Myanmar. In the course of time, many Tangsa have embraced world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, while others have continued their indigenous practices. In recent years there has been a move amongst a section of the educated Tangsa to rationalise and institutionalise their older practices under a new name, Rangfraism, in order to maintain continuity but also to prevent further conversion to Christianity.

I take a closer look at Rangfraism to ascertain how much of the old has been retained, what new has been added, and to what ends. Using old Tangsa mythology as a base and intermixing older rituals and cultural practices with attractive features from both Hinduism and Christianity, the leaders of the Rangfraa movement have partly succeeded in stemming the wave of Christian conversion, but it has also brought them into direct confrontation with the Christian Tangsa, especially those radical groups aligned with the Naga Baptist church. This has created serious fissures in Tangsa society, and has been a setback to recent efforts made by some sections to create a new pan-Tangsa identity. I will also discuss the spirituality of the *keychus* (shamans) and their intimate relationship with their new God – Rangfraa. This has led to tensions between them and those leading the community-based practices of Rangfraism at the village level, aggravated by the fact that most of these *keychus* are young girls.

Salpo and *Mahua* (the Drinks of the Gods) in Shamanic Tradition: Social and Ritual Use of Alcohol in Indigenous Communities in Odisha

Stefano Beggiora (University Ca' Foscari, Italy)

The tribal areas of Odisha are renowned for the production of local palm wine, *Salap*/*salpo*, which is produced by treating the juice of the *Caryota Urens* tree. In some hilly areas there is a variety called *mahuli*, a liqueur produced from the *Madhuca Indica* that has the same use. The custom of drinking these fermented products is a characteristic feature of the tribal culture of this region: this creates sociality, enshrines communal relations among the clans, consecrates the moments of passage such as weddings, births, etc. The consumption of alcohol produced from the plants of the forest, where survival is always under threat, has historically contributed to reduce the level of anxiety in the community. For these reasons, these particular types of tree are considered sacred. The tree and its juice are in fact of central importance in the shamanic ritual and in the worship of the ancestors. Not only does the shaman drink the juice in the early stages of trance, but he celebrates his offering, summoning the spirits and renewing the covenant between the living and the dead. In the tribal cultures of Odisha, as well as elsewhere in India, the trees that exude latex are symbols of divine maternity: this is the reason why they are sought by spirits who try to come back to life. Nevertheless in the shamanism of the indigenous groups of the region, the plant embodies a manifestation of god: its juice opens the intimacy with the sacred, tearing the mystery surrounding nature, its material forces possibly hostile to man.

Methodology and case studies: I will refer in particular to some years of fieldwork in the district of Rayagada in the community of Lanjia Saoras, where I had the opportunity to document the techniques of the treatment of the plant, the ritual and social use of fermented products, to record and eventually to translate from tribal dialects the liturgies and some folk songs dedicated to the sacred palm.

The Ritual Practices of Rabari Community, Gujarat

Dagnosław Demski (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland)

Rabari groups belong to the Hindu society, however, they live on the periphery of the agricultural areas in Western India. Traditionally they kept animals, so their culture was related to the animals. Several main rites were associated with animals, especially with camels. They pay homage to a form of Mata, a goddess on a camel installed in the temple in Kutch District, where they celebrate a night ceremony in the valley nearby. Similar rites are held in various sites in the area in the different months of the year. Both men and women take part in these religious events, and their religious priests become possessed by the goddess. The ceremony attracts community members from the neighbouring villages. The animals take part along with humans in these night practices. In the shrinking domains of life, like arid-areas, contemporary everyday life changes, and many former nomads and shepherds stopped their jobs, settled and moved to the cities. Anyway, they as a community create and continue a culture that can be regarded as a 'repertoire of ritual practices'. I will present a look at the role of animals, and various activities of the different parts of their community.

Are Trolls, Bears and Sámis People too? – Considering the Mythic Ethnography of Old Norse Culture

Frog (University of Helsinki/ The Kalevala Society, Finland)

Whereas ethnography is the (ostensible) objective scientific study of empirical ethnic groups and cultures, I use the term mythic ethnography for the study of ethic categories and their cultures as these are constructed and viewed through the lens of a group or culture. In other words, mythic ethnography is the perception of cultures from a particular perspective. The adjective 'mythic' in this term reflects its foundations in an approach to mythic discourse and mythological thinking. To put it simply, the focus of mythic ethnography is on how one group or culture 'mythologises' other groups. The other groups considered are groups as perceived from the perspective of that culture. These groups therefore include empirical beings, beings that are purely imaginal and also beings that are empirical but are imaginally conceived in ways that may contrast significantly with empirical evidence.

This paper considers the mythic ethnography of Old Norse culture – or, speaking loosely, it considers what the 'Vikings' thought of as an ethnos. The aim is to problematise ways that we think about vernacular categories of being. This is done through the review of three cases that our modern categorisation would group differently than the Norse. These are: a) the Sámis, whom we would class as 'human'; b) bears, which we would class as 'animals'; and c) trolls, which we would class as 'imaginal beings'. The research presented builds on work that I have been doing on the mythic ethnography of Old Norse culture. Each of the three cases will therefore be reviewed and discussed here only briefly. The paper will not focus on any one of these cases or on the details of specific arguments. Instead, focus will be on a global argument concerning the social construction of categories of being. It will conclude with both theoretical and methodological points.

Boil and *Nag Bacca* – Trance Mediums as Non-Human Agents. Two Examples from Western Odisha, India

Lidia Guzy (University College Cork, Ireland)

Trance mediumship (*boil*) is a common cultural, religious and ontological language of Western Odisha (India). Trance mediumship is a form of ritual specialisation and transformation to a non-human entity. Trance mediums embodying local goddesses and gods act in consonance with the beats and rhythms of drums in order to heal and mediate between the human and the otherworldly sphere. Local dance and drama traditions re-stage a divine play on earth, where the scene is manifested in and mediated through the body of the human artist, while the sounds of musical instruments represent local notions of the utterances of different goddesses.

Another example of trance mediumship is the *Nag baccha* tradition of Western Odisha. *Nag baccha* literally means the 'snake children'. It is a local trance and possession cult combining the veneration of the snake god Nag – a local deity identified with the Pan-Indian Hindu god Shiva – with male peer group and initiation rituals, indigenous theatre, martial arts performance, music and healing traditions. It is mainly performed by young men from villages with mixed communities of Binjhal, Gond, Mali and Telli.

The paper explores the relatedness of trance mediums to non-human entities and to their non-human agencies, and explores the effectiveness of trance mediums on humans. The paper will reflect on approaches to non-dualistic worldviews.

The Prey of Demons: Perspectives on the Ontology of Human and Non-Human Persons in Gagauz Healing Charms

James A. Kapaló (University College Cork, Ireland)

This paper explores representations of non-human 'demonic' agents in Gagauz narrative healing charms. The Gagauz are a Turkish speaking Orthodox Christian minority dispersed throughout several Balkan and South Eastern European countries. Despite the Orthodox Christian identity of the Gagauz, their indigenous knowledge system recognises a wide range of other 'persons' in the world who directly influence man's wellbeing. Through an analysis of verbal and physical ritual interventions on the part of healers and charmers to counter invasion of the body or 'possession', I will discuss the physical characteristics of personified illness demons, their route in and out of the human body, and their dwelling places.

Charles Taylor has argued that the vulnerability or 'porousness' of the body, the 'prey of demons' is characteristic of the pre-modern self. In this paper, I question this assertion regarding modernity and instead attempt to elaborate the way that multiple modernities may sustain differing understandings of human vulnerabilities to attack by unseen agents. The ritual therapies discussed in this paper, which unlike medicines work with complex social entanglements, are important indicators of vernacular ontologies of the self and the other. Examples in this paper are drawn from Gagauz charming and healing cultures in Bulgaria and Moldova.

Dogs and Humans in the Komi Hunting Worldview

Art Leete (University of Tartu, Estonia)

I attempt to discuss, how and to what extent, vernacular religious ideas are reflected in actual hunting practices of modern Komis. Most of the ethnographies that explore hunting among the Komi people consist of scarce evidence about the dog-hunter relationship. I have conducted fieldwork among the Komis annually since 1996. I have recorded numerous stories that reveal hunters' ideas concerning characteristics that determine good and bad dogs and rules for proper treatment of a dog by a hunter. The context of vernacular beliefs and ethics frames the Komi hunters' way of treatment of their dogs. Data concerning dog-related mythological beliefs can be found randomly in the Komi ethnographic descriptions. Contemporary Komi hunters tell stories that include hints about the relationship between dogs and the so-called supernatural (dogs being mediators between a hunter and forest spirits or messengers from the Other World). Everyday hunting rules are somehow framed or mixed with understanding of the dog as an extraordinary animal. Contemporary Komi hunters seem to treat the dog as a fragmentarily sacred hunting fellow.

Storyworlds and Alternative Realities in the Folklore of the Weretigers among the Khasis

Margaret Lyngdoh (University of Tartu, Estonia)

The Khasis are an ethnic community who inhabit the North Eastern Indian state of Maghalaya. Although today the majority of Khasis are Christian, the indigenous religion, *Niam Tynrai*, remains inextricably linked to the psychology of the community and predisposes an interactive, relational perspective towards the environment. This however, is not a feature that is immediately observable in the urban centres of the community, but can be noticed in the agrarian outskirts and peripheries of the state of Meghalaya. The relational aspect of the Khasi mentality may be expressed in the everyday responses to the environment - a river is admired but it is also feared because it hosts seductive nymphs (*puri*) who lure men and water spirits who drown people (*ksuid*); an impressive block of natural stone is a dwelling for a guardian deity; a cave containing thousands of bats is associated with the tiger spirit - these instances of relationality are natural manifestations of the Khasi religion as it is practiced and experienced.

The tradition of the weretiger, in which humans shift into the being of a tiger as an inherited attribute in their soul essence (*rngiew*), can be found in most parts of the Khasi Hills. The relationship and interaction between human and environment is mediated through the agency of the human-animal beings. This occurs through the awareness of self being projected outside the physical being, into the natural surrounding. More, the weretigers authorise non-human agents (ancestors, tiger deities, spirits of the dead, guardian deities) in their commonplace and everyday interactions with human beings.

This presentation will focus on the Khasi vernacular concepts of human beings and other-than-human object-persons following the new definitions of animism (Harvey 2012, 2013). Animate and inanimate entities “communicate intentionally and act towards

others relationally" and this characteristic qualifies them as "persons" (2013: 125). Khasi epistemology is enacted and made manifest in the vernacular religion of the community, and the relationship between human beings and the natural environment is encoded in indigenous belief.

References:

Harvey, Graham 2012. Things Act: Casual Indigenous Statements about the Performance of Object-Persons. *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief.* Edited by Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk. Sheffield, Bristol, CT: Equinox. 194–210.

Harvey, Graham 2013. *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*. Durham, Bristol, CT: Acumen.

The Deconstruction of Christianity: The Example of the Mukyokai

Sean McKnight (University College Cork, Ireland)

For this proposed paper I will discuss the efforts made by those within the 'Non-Church Movement' (called the Mukyokai) in Japan to remove all traces of Christian denominationalism. More specifically I will focus on the influence of Protestant missionaries on Uchimura Kanzo, the 'founder' of the movement. I will trace, through Uchimura's early days as a Christian, the influence of Protestant missionaries on his views, and his disillusionment with Christianity after traveling to the United States. This journey ultimately lead him to believe that denominationalism was corrupting Christianity at its core, and he sought ways to remove all hierarchies and structures from the worship practices of Christianity in Japan. He felt it was possible for one to live as a Christian without relying on clergy or institutions, so he attempted to return Christianity to what he believed was its original form. Believing that the Protestant Reformation did not go far enough in eliminating hierarchal structures within Christianity, he felt that he needed to take the reformation one step further and remove all intermediaries between humanity and the Divine. To do this he used aspects of Japanese culture (such as Buddhist influences and Bushido) to create a form of Christianity that is wholly Japanese in nature and free from Western domination.

Place Legend about the Origin of a Lake and the Changes in Estonian Kinship Structures

Merili Metsvahi (University of Tartu, Estonia)

In the Estonian Folklore Archives there are about 73 manuscript versions of the legend about the perishing of the building where a marriage between siblings is taking place. In the place of this taboo breaking a lake appears. I have also found data about the written versions of this story in other sources, the earliest among which is a chronicle from 1489.

In my paper I am going to analyse the story in the context of history of familial and social structures (avoiding the term *kinship studies* because this field is based on an unnecessary distinction between the private and the public sphere). My conclusion is that the legend can be best explained in connection with the former matrilineal society structure and the huge social change that was forced on Estonian peasants from the 13th century, when the territory was conquered by patriarchal Catholic Europe.

The history of familial relationships is a truly under researched topic in Estonian scholarship. So far little more has been said than in the territory of Estonia there has always been a patriarchal social organisation. Only during the last five years has some work been published that gives a much more adequate picture of Estonian family history. From the research done by archaeologist Marika Mägi (2009), it has become evident that before the Europeanisation of Estonia, the position of woman was strong and society most probably matrilineal and matrilocal.

Reference:

Mägi, Marika 2009. Abielu, kristianiseerimine ja akulturatsioon. Perekondliku korralduse varasemast ajaloost Eestis. *Ariadne Lõng: Nais- ja Meesuuringute Ajakiri.* ½, 2009. 76–101.

"In This House They Don't Want to Enter": the Reorganisation of Living Spaces among the Birhors of Jharkhand and Odisha

Deborah Nadal (University of Verona, Italy)

The Indian government has defined Birhors as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal group consisting of approximately 10 000 people living as various small communities scattered in Jharkhand and Odisha and also, to a lesser extent, in Chattisgarh and West Bengal. Until the 1970s their lifestyle was primarily nomadic and dependent on the availability of forest game and market trends. In actuality, the Birhor economy was at this time fundamentally based on the hunting of small and medium prey and collecting edible provisions and in particular natural fibres, which could be converted into marketable products. During the Seventies the Indian government started to limit the Birhor people's access to the forest. Consequently their hunting and gathering subsistence was altered, they were pushed into subordinate agricultural and mining labour and their nomadic lifestyle was thereby significantly restricted, not to mention as a symptom of the construction of resettlement colonies in the surrounding areas.

Nowadays, at least in Jharkhand and Odisha, the majority of Birhors live in resettlement colonies where they have received brick houses that they utilise and inhabit but cannot completely appreciate. According to my research, the reason for this discontent lies mainly in their religious feelings and in their cultural perception of living spaces. As a consequence, many of the Birhors I met made considerable changes to their allotted dwelling place in order to adjust it not only from their own cultural concepts but also in service to the requests of the invisible but always present spiritual entities (such as ancestors and tutelary gods) who are deeply welcomed in Birhor habitats. Living in a house where these highly esteemed beings refuse to enter is a source of great sorrow for the Birhor people

and of notable concern for their wellbeing. As a consequence, the act of Birhor people reorganising their living space in the resettlement colonies is vital to the existence of the invisible inhabitants with which they live.

Remaking a Buffalo Sacrifice: Assertions of Indigeneity in a Threatened Environment

Prakruti Ramesh (Aarhus University, Denmark)

I suggest that the Dongria Kondh, an indigenous community in the Niyamgiri Hills of southwest Odisha, India, have invested a site with ritual significance in an attempt to screen it from corporate mining. Piecing together ethnographic insights from my pilot fieldwork with findings from existing literature, I argue that the Dongria Kondh's relationship with a mountain deity has been foregrounded and re-spatialised in their resistance to the proposed mining of the mountain. I am interested in how tradition and ritual are rearticulated, and which practices are transferred from one context to another. Can certain frameworks of discourse – around indigeneity, primitive accumulation, and human rights – be said to elicit such changes?

I am in the process of reformulating my research questions and developing a research design. Five weeks of pilot fieldwork in Odisha have left me with doubts regarding methodology as well as research ethics, as I try to understand my own positioning vis-à-vis the communities with which I hope to engage. Some of the issues I hope to discuss are: how to nuance the debate over tribal isolation/integration; how to describe subaltern agency and resistance without compromising such resistance; and how to look for the ways in which mining and the perceived threat to an environment consolidate certain kinds of folklore and storytelling.

The Post-Human *Uyu*: Adi Entities of the Recently Dead

Claire Scheid (University College Cork, Ireland)

The Adi of the far eastern Himalayan foothills follow an indigenous religion known as Donyi-Polo ('Sun-Moon'). A central tenet of Donyi-Polo is the on-going mediation between the living community and the *uyu,* non- or post-human entities. This paper will examine the roles and actions of post-human *uyu*, manifestations of deceased community members who can be either malevolent or benevolent. Post-human *uyu* can act with or without possession of a host body; in either case, the burning (rather than burial) of the corporeal remains of the dead person can effectively 'kill' the *uyu*. Over the past years, the bodies of several ritual specialists have had to be exhumed and burned because their *uyu* continued to harm the living from beyond the grave; certain marks found on their skeletons are understood to confirm the on-going malice of their post-human *uyu*. Possession of the living by the post-human *uyu* also plays a central role in the judicial system of the Adi: immediately following someone's death, his/her *uyu* will often temporarily come into the body of one still alive and narrate the circumstances of his/her death. This 'death narration' is generally accepted as true and can lead directly to the prosecution of those named as culpable by the post-human *uyu* through its human vehicle. Outsiders who die in Adi territory are also believed to manifest as post-human *uyu*; one popular narrative details the sudden (and English-language) possession of numerous Adi in an isolated village by a group of tourists who had recently died when their jeep went over the mountainside en route to the Tibetan border. (This research is based on fieldwork still in progress in East and West Siang districts, Arunachal Pradesh, India.)

Stranger King, Peacock and Tree. Notes on the Royal Chronicles in Bonai

Uwe Skoda (Aarhus University, Denmark)

The founding myth of the kingdom (*rajya*) of Bonai elaborates on the relationship between the future king arriving as a stranger and autochthonous chiefs as allies or enemies. However, it also includes distinctive roles for two non-human agents (or actants) namely the peacock and the Kadamba tree - both offering protection while the raja is in need of support and both becoming crucial royal symbols afterwards. In this explorative paper I will look at these links in the light of recent theories on non-human agency.

Synty in Finno-Karelian Kalevalaic Poetry, Laments and Yoiks

Eila Stepanova (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* stands in the background of the history of discussions of Finno-Karelian mythology. Because of this, names like Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, Lemminkäinen and the Thunder-God Ukko are the most likely to be mentioned when Finno-Karelian mythology comes up for discussion. *Suuri Synty* – 'Great Synty' – is almost completely unknown. This paper will set out on the tracks of Great Synty. Beginning with the work of Elias Lönnrot, it will offer an overview of the term *synty* and its derivatives to refer to mythic beings, objects and places. The focus will be on uses in kalevalaic poetry of different genres on the one hand and in a different poetic system used for lament poetry and (Karelian) yoiks on the other. The paper will discuss the different categories designated by the term *synty* in these different genres and poetic systems. It will consider how these are similar, how they are different, and how they can inform us about *synty*s and Great Synty in the mythology and belief traditions. This paper will help to illuminate certain archaic features of Finno-Karelian traditions, presenting evidence of their significance to the vernacular culture although they have more often been overlooked or misunderstood in research.

A Living Indigenous Religion in the Contemporary World: the Udmurt Religion in Bashkortostan

Eva Toulouze (University of Tartu, Estonia/ National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, France)

This presentation is focused on an example of indigenous religion which is very much alive in its context. At the north-eastern edge of Bashkortostan there is a compact community of Udmurt living in villages and practicing, on a daily basis, a religion of their own. It is very much alive and I would comment in this presentation, on the basis of my fieldwork, the manifestations of this vitality: the general participation of the whole of the communities in religious practice, including the younger generations, the absence of an articulated ideology behind it, the existence of local peculiarities within general features of the rituals. Moreover, because of the continuity that characterises religious practice throughout the 20th century, these practices have been permanently changing and adapting to new conditions: this may be illustrated by the analysis of the sacrificial priest's costume. Decisions are continually made to cope with the changes in the social environment. I shall in conclusion reflect on the conditions of this vitality – for instance the Muslim environment and the strong rural society – and on the effects of possible pressures from the external environment and especially on the perspectives of the countryside: how do Udmurt compelled to quit their environment come to terms with spiritual life?

The Last Weretigers of Mayong: Vernacular Beliefs about Human-Animal Transformations in Assam

Ülo Valk (University of Tartu, Estonia)

Mayong is a historical area in the Marigaon district of Assam, where the Assamese caste Hindus live in close interaction with the indigenous Tiwa, Karbi and Khasi communities. It is well known in North Eastern India as the 'land of black magic'. Today, more than one hundred semi-professional wizards and healers (*bej*) are practicing in Mayong. Due to new road connections the area, which was once isolated, is now only a one-hour drive away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. By now the area has been to a great extent deforested, with the exception of the small Pabitora wildlife sanctuary next to Mayong with a dense population of rhinos and wild buffalos.

Oral history and narrative traditions of Mayong are rich in stories about hunting magic that are projected back to the period when wild tigers still roamed the area and killed the cattle of the villagers. Several historical *bej*es, such as Shurabej, figure in these legends as heroes who were able to control and catch wild tigers due to their magical skills (*bejali*). Another recurrent topic in these legends is transformation of humans into tigers and other animals, which can be a voluntary action of a *bej* who goes hunting in the shape of a predator, or an involuntary metamorphosis as a victim of bewitchment. Several legends discuss the magic means of transformation, the dramatic consequences if something goes wrong, the distinctive features of weretigers in contrast to ordinary animals and the last cases when someone had practiced this dangerous magic. The paper discusses attitudes towards magic in these legends and their generic traits of blending the storyworld with social and physical reality. It is based on fieldwork conducted in Mayong from 2008 until 2014.

Categories of Animistic Spirits in the Vernacular Religion of Votians: Vocabulary and Comparison of Dominant Notions

Ergo-Hart Västrik (University of Tartu, Estonia)

Among 47 ethnic minority groups who have received the official status of indigenous small-numbered people of the Russian Federation the Votians are one of the smallest. According to the latest all-Russian census in 2010, only 64 people identified themselves as Votians, which is the result of a long-standing lack of recognition by state officials of Imperial Russia as well as of the nationalities policies of the Soviet Union. Votians gained the status of indigenous minority group of North-West Russia in 2008 as a result of protests against the construction work of Ust'-Luga multi-purpose seaport, which currently endangers the last villages where the Votian language and ethnic identity have survived up to now.

Votian beliefs and customs have been studied since the scholarly community of early ethnographers, linguists and geographers discovered this minority group at the end of the 18th century. The Votians have particularly attracted the attention of Finnish and Estonian researchers who searched for aspects of past culture they presumed to have disappeared in their home country but were still observable among kindred peoples.

There is also another side to this coin: systematic fieldtrips of Estonian linguists and folklorists to Votian villages since World War II have eventually supported Votian self-identification as a separate ethnic group. The contribution of professor Paul Ariste (1905–1990) in studying Votian language and folklore was crucial in this respect. He was especially interested in mythological vocabulary, denominations of animistic spirits and other beings of vernacular religion, as well as belief narratives related to them. Therefore, Ariste's manuscript collection entitled *Votian Ethnology* and his publications provide rich material for the study of vernacular Votian religion.

The corpus of Votian belief narratives contains a variety of texts about human beings' encounters with nature spirits and animistic entities related to domestic buildings. Because of the natural conditions and means of livelihood that were related, as well as agriculture and cattle breeding, fishing, hunting, berry and mushroom picking, one can find, for example, many belief legends and memorates about water and forest spirits. The category of earth spirits remains, however, quite vague and polymorphic as these supernatural entities were mentioned in belief narratives together with other nature spirits. Household spirits have their specific vocabulary, which allows them to be analysed as a separate category. In addition to narratives about supernatural encounters these spirits were addressed in incantations and rituals.

This presentation focuses on vernacular knowledge about various categories of nature and household spirits in Votian folklore. My aim is to delineate terminology related to animistic spirits and map the most popular notions related to different types of spirits. Close reading of folklore texts will be implemented on the material recorded over the course of approximately one hundred years.

Human Rights and Human/ Non-Human Relationships

Gillian Watts (University College Cork, Ireland)

This paper aims to ask the question: Is it a human right to maintain/initiate/develop human/non- human relationships?

Here my discussion focuses mainly on human relationships with plants (and plant spirits) and also on human relationships with entities that might be called 'spirits' 'guides' or 'ancestral beings', some of which may take the form of animals, plants or non-animate objects. I elucidate through examples of shamanism, which grounds itself in the reality of a necessary mediation with other worlds populated by non-human beings. These beings are a source of information and solace. I will place this example within the context of 'indigenous' worldviews, and within the urban late- modern contexts where contemporary *ayahuasca* shamanism is a growing movement. This late-modern example interweaves with the Brazilian *ayahuasca* religion Santo Daime, which has over the last decade challenged several governments on human rights issues regarding the religious use of the *ayahuasca* or/Daime sacrament in the Santo Daime church. Is it a human right to have a relationship with the plant spirit of the *ayahuasca* and indeed the *ayahuasca* itself?

I will also highlight the growing movement of people who hear voices either with or without a 'shamanic' interpretation of their experiences and discuss their important human rights concerns.

I argue that there are Human Rights issues in these areas that may be complex and counter to prevailing scientific materialism. However, in some cases it is evident that these rights can be shown to be supported by the text of the UN Charter.

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Captions to cover illustrations

Front cover:

Above, from left to right:

1) A Khasi woman with a child and a puppy (Mawbri village, Bhoi Lymbong, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, 2009). Photo by Ülo Valk.
2) A Komi hunter from Vologda province. (Postcard published by Imperatorskij Moskovskij i Rumjancevskij muzej, 1914.)
3) Vepsian people at the Our Lady of Vladimir village festival (Ladv village, Leningrad region, 2009). Photo by Madis Arukask.

Below, from left to right:

1) Girls of the Mising tribe (Tajik-gaon near Gogamukh, Eastern Lakhimpur district, Assam, 2009). Photo by Ülo Valk.
2) Pilgrimage to the holy Lum Sohpetbneng Hill (Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, 2009). Photo by Ülo Valk.

Back cover:

Above, from left to right:

1) Village chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas (Gomorovichi village, Leningrad region, 2013). Photo by Madis Arukask.
2) A Sámi family in northern Norway around 1900. (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Sami_Family,_Norway_WDL2626.png)
3) Khasi vernacular architecture (Raid Khatar Nonglyngdoh, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, 2012). Photo by Ülo Valk.

Below, from left to right:

1) A cabin and a storehouse in Komi hunting grounds (Kulymdin district, Komi Republic, 2003). Photo by Art Leete.
2) Sacred corner in an Izhorian home (Säätinä (Slobodka) village, Leningrad region, 2012). Photo by Ergo-Hart Västrik.
3) A Vepsian woman lamenting (Yashozero village, Prionezhsky district, Republic of Karelia, 2005). Photo by Madis Arukask.