



# Folklore

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# **Folklore**

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**Editorial address:**

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore  
Vanemuise 42–235  
51003 Tartu  
Estonia  
phone:            +372 737 7740  
fax:                +372 737 7706  
e-mail:            folklore@folklore.ee  
home page:      <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

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Authors

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## INTRODUCTION

***Liisi Laineste***

*Senior Research Fellow*

*Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia*

*e-mail: liisi.laineste@folklore.ee*

Foodways is an area of research that has not always been as prosperous as it is now. It was only in the 1960s that the first dissertations on food research were defended and first syllabus courses held at universities (see Bringéus 2013). Preparing and eating food were taken as given: so basic that they did not need to be talked about, and not serious enough for academic study. By now, the picture has changed beyond recognition, as culinary culture has risen into the limelight of interdisciplinary interest. And it is not only in the academy where food-related issues are more visible than before: restaurants do not hide their preparation processes behind closed doors, whole shelves are dedicated to cookbooks and other culinary literature in bookstores, food is on people's minds and in conversations as they take photographs of their dishes and post them on social media, organise social gatherings and select their daily food according to their special diet requirements. This collection of articles represents the interdisciplinarity in a modest way, bringing together ethnologists, folklorists, and linguists from Eastern Europe to reflect on their data connected to the history and present day of culinary habits of the region and – for comparison and etymological insight – also beyond.

The special issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, dedicated to culinary culture, consists of eight articles, most of them dealing with food culture in the Eastern European context, but also Central Europe (Trieste), and wandering even towards the Far East, in the analysis of Chinese food-related symbolism. It is, above all, motivated by the fact that food research in Eastern Europe is not yet as abundant as in the West, and points of comparison are welcome in this international and interdisciplinary field of study.

The special issue came about as part of the cooperation project between Estonian and Polish Academies of Science, *Communication Styles: Developing a Cross-Cultural Theoretical and Methodological Framework* (2016–2018), with the general aim to present a novel model for studying cultural communication

styles, starting from the assumptions proposed by sociologists and business/marketing researchers, and developing these in order to adjust them to the needs of linguistics and folkloristics. Culinary culture is seen here as one possible way of communicating with the surroundings: after all, what we consume, how we acquire it, who prepares it, who eats first, etc., is a form of communication that is rich with meaning (Stajcic 2013). The project sets out to provide new knowledge on communication styles typical of particular cultures and to describe the fundamentals of stylistic diversity both on the individual and collective levels.

The first part of the special issue deals with commensality and its relation to identity in the present day. Bringing examples from a number of Eastern European countries, the authors show how reinventing food traditions and stressing their communicative aspect may entail anti-mass-consumption attitudes and celebrate people's creativity in reinforcing their identities through their eating habits and inclinations of taste. The second part of the special issue shows how ideas about food and eating influence our daily culinary practices and vice versa – how our eating habits leave a trace in our language.

**Ester Bardone** and **Anu Kannike** talk about temporary venues of consumption – so-called pop-up restaurants – and their effect on the dimensions of public and private, professional and amateur, business and leisure in commensality. Their study targets recent examples through participant observation in different parts of Estonia and through in-depth semi-structured interviews (from 2011 to 2014) with the restaurant/event managers. The authors pinpoint the motives, visions, and practices of the pop-up restaurants and other food-related events, showing that social communication is valued as highly as the food itself on such occasions. Equally important is the insight that pop-up restaurants introduce dynamic spaces of gastronomic innovation and individual creativity to the often conservative culinary culture.

By revisiting the concept of nostalgia, **Daša Ličen** addresses contemporary restaurant culture in Trieste, which looks back into the Habsburg era in search for an authentic culinary identity. She explains how history can motivate quite separate and unique foodways in an area with strong Italian influences (and a lack of evident Slavic ones): evidence of nostalgia for the imperial Habsburg era is visible in the frequent use of mustard, *cren* (horseradish), sauerkraut, etc. – elements quite unknown to the Italian cuisine. For her fieldwork, she visited the typical culinary topoi of Habsburg nostalgia, among them restaurants, bars, and cafés, and talked to their owners and local as well as foreign visitors to find out what appeals to the crowd and what is behind the success of such establishments. She stresses that the “authenticity” of those places is not so much a result of the actual historic precision but rather tells us about the present day and future of Triestine cuisine dictated by gourmet authorities (owners of restaurants and cookbook writers) who construct this image and carefully choose what fits in.

Strong nostalgic feelings are also present in the Estonian example: a study of cookbooks that aim to revive old cooking traditions (baking bread, cooking with ecologically pure ingredients, linking culinary traditions with seasonal rhythm of life, etc.). This is the way in which the “Estonianness” of foodways is constructed in the present day. **Liisi Laineste** underlines what Ličen points out in her article, namely that nostalgia says considerably more about contemporary social configurations than about the past; it defines the identity of the people who crave for the past. She suggests that the politics of food has plenty to do with the creation of nation-states and that contemporary Estonian identity relies greatly on the legacy from the first republic of the 1920s–1930s – and so does contemporary Estonian culinary art. A longing look into the past stimulates and inspires ideas of integration, nostalgia for the “good old days”, a longing for nobility that Estonians as a nation never had, and last but not least – the revival of national ideals after a long and difficult period under totalitarian regime. In her analysis on recent (multilingual) cookbooks, Laineste shows how the authors of these books re-write history in a way that brings culinary nostalgia and authenticity into the discourse of national identity, and through that contributes to the process of nation-building. The cookbooks convey nostalgia, stepping closer to realising the ideas of authenticity, tradition, and national cuisine.

**Ivanka Petrova**, who writes about baking bread in contemporary Bulgaria, addresses another aspect of “authentic cooking” in the article. Petrova presents the narrative strategies of the bread-makers, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage, studying the self-presentation of the members of the organization called the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv in April 2015. The strategy of adding emotion to the maker-buyer relationship is skilfully used to create an intimate, authentic atmosphere that challenges similar products made through mass-production. The small bakeries do not just sell bread: they sell emotion; they sell a story.

**Anastasiya Fiadotava** writes about family lore concerning humorous tales about cooking traditions within families. By comparing these to cooking-related humour found on the internet, she concludes that their forms, topics, and functions differ greatly and reflect separate aspects of Belarusian foodlore. The longitudinal data shows that jokes themselves have changed, but the motivation for the jokes has remained largely the same. As cooking is still a family activity in Belarus where she conducted her fieldwork, it gives a much-needed insight into family life, gender roles, and values associated with domesticity. As a sidenote, she also points convincingly at the differences of oral and internet data, claiming that it is impossible to mechanically extrapolate any conclusions made regarding studying internet jokes to the dimension of humorous family anecdotes, and vice versa.

Verging further away from European culinary traditions, **Dorota Brzowska** shows what is universal and what is culture-specific in eating by purposefully analysing an exotic example, that of China, as compared to the previous, mainly Eastern European ones. Her case study is based on literary examples, first and foremost the novel *Peony in Love* by Lisa See, a Chinese American author. She lists the various things food can symbolise and concludes that not just the basic need for nutrition but beliefs and emotions are crucial in making the decision of what to eat and how.

**Ene Vainik** writes about the crossroads of emotion and taste, aiming to provide a much-needed template for the further studies of other languages and/or cultural comparisons of different languages with regard to food lexicons. The bitterness and sweetness of emotions offers a good example of how emotions are conceptualised in more tangible, approachable terms and what are the etymological, cultural, and evolutionary roots to such a conceptualisation. She shows convincingly that emotional connection is more deeply rooted than was thought earlier, and thus makes a highly useful contribution to the study of emotion and taste.

Last but not least, **Władysław Chłopicki** tackles the subject of translating menus. He asks whether it is the inherent untranslatability of such texts that sometimes makes menus so illegible for cultural outsiders, or should an experienced translator always be capable of overcoming the barrier and generating an understandable translation. The frequent assumption that customers do not care about the translation as long as the food tastes good does not end well; instead, it produces unwanted humorous – or even worse than that – discouraging results for the customer. Chłopicki asserts that the four principles to be followed in translating menus or other culture-sensitive texts are comprehensibility, completeness, economy, and carefulness, with comprehensibility being given the priority over the others.

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# EATING OUT AND IN BETWEEN: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE POP-UP RESTAURANT SCENE IN ESTONIA

***Ester Bardone***

*Lecturer*

*Department of Ethnology, Institute of Cultural Research*

*University of Tartu, Estonia*

*e-mail: ester.bardone@ut.ee*

***Anu Kannike***

*Senior Research Fellow*

*Estonian National Museum, Estonia*

*e-mail: anu.kannike@erm.ee*

**Abstract:** The article focuses on a particular form of consumption in contemporary culture – pop-up restaurants – from the ethnological viewpoint, drawing on our on-going research in Estonia. We trace the emergence of a new phenomenon over the past couple of years, examining a variety of temporary food establishments in urban as well as rural settings. As Estonian food culture is becoming more and more hybrid, pop-ups reflect global trends in the gourmet foodscape – an increased attention to environmental consciousness, local specialities and authentic experiences as opposed to industrial or mainstream restaurant food. The analysis aims to examine how pop-up restaurants challenge borders between private and public, business and entertainment. Creative and experimental practices of lifestyle entrepreneurs and reflective consumers in such temporary restaurants create new liminal spaces where innovative ideas about food, the home, and community are negotiated. By extending the borders of the conventional restaurant or the home into public space, the pop-up restaurants create spaces of negotiation between the private and the public and new forms of commensality.

**Keywords:** festivals, food culture, local communities, pop-up cafés, restaurants

## INTRODUCTION: THE POP-UP PHENOMENON

In contemporary Western society a new phenomenon in food culture – the pop-up restaurant – challenges the borders between private and public consumption. This article traces the emergence of this phenomenon in Estonia in

2011–2014, examining a variety of temporary food establishments in urban as well as rural settings.

A number of recent studies have argued for regarding consumption as a spatial activity. Increasingly transient and mobile lifestyles and new technologies have resulted in diverse novel uses of public space. Temporary venues for consumption have been among the most common manifestations of this phenomenon in recent years. Pop-ups are micro-events that are put up at the kind of venues where people “collect as many experiences as possible” (Fernandes & Sharma 2013). Thus the pop-up phenomenon is closely related to the ideologies of the “experience economy”, which advocate business services to create “experiencescapes” in order to engage clients’ senses and to surprise them with novel settings and ideas (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Jönsson 2002; Löfgren & Willim 2005). There is a growing range of public and private spaces catering for the needs of the “time-starved consumer on the move” (Bishop & Williams 2012: 68). Many pop-up shops, restaurants, performances, etc. reflect the hybrid nature of culture, and “explicitly offer new consumer experiences by blurring the usual boundaries between eating, theatre, music and art” (Bishop & Williams 2012: 213). More and more people work in a flexible manner both in terms of location and time (part-time jobs, home enterprises, etc.) and take up self-employment or a temporary project in addition to or instead of their present occupation as a lifestyle choice. The actors of temporary phenomena are increasingly multi-disciplinary.

The pop-up phenomenon points to the blurring boundaries between public and private, professional and amateur, business and leisure, concerning the use of both space and time. Especially the border between the private and the public becomes increasingly ambiguous in pop-up events, giving rise to “states of liminality” (Zukin 1991). As we know from anthropological research, liminal practices are distinct from the routines and rules of everyday life, creating in-betweenness in a spatial, social or cultural sense (see Rapport & Overing 2000: 229–236). Sharon Zukin argues that liminal space is a growing characteristic of the contemporary city in which localism, or neighbourhood urbanism, has been transformed into postmodern transitional space. Liminal spaces are ambiguous and ambivalent, they slip between global market and local place, between public use and private value, between work and home, between commerce and culture (Zukin 1991: 222).

By examining four different cases of pop-up restaurants in Estonia, this article aims to give an overview of the emerging landscape of temporary eating establishments in Estonia and study how the innovative practices of entrepreneurs challenge borders between private and public, business and entertainment, giving rise to new liminal spaces in urban and rural settings.

## THE POP-UP RESTAURANT

In this study the term ‘restaurant’ is used in a broad sense, not just as an enterprise where food is prepared by professional cooks, but as a public eating place, including temporary cafés, pubs, bars, etc. The pop-up restaurants, sometimes also called supper clubs,<sup>1</sup> are temporary eating establishments that may operate from a private home, although equally they may emerge in varied locations in public space (especially in bigger cities) and in festival settings. Historically the temporary geography of food consumption has existed in the form of, for instance, street food markets. However, in the case of the pop-up restaurant one may say that the temporary use is not just an instrumental but also an aesthetic decision – the performance of dining may redefine the everyday meanings of the social space used at different levels (cf. Harris 2014). The temporary performances enacted in pop-up restaurants likewise fit into the experience economy schema as they create transitory spaces for new affective experiences that emerge from various forms of interaction and participation. The latter, in turn, challenge the habitual borders between the private and public in the restaurant scene (cf. Noorani & Blencowe & Brigstocke 2013: 115).

The pop-up dining concept has been developed in various ways, extending the conventional restaurant/café experience into streets, parks, museums, shops, art galleries, private living rooms and gardens. Sometimes it may take the form of “guerrilla hospitality”, leading to the emergence of pop-up venues in dilapidated buildings and ruins in cities (see Lugosi, P. & Bell & Lugosi, K. 2010). Underground pop-up restaurants became popular in Great Britain and Australia in the first decade of the twenty-first century but actually existed well before in the United States and Cuba. The British pop-up restaurant scene is described as follows:

*Occurring in unusual places – an abandoned shop, a boathouse, a garden or a hired location – it is ‘pop-up’ because it is temporary, either in terms of the space or the amount of time it will remain open. Frequently the chefs are professionals and the waiting staff experienced. Prices tend to be higher. But it is a great opportunity for young chefs without their own restaurants to showcase their food. (Rodgers 2011: 18)*

Thus, a pop-up restaurant may also be a kind of start-up for young professionals to gain exposure for their skills in the field of hospitality as they seek investors and attention pursuant to opening a restaurant or another culinary establishment.

Pop-up dining is likewise a good example of how lines between public and domestic spaces become blurred. In many cases pop-up restaurants operate

in a private home, garden or as an extension of the domestic space into the street. They may be legal, semi-legal or even illegal. Supper clubs, also characterised as “paid dinner parties” (Williams 2009) held in private homes, are attractive among foodies because they are anarchic and adventurous and at the same time based on mutual trust. Supper clubs provide intimate encounters in somebody’s private space while being at the same time social events where guests can interact and share their love for food and thirst for the new (Tyler 2009). Furthermore, novel forms of domesticity and hospitality are emerging in contemporary culture, which are looking for authentic tastes and at the same time intimacy that is often lost in anonymous urban consumption (Russo 2012).

Additionally, the virtual space of the new media, especially social media (for example weblogs, Facebook), has facilitated the development of the pop-up restaurant movement. The information can be spread quickly, yet among selected people, and no investment in advertising is required, giving amateur cooks the chance to enter a scene that was previously occupied by professionals (de Solier 2013). Thus, the pop-up phenomenon may also be related to the democratisation of contemporary foodscapes in which consumers want to actively participate in making their food and sharing it with others in settings alternative to traditional restaurants (Johnston & Baumann 2010).

In Estonia the term ‘pop-up’ was taken into use relatively recently, mostly in connection with temporary design and fashion shops, and cafés, mainly of alternative or charitable character.<sup>2</sup> However, from the academic viewpoint the local pop-up phenomenon has been discussed briefly, mainly in the context of temporary urbanism / urban architecture (Kurik 2013). Although temporary eating establishments in public or domestic spaces are not a new phenomenon in Estonia (for example, at traditional fairs, markets or streets), the idea and concept of the pop-up restaurant arrived here just a few years ago.

We aim to discuss some aspects of pop-up restaurants as a multifaceted phenomenon, trying to outline novel features of these establishments in the context of Estonian food culture and the ways pop-up restaurants are positioned in the ambivalent zone between the private and the public. We mainly focus on activities of the hosts of the restaurants and their services. Through participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews (from 2011 to 2014) we established a personal rapport with people responsible for various pop-up establishments and aimed to pinpoint the motives, visions, and practices of the restaurateurs. Due to the limited character of these restaurants both in time and space: once a year in Kärkla on Hiiumaa Island), irregularly in Uus Maailm (New World, a subdistrict in Tallinn), approximately once a month in the case of the Tallinn Supper Club, and from a couple of times a month to several times a week in the case of Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm in Rapla County (depending on the season and visitor interest), short-term fieldwork was inevitable. Yet, in

all cases (except in the case of Kärđla) it involved several visits: first as clients documenting the overall atmosphere of the event, the specific setting, menu, and communication patterns of the establishment, and introducing our aims to the hosts, and, secondly, for interviews. Apart from the interviews and fieldwork observations, we used as our sources websites and Facebook accounts, weblogs as well as texts and photographs in the printed press. Although the feedback from the customers of pop-up restaurants is of great analytical importance, it remained beyond the scope of this study, as it would have required different methods for data collection and analysis.

## **KÄRDĻA CAFÉ DAY**

Food festivals have been an essential ingredient of culinary tourism as well as destination branding. In recent years pop-up cafés and other temporary eating establishments have become increasingly popular as part of tourism destination marketing as well as an expression of urban vernacular creativity that enables individuals to re-design the use and meaning of public space. The Kärđla Café Day, organised annually since 2007, is the oldest and best-known pop-up food event in Estonia. In recent years it has become one of the top summer festivals, attracting huge crowds of visitors, mostly tourists from the mainland. In the centre of this small island of 8000 inhabitants, “the host of a small café has to calculate upon a thousand guests per day, and that of a medium-sized café – two or three thousand” (Rudi 2013). It is also the largest pop-up event in Estonia in terms of space, totally transforming the habitual patterns of movement, communication, and consumption in the township’s streets, parks, the seaside, and private gardens. Recently, the café day has extended over the whole island with pre- and after-café (café on the day before and after the main event) in different villages, ports or museums.

The event was initially seen by the organisers as a revitalisation of a local tradition: workers from the Kärđla Textile Factory were among the first Estonians to start coffee drinking regularly in the mid-nineteenth century; the fashion spread quickly and the people of Kärđla became known as “coffee pots” (*kohvilähkrid*) (see Kohvilähkrid). On the first café day sixteen cafés were set up in private gardens and public places not related to dining (the city government building, the church, the museum, the port). Project leader Ere Naat described the event as a “café farce” that would enable people to “take a look at the strata of history and culture of Kärđla through the tradition of ‘coffee pots’” (Pulk 2007).

First set up by the local tourism organisation and now by the Kärđla Café Day NGO, it has merged the promotion of the island as a tourist destination

with the spread of knowledge of local history and traditions. Helgi Põllo, research director of the Hiiumaa Museum and history counsellor to the event, states that it is “a conscious valuation of traditions and cultural heritage” alongside other analogous enterprises, such as folklore festivals, village days, etc., thereby contributing to “the strength and sustainability of the identity of the community” (Põllo 2010).

The event has a permanent organisation committee which chooses about fifteen entrepreneurs, NGOs or just families or groups of friends from among the many applicants to set up a temporary café. All the cafés are supposed to have a theme reflected in the menu, decoration, and entertainment programme. Some themes only occur once, while others run through the ten-year history of the event, like cafés in historical or nostalgic styles that have an educational component: The Barons’ Veranda, displaying a nineteenth-century noble atmosphere, is decorated like a century-old classroom, some cafés resemble a village tavern or even a Soviet-style bus station. Another permanent theme is that of the sea, coastal life, and the Baltic Sea region. Living on the island is supposed not only to shape the lifestyle, but also the mindset of the Hiiumaa people. Openness to foreign influence, hospitality and flexibility, as well as living “in accordance to the rhythms of nature” are values associated with the islanders and are considered worthy of preservation according to local cultural leaders (Põllo & Kokovkin 2007). Caring about the community and one’s neighbours is also a part of the Kärđla Café Day ideology: a number of cafés have supported charities or communal projects (the local hospital, youth centre, people with special needs, renovation of a historical lighthouse, etc.) (see in detail: Hiiumaa kohvikutepäevad; Kärđla kohvikutepäev).

Over the years the Kärđla Café Day has transformed from an improvised local event consisting of home cafés into a large festival orchestrated to promote not only Kärđla, but the whole island as a tourist destination. The pompous opening ceremony is now held in the main square and on several occasions the former president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, opened the event as a guest of honour. The comparison of the names and programmes of the pop-up cafés over the years reveals a turn towards more cosmopolitan and trendy menus and a shift from traditional cafés and restaurants towards multi-dimensional performance arenas with concerts, workshops, children’s events, TV and radio broadcasts, and so on. Another noticeable tendency that emerged some years ago is the increasing localisation of food in some cafés, meaning that one finds on the menu adjectives like ‘local’, ‘ecological’ or ‘natural’, echoing the global turn towards “the holy trinity of seasonal, organic and local” (Baggini 2014: 29).

The example of café Bella Rosa illustrates the changes in the character of the pop-up event quite vividly. Ten years ago it started as a family café, describing itself as an intimate domestic garden café:

*In a small and cozy home garden we are waiting for you with good coffee, tasty cakes, mushroom pies, [...] grandmother's currant drink, nice company and good spirits. If it rains, we give you shelter next to the rustling fire in the fireplace. If the weather is sunny, you can enjoy the beauty of the flower garden, good music and the adorable smell of roses.*  
(Café Bella Rosa 2007)

By 2013 the concept and image of the café had acquired a more cosmopolitan and professional character:

*Bella Rosa is a piece of Italy in the small backyard of a home in Vabaduse Street. [...] guests can enjoy fine Italian music and a nice atmosphere. As a family business, Bella Rosa cares about its family members and café guests. We are equally caring to the workers in coffee, cocoa, tea, and sugar plantations. That's why we use Fairtrade products in our café. In Bella Rosa, you will find le persone in amore, temperamento come italia, un grande menù and la musica bella!* (Café Bella Rosa 2013)

In 2013 the personnel consisted of forty people: relatives, neighbours, friends, and friends of friends. Although the garden was well groomed, the overall atmosphere was similar to a mainstream commercial restaurant terrace anywhere in Europe. Despite the efforts of the hosts, the place was overcrowded and the waiters overwhelmed with work. Here, the quiet domestic arena was transformed into a buzzing public space of consumption with professional service. Yet, in some other cases (for example, a nearby vegetarian café) the one-day-entrepreneurs had managed to create a cosy and intimate atmosphere where visitors could sit on kitchen chairs or on a rag carpet on the lawn and feel as though they were visiting a friend. The borders of the home became porous with domestic practices extending into the garden and the stretch of street in front of the house.

Although café organisers are supposed to demonstrate their knowledge of local history traditions, actually few pop-ups serve local traditional food. In 2013 there were two cafés of the kind – Hiiukala fish café, which opened a traditional fishermen's inn at Kärkla harbour (see Fig. 1), and one in a neighbouring village specialising in nineteenth-century food and mixing coastal and small town traditions. This is somewhat surprising, considering that over the last years major initiatives (largely supported by the EU LEADER programme) have been implemented in Hiiumaa with the aim of strengthening ties between local food producers and local consumers, promoting the sustainability of the community and healthy eating through the “from farm to pot” initiative (including the organisation of cooking seminars and workshops, etc.).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1.** The “fishermen’s inn” at Kärddla harbour. Kärddla Café Day, 2 August 2013.  
*Photograph by Ester Bardone.*

By the seventh year of the Café Day both the guests and organisers had become aware of the changes in the character of the event. The organisers tried to avoid the overcrowded feeling by scattering the cafés around the town. Yet, most visitors did not enjoy the day in an everyday manner in one café or restaurant; rather, like us, they tried to visit all of them, carefully following the orientation map and tasting a little bit here and there. Therefore, Kärddla was full of ‘processions’ moving from one attractive spot to another. Public and private spaces were turned into performance stages and united in the spatial structure of a major festival. At the same time the clear focus of the organisers on promoting local heritage and keeping the size, structure and quality of the event under control has prevented the Kärddla Café Day from becoming just another mainstream summer show.

The success of Kärddla has inspired several other communities in Estonia to adopt the same format in order to celebrate local heritage and/or revitalise local community life and attract tourists.<sup>4</sup> This is part of a global trend of place marketing, in which food plays an important role. Food is used to promote re-discovering and strengthening of the community as well as promoting the place through varied forms of consumption, as is the case with similar (food) festival performances elsewhere in Europe.

The Kärddla Café Day has developed from a spontaneous local initiative into a professionally orchestrated and partly commercialised place-marketing event. Here the pop-up phenomenon has not only extended domesticity into the

public space, but also brought entrepreneurship into private homes and gardens. The structure and logistics of the event enable the visitors to participate in the creation of a special dynamic and communal spirit in urban spaces. The variety of temporary enterprises gives the clients an opportunity to experience the local milieu and traditions simultaneously with global- and urban-style settings and food.

## **RESTAURANT DAY IN THE UUS MAAILM DISTRICT**

The Restaurant Day, originally invented in Finland in 2011, is an event intended to promote and celebrate food culture and commensality with no professional or profit intentions. The event has become global, transforming city spaces all over the world four times a year.<sup>5</sup> The character of the event is anti-bureaucratic and anti-hierarchical; it promotes creativity, cultural diversity, and civic initiative.

In February 2012 an Estonian-Finnish family of artists living in Uus Maailm district near Tallinn city centre was the first to import the Restaurant Day to Estonia, setting up a home restaurant called Savolax in their living room for one day. Apart from the Restaurant Day in Helsinki, they also mentioned other events that promoted organic and local food, home-made goods and recycling as their sources of inspiration. They served Savonian (a historical province in the east of Finland) regional food for about thirty people, mainly people from the neighbourhood, although there were also some visitors from Finland. Since then they have repeated this event a couple of times on restaurant days and during neighbourhood festivals in the back garden of their house. The family was satisfied with the outcome:

**Kirsi:** *In one word, very positive, actually it was quite a hard day, but at the same time it makes you so happy. It gives the energy that pushes you to do it again.*

**Anu:** *Not the profit?*

**Marko:** *No, rather, in winter we calculated that we did not even get the electricity expenses back, maybe just the food bills. And now in summer it was so that we got most of the expenses covered, but we didn't count our own work.*

**Kirsi:** *So it's really rather fun and a hobby at the moment.* (Interview on 13 June 2012)

A year after the first Restaurant Day in Helsinki, the Uus Maailm Society, to which Kirsi and Marko belong, introduced the event in their neighbourhood.

The anti-hierarchical and community-building ethos was clearly voiced by the organisers: “Such enterprises manifest our attitude against bureaucracy and mass consumption” (Interview on 13 June 2012). Some pop-up restaurants were half-illegal; for example, the temporary cafés in the basement and garden of the Uus Maailm Society had no permission to sell alcohol, and the sanitary conditions certainly left to be desired. But one of the main organisers, Erko, stated: “The main aim for us is to have fun” (Interview on 13 June 2012).

As an independent event, the Restaurant Day in Uus Maailm was organised in May 2012 and 2013, later on some pop-up cafés have been opened during the annual district festival in September. When we visited the event in 2012, several pop-up food establishments operated on the borderlands of the public and the private: a street in front of a house, a private garden or backyard, public green areas and new communal spaces like the Uus Maailm garden where herbs and vegetables are grown. In one case, a pop-up café was set up in a first floor flat. In this case visitors did not enter the café; rather, access to food and drink was by climbing a ladder and visitors were served through an open window. Another café sold home-made burgers through a ground floor window. These practices follow the slogan of the Uus Maailm Society: “Home starts in the street”. Thus, we are dealing with conscious expansion of homeliness and the blurring of the strict borders between the home and the public space, domesticating common areas. For one day, marginal or impersonal public spaces became arenas in which to celebrate communality and locality (see Fig. 2).

In these pop-up restaurants playfulness and fantasy were important, and the quality of the guests’ experience depended on their ability to play along or improvise with the hosts. The pop-up places were mobile both in space and time: one of the cafés opened in a basement and was later moved to the garden; operating times did not correspond to the day’s schedule announced on the Restaurant Day Facebook page but were flexible. Opening depended on the time the hosts woke up and when they went shopping for the ingredients; closing time was when the food was sold out or the chefs wanted to take a break.

By ignoring standards of professional planning or service the hosts of pop-up restaurants emphasised an informal and homely atmosphere. Food seemed to be rather a means of socialising than an aim in itself. From the culinary viewpoint ‘nostalgia food’ (grandma-style pies and biscuits, hamburgers, Baltic sprat sandwiches with vodka, pancakes) dominated, but there was also exotic food and drink (for example Indian curry, chai) popular among the local young bohemians and spiritually minded guests and New Age fans. However, whereas in Helsinki numerous ethnic minorities were present, introducing their food and culture, this was not the case in Tallinn.

Unlike the annual Uus Maailm Festival, which attracts visitors from all over Tallinn (where pop-up restaurants are one of the many elements of the



**Figure 2.** *Restaurant Day in the Uus Maailm district. Kirsi and Marko from restaurant Savolax. Tallinn, 19 May 2012. Photograph by Anu Kannike.*

event alongside street markets, concerts, playgrounds, etc.), the Restaurant Day mainly attracted younger local families with children. Here, it was specifically the temporary and performative character of restaurants that enabled their hosts to enjoy a different role for one day, contributing to the community building goal. There were no long-term projects associated with these pop-ups:

**Kirsi:** *Yes, to establish a restaurant as a full-time job, then perhaps the joy would vanish. Such a sweet thing and if it became a real job...*

**Anu:** *So you prefer the pop-up principle?*

**Kirsi:** *Yes, then it would still have the energy, the freshness, like, let's think again what we could do this time. Otherwise, when we did it every day, it might follow very much the same path.*

**Anu:** *Routine?*

**Kirsi:** *Yes, routine, then the fresh energy would disappear quicker. We would rather surprise people once. One day is really very good, you work hard one day, and then it's over in a day, and you are happy, at the moment it suits us very well. (Interview on 13 June 2012)*

The bohemian approach to public space as a common 'home', which manifested itself during the Restaurant Day, is not totally unproblematic. Some locals have voiced critical attitudes towards noisy and unruly behaviour in the streets and the lack of control over alcohol consumption during the Restaurant Day, revealing different understandings of the borders of privacy, homeliness, and communality.

Although the Restaurant Day movement has not yet gained wider ground in Estonia, similar temporary food establishments can be seen at community festivals elsewhere. For example, in May 2014–2017 a special Courtyard Café Day was organised during the Kalamaja Days Festival in Tallinn. The spatial structure, idea, and overall atmosphere of the event was very similar to that of the global restaurant days with a detailed orientation map, pop-up restaurants or cafés serving vegetarian or exotic food, support for global or local charity causes, all accompanied by concerts, theatre performances, sports competitions, arts and crafts workshops, and second-hand sales (Hoovikohvikud). Compared with other similar pop-up events, the social and community-building dimension of the event was more pronounced – for example, one café hosted a public discussion on the planning of a local street, some pop-up events collected funds for local jobseekers, and people of all social groups came together for a common dinner, sharing food at a 120-metre table.

All in all, the Restaurant Day in Uus Maailm is an anti-bureaucratic and community-building event that aims to democratise the use of public space and domesticate the streets, parks, and common gardens, etc., through carnivalesque practices. Playfulness and the enjoyment of the participants is of primary importance for the organisers and the main attractive element for visitors. Food underlines the democratic character of the event, offering experience of homemade dishes and more familiar regional cuisines alongside other ethnic tastes. In this case the food serves as a vehicle for social bonding and open commensality rather than an aim in itself – the social experience predominates over the culinary experience and locality is created by people who open their homes to guests, rather than by ingredients and recipes.

## **TALLINN SUPPER CLUB**

Supper clubs, as mentioned above, are paid dinner parties usually run from somebody's home yet open to everyone who has access to the information about this illegal endeavour. However, in different countries supper clubs may have different local characteristics, being more or less alternative and anti-mainstream. The Tallinn Supper Club is an underground restaurant located in the

capital of Estonia, which operates mainly from the home of Kristina Lupp, a Canadian native who has Estonian roots and has lived here for the last couple of years. She has worked as a cook in Toronto and Florence and did her master's thesis on the changes in Estonian food culture during the Soviet period. Cooking, travelling, and writing are her passions and the supper club gives an opportunity to share these in many ways, leaving her freedom to keep cooking as a hobby rather than as a profession. "I thought that I don't want to open my own restaurant, but I would like to cook and if it happens once a month, it is not so much work" (Interview on 22 January 2014). Kristina's trips have taken her to a variety of supper clubs in other cities and she was encouraged by her Estonian friend who currently lives in London and runs her own supper club.

The supper club was established in November 2012 and has had regular meetings with some longer breaks. The majority of Tallinn Supper Club events have taken place at the hostess' rented apartment located in an old house in the medieval centre of Tallinn. The rooms have high ceilings and large windows and white walls, furniture in pale green colours provides a neutral backdrop to the events celebrating different food styles. She bought a large white table that sits up to 14 guests. She admits that the lack of a car is one reason why she is not eager to choose other locations; however, some Tallinn Supper Club events have taken place at different venues (for example other restaurants, private residences, etc.). The rule is that the venue is revealed only to the guests who have made a booking and pre-paid a donation for the event. According to Kristina, the place is not what defines the supper club: "If I moved to another apartment, the supper club would move with me" (Interview on 22 January 2014).

Internet and social media are more than just media for feedback; they are the key pillars of the success of any secret supper club – this is how information is spread, clients found, etc. The Tallinn Supper Club has a mailing list that anyone can join; there is also a Facebook account that updates members with news about forthcoming events as well as past dinners (for example, photographs are shared).

Kristina emphasises that, although surrounded by secrecy, the Tallinn Supper Club should not be seen as an exclusive closed club for a limited number of devoted members. She also distinguishes her supper club endeavour from the home restaurant (cf. Võsu & Kannike 2011):

*This supper club, it's like a dinner party. [...] Well, it's not like a home restaurant. It's about a small company at somebody's house. [...] There are some people who always bring me flowers or some small present (laughs). It's weird for me because they have paid, why should they? [...] I think that you have the chance to meet people whom you wouldn't meet otherwise in your daily life. (Interview on 22 January 2014)*

She says that the fact that she usually needs to be busy in the kitchen during the dinner does not bother her and she can get feedback from the guests at the end of the dinner or later on via e-mail. In those supper club events that involve other chefs and locations Kristina sees herself as an intermediary who gives people interested in food a chance to meet culinary professionals face to face.

The Tallinn Supper Club has no standard menus although the hostess has some preferences concerning the cuisine – she loves to cook Italian but also Mexican food, especially because the latter is rare in Estonia. Local food and culinary traditions do not have a primary importance for her, although the Tallinn Supper Club has also hosted an Estonian dinner with top Estonian chef Inga Paenurm, who was also the executive chef to the President of Estonia. Kristina herself praises culinary experiments, interesting flavours and ingredients, and tastes unusual in Estonian mainstream restaurants: “I love to demonstrate to people what ingredients exist. I would like them to taste something new” (Interview on 22 January 2014).

Because of the cosmopolitan and global food styles her ingredients come from Canada, Germany, Sweden – depending on what exactly she wants to cook and what is available. For the local food she visits both indoor and outdoor markets in Tallinn; however, some ingredients are problematic for Estonian producers. Food safety legislation in Estonia means that animal blood cannot be sold in a market, therefore for the Swedish Goose Supper, which includes a spicy black soup (*svartsoppa*), she had to order the blood from Sweden. Kristina finds this situation absurd, especially because blood is used in many dishes, not least in Estonian traditional dishes (for example, *verivorst* or blood sausage) (see Fig. 3).

Themes, scripts, and menus for supper club events are also inspired by public holidays, seasonal festivities, and various cultural impulses. For example, the Swedish Goose Supper on 23 November 2013 was triggered by a southern Swedish tradition of eating roast goose in celebration of St. Martin’s Day<sup>6</sup>, and by Swedish friends the hostess has in Tallinn. The main course was a roast goose stuffed with apples and prunes and served with red cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and oven-baked Hasselback potatoes. The goose, however, was not from Estonia but from Germany, because Kristina claimed that they could not find the same quality goose meat in Estonia. The event took place in a house belonging to the British ambassador (a personal contact of Kristina’s made access possible) with an elegant lobby and a stylish hall designed for dining. To add a more aristocratic touch to the event, porters and waiters were invited for the extra service. There were more than 30 guests who were seated at three tables according to the seating plan, aiming to give people an opportunity to meet somebody they did not know as their neighbour. (However, this plan was not followed fully by all guests.) In spite of the noble venue, the overall atmosphere of the dinner was quite informal, full of conversation around food



**Figure 3.** Invitation and menu of the Swedish Goose Supper.  
Tallinn Supper Club, 2013.

as well as shared personal stories. One of the guest chefs from Sweden shared his colourful memories of food and hospitality in different countries.

Food is an important element of the Tallinn Supper Club events, but from the interview with Kristina it was apparent that she gives significant importance to the commensality and social communication. The Supper Club events are places for social exchange, especially for foreigners living in Tallinn, who form a large number of the permanent visitors to the Tallinn Supper Club. Thus, social communication and interest in shared culinary surprises are the main motivations for both the hostess and the guests. Similarly, the hostess of a Swedish supper club describes her suppers as “social experiments” (Ridderheim 2012: 46), and Hannah Sugarman, the protagonist of the novel *The Secret Supper Club*, describes the aim of mutual social sharing as being “to swap stories and histories and see how food can bring people together” (Bate 2012: 139).

Interestingly, the internet and especially social media have not considerably increased the heterogeneity of people who regularly come to the events – foreigners dominate among the guests. Perhaps the language is also an issue here because the advertisements, e-mail communication and conversations are usually in English. In that sense the Tallinn Supper Club shares some similarities with other thematic clubs, albeit not exclusively, and also has some traits of the global subculture of foodies, which combines love for food with the search for new experiences and social encounters. The fees or donations for the dinner are relatively high considering Estonians' average income and this may be another reason why the active guests of the supper club dinners are mostly foreigners whose income makes them representatives of the local upper middle class. Such ambivalence between democratisation and distinction, which exists simultaneously in contemporary foodways and foodscapes, sometimes in the context of the same event, is characteristic of a global trend (cf. Jönsson 2013).

Like supper clubs elsewhere, the Tallinn Supper Club may be characterised as a novel phenomenon in the contemporary cosmopolitan urban culture, in which private homes may become subcultural social spaces where food brings people together and enables commensality experiences shared with strangers. Stories about and around food, the intimate atmosphere, and a bit of secrecy are more important here than extraordinary taste experiences.

## **POP-UP RESTAURANT AT THE ÖÖBIKU GASTRONOMY FARM**

The last pop-up restaurant we introduce is a different, somewhat borderline, example in comparison with the pop-up eating establishments considered above. It was started by professionals with the aim of establishing something permanent, and the choice of a rural venue is in line with the latest trends in Scandinavia, where acknowledged chefs are (re-)establishing destinations for culinary tourism by looking for rural settings that would support the serving of local quality food (see Markowska & Saemundsson & Wiklund 2011). However, the temporary restaurant at the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm enables us to look beyond the boundaries of private and public in the urban context and see how new trends of entrepreneurship and consumption emerge in the countryside.

In the summer of 2013, one of Estonian top chefs, Ants Uustalu, and confectioneer Kertu Lukas opened a pop-up restaurant in their home – a recently purchased farmhouse in Kuimetsa village, Rapla County.<sup>7</sup> The pop-up restaurant opened its doors in July and accepted ten to twenty guests at a time. Although defined as “pop-up” by the restaurateurs, the business concept was to develop the place into a gastronomy farm in the future – a goal that was realised in 2016. Thus, during the first year, the pop-up restaurant functioned as a liminal

establishment in order to attract customers and promote the place before the permanent restaurant came into existence.<sup>8</sup>

In 2013 both the restaurateurs were trained professionals with previous work experience in Tallinn. The chef has worked for the President of Estonia, for the Finnish Embassy, and also in upscale London restaurants. The confectioner has, in addition, previous experience in media and public relations, which facilitates knowledgeable marketing of the business. This background gave both Ants and Kertu significant “culinary capital” (Naccarato & Lebesco 2012) and helped to build up their business in a location far from the city lights. The Gastronomy Farm still needed to be established as an enterprise, therefore in 2013 Ants and Kertu were running catering and cooking courses and also participated actively in open-air festivals and fairs, promoting high-quality Estonian cuisine based on fresh local ingredients.<sup>9</sup>

The host Ants Uustalu has defined the culinary principles and food values of the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm as follows: “quality ingredients, pure and rural tastes, classical culinary techniques and elegant finish” (see Rand 2013: 36). He sees his activity in the context of the current quest for local and authentic food, especially in connection with the Scandinavian developments (cf. Jönsson 2013). Ants believes that good restaurants are moving from cities to the countryside: “Where you have good ingredients, where you can actually grow your food. Then you have bigger profit and better quality. And you are more satisfied with what you are doing” (Interview on 19 August 2013). Kertu adds that having a restaurant at a farm is something “every chef would like to do as a dream job”, because it gives an opportunity to earn a living while cooking for small groups – one can be very flexible about the menu (Interview on 19 August 2013). Ants and Kertu agree that for them it is also a lifestyle job because at the Ööbiku Farm they can practice the lifestyle they had been longing for when working in the city – with more freedom and space for themselves.

Ants does not see the gastronomy farm as a farm in the traditional sense where “one drives a tractor and tends large animals”. Rather, it is a place where “new tastes are born”, where local culinary traditions are rediscovered and reinterpreted and cooking or gardening courses organised (Interview on 19 August 2013). Thus, the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm is an enterprise that introduces new ideas and practices of rurality (cf. Bardone 2013; Woods 2011). Nevertheless, in 2012 ducks and in 2013 hybrids of wild boar and domestic pigs were kept at Ööbiku. The latter were a great attraction, especially for guests with children who could feed the animals living freely in a hog-pen on the forest floor. In the future the aim is to involve more gardening and to promote it as part of the food culture education for the younger generation.

The pop-up restaurant was set up with a little investment, following the principles of recycling and bricolage. The hosts cleaned a former barn on the farm

themselves, decorating it in a simple style and furnishing it with secondhand furniture. Kertu expressed her criticism of trendy restaurants with luxurious interiors, where the quality of the food and the efforts of the cook are sometimes underestimated. However, with the help of an investment loan the kitchen at the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm (located in the main building) has been fully renovated and with its stainless steel surfaces and large cooking island in the middle corresponds to the standards of a professional kitchen, except for the wood-burning stove which is rare in urban restaurants. In the summer season outdoor cooking facilities, such as an underground oven and barbeque, were used to give the wild boar meat and bread a unique smoky taste.

With a few exceptions, the gastronomy farm uses the produce of other farms as locality, ecological production, and genuine taste are the key food values supported at Ööbiku<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 4). Overall, both the setting and food celebrate a domesticity and simplicity that is given a professional touch through careful selection, preparation, and elegant presentation of the ingredients and dishes. The nostalgia for real tastes plays an important role in their food philosophy. The hosts stressed that they wanted to bring their clients back to forgotten tastes and values. In another interview, Kertu stressed that all food must come from the farm, forest, and bogs: “Old childhood tastes or forgotten things, but adding a bolder and more modern twist. For example, smoked duck eggs, apple tree smoked salmon, dandelion syrup or salad, nettle, oxalis or wild mushroom dishes...” (Rosen 2012). On the website of their enterprise, Ants declares that his aim is to “surprise clients with the *luxurious simplicity* you might still recall as the green grass and blue sky of childhood when not every soup was seasoned with a bouillon cube or every piece of fish with lemon pepper” (Ööbiku, emphasis added).

Social media has played quite an important role in marketing the business as their main target group in 2013 seemed to be (urban) people from their own generation or slightly older – people in their thirties and forties.<sup>11</sup> The Ööbiku Facebook account was likewise used to inform guests about the dates and availability of dinners and lunches and to share visual information about the dishes or other events at which the chefs participated. The word was spread quickly and with the help of Facebook the dinner tables were usually booked well in advance.

However, not all of their customers are dedicated urban foodies: there have also been visitors from smaller places. The location in the vicinity of Tallinn makes it easy to get back to the city by evening without the need to look for accommodation (in the future the gastronomy farm wants to provide farm-style lodging). Yet, the locals (except a biodynamic farmer who also originates from Tallinn) were rather sceptical about the idea of a restaurant in a former barn – “Who would come to eat here?” (Interview on 19 August 2013). Some local people involved in the catering business were also afraid of losing their



**Figure 4.** *Ants Uustalu, chef de cuisine of the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm. Kuimetsa, 2014.  
Photograph from Facebook, Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm.*

business to the distinguished chefs, but the hosts of Ööbiku sorted this out early on – they did not aim to deal with the catering of local parties and festivities, except for a few annual events that enable them to feel part of the community. Now locals often call them to provide home-grown vegetables or fruits. All in all, the contribution of the enterprise to the local community is somewhat ambivalent – the ingredients come from the region, but the clients are mainly well-off city people.

The pop-up restaurant at the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm challenges the borders between city and countryside and is an example of rural gentrification, combining the village milieu and carefully selected local ingredients with gourmet cooking and service. By hosting guests in their private home at a farm, the chefs emphasise the values of being local, purity, and simplicity through a rustic domestic setting, at the same time underlining the exclusivity of such food by their professional input and relatively high prices. Yet, the pop-up restaurant at the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm likewise challenges the borders between temporary and permanent – since autumn 2014 the restaurant is open all year round, from Wednesday to Sunday, for pre-booked clients, but Ants continues to be the only chef in the house. The novelty and ephemerality of pop-up dining have vanished, having been supplanted by consistent quality and high reputation (in 2014–2017 the Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm was among the 50 best restaurants in Estonia).

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The temporal quality expressed in the term ‘pop-up restaurant’ does not mean that we have a mere substitute for a ‘real’ enterprise. Instead, relying on our examples, we suggest that it has extra qualities permitting many things that would be impossible in the long term. Such temporary urban or rural restaurants are dynamic spaces allowing for innovation and experimentation for both lifestyle entrepreneurs and consumers.

Like the setting and the menu, the sensory elements of the atmosphere in pop-up restaurants are not fixed, but of transitory character, allowing the hosts to employ their creativity in diverse ways and provide a multitude of new restaurant experiences. The possibility to communicate and advertise through social media in a fast and flexible manner adds to the ephemerality and exclusivity of the pop-up dining experience, but also enables the customers to give immediate feedback and thus contribute to the development of such events.

There are multiple pop-up restaurants in Estonia, some of which are more focused on culinary, and some on social, experiences. Generally speaking, they entail anti-mass-consumption attitudes and celebrate people’s creativity. As Estonian food culture is becoming more and more hybrid, pop-up restaurants reflect global trends on the gourmet foodscape – an increased attention to environmental consciousness, local specialities and authentic experiences as opposed to industrial or mainstream restaurant food. The pop-up restaurant scene in Estonia is quite diverse, in this being similar to that of other countries, and the material we studied enables us to suggest a preliminary typology:

- (1) pop-up community events and shared or commoditised hospitality and commensality;
- (2) pop-up cafés and restaurants organised by professional cooks or other food experts in order to gain more control over ingredients, menu, and setting;
- (3) supper clubs as an introduction of a global format that is currently a limited phenomenon for small groups of foodie customers.

Indeed, such a classification just indicates some main aims and functions that a pop-up restaurant may have, as its more specific characteristics depend on the particular socio-cultural context in which it emerges. There are no two identical pop-up eating establishments and by definition it is impossible to step into the same pop-up restaurant twice.

The pop-up restaurant, along with other pop-up enterprises, has brought new dynamics to urban and rural public and private spaces. Parts of public spaces have been privatised or domesticated to express individuality and offer intimate social encounters; at the same time some private spaces have been involved in wider public initiatives of community or neighbourhood building,

promoting social cohesion and marketing localities. Thus, pop-up restaurants produce liminal spaces in habitual everyday environments.

In contemporary cities the formation of distinctive neighbourhoods is a way of giving a certain flavour to public spaces as spaces of sociability. This often runs parallel to the rise of environmental awareness and a search for sustainable urban forms where “impersonal urban space can be broken into interpersonal spheres of communities” (Madanipour 2003: 209). The pop-up restaurants in some new urban neighbourhoods contribute to the creation of the temporary *communitas* through non-habitual use of space and common eating experience among people who usually do not meet each other.

In the cases studied, it is not so much particular food styles that define a pop-up restaurant – although some chefs may take their job very seriously – but rather values related to creative economy and alternative consumption that matter. Some authors have claimed that supper clubs especially are manifestations of resistance to corporate restaurant culture. One radical supper club owner in the US states that supper clubs are “alternatives to the restaurant industry and its ultra-capitalist, ultra-exploitative, ultra-wasteful trappings” (Kennedy 2008). Although this is not always the case in Estonia, the pop-up restaurants studied are seeking alternatives to mainstream food consumption often providing more local and personalised dining experiences. There is also a significant resistance to mainstream food consumption in which the authenticity of culinary and social experiences is believed to have vanished.

Some of our examples support the observation made by Greg Richards, who claims that food experiences “contribute to local development in a range of ways, stimulating cultural production and consumption and supporting regeneration in urban and rural settings” (Richards 2012: 25). In addition, pop-up restaurants may contribute to the experience of locality not in terms of food but in terms of social experience, through immediate encounters between the host and guests.

‘Homely’ food, atmosphere, and service are used for both community building and as an added value in the commodified experience economy (Jönsson 2013). Contemporary foodies are ready to pay extra for the unique setting and/or company. They value time-limited exclusivity and performance-like immediate encounters that may increase the feeling of authenticity of the consumption experience. On the other hand, pop-up restaurants set up in private homes illustrate the tendency that the contemporary home is no longer an enclosed and clearly demarcated space – instead it is in continuous interaction with the outside world, and parts of the home may be transferred into public spaces either through commercial or pop-up activities (Johansson & Saarikangas 2009: 11; cf. Miller 2001; Vösu & Kannike 2011).

By extending the borders of the conventional restaurant or home into public space, pop-up restaurants create spaces of negotiation between the private and

the public and new forms of communality. The liminal properties and heterogeneous multisensory experience make them attractive for both entrepreneurs and consumers. Thus, the new wave of temporary activities, including pop-up restaurants, might have deeper implications not only for personal creativity and community-building, but also wider spatial policy and practice. Pop-up dining demonstrates the importance of individuals as creative cultural agents who cook as well as eat.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Historically the term ‘supper club’, especially in the USA, designated closed clubs for entertainment as well as dining that became popular in the 1930s (see Hoekstra 2013).
- <sup>2</sup> For example, the charitable pop-up shop Mondo sells handmade items from Africa and Afghanistan (Mondo pop-up pood) and a pop-up café run by Estonians in Uganda employs people with special needs (Pop Up Kampala). The concept ‘pop-up’ has also been used for temporary multidisciplinary art projects, for example, the pop-up exhibition “27” set up in Tartu city centre during the annual drama festival and featuring “ideas, thoughts and magical spaces” of Estonian scenic designers (Kakskümmend seitse). In February 2014 the first pop-up museum in Estonia opened for two weeks in the Telliskivi Creative City in Tallinn (Telliskivi pop-up museum) and a pop-up restaurant led by Ants Uustalu from Ööbiku farm in an art gallery served as a meeting place and club for Tallinn Music Week, a festival of contemporary music (TMW Tastes).
- <sup>3</sup> See in detail in Hiidlaste Koostöökogu, Growing Gastronomists.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, the organisers were invited to Värskas in order to train local people to set up a similar event. On 17 August 2013, the *Seto Külavüü Kostipäiv* (Seto Belt of Villages Treats Day) featured ten cafés in farmyards and farmhouses. Although the event promoted local Seto food (fish, different pies, the local cottage cheese *sõir*, etc.) and the ingredients were of local origin, the style of these pop-ups, from names to entertainment programmes, was borrowed one-to-one from the Kärđla example (Kostipäiv).
- <sup>5</sup> One-day restaurants have so far popped up in more than 70 different countries (see <http://www.restaurantday.org/en/>).
- <sup>6</sup> St. Martin’s Day was traditionally celebrated in Estonia. Some domestic animals were slaughtered in order to celebrate the end of the harvest season. Estonian folk dishes included pig’s head with vegetables; also various blood dishes were served. The custom to eat goose is quite recent and was mainly practiced by the wealthier families.

- <sup>7</sup> Approx. 60–70 km from Tallinn, the largest city in Estonia.
- <sup>8</sup> Although small rural eating establishments have a long history in Estonia, a gourmet restaurant established in a rural setting has become a relatively recent trend in the modern culinary landscape related to the ongoing commodification and gentrification of the modern countryside (cf. Norrman & Pettersson 2011; Markowska & Saemundsson & Wiklund 2011). There is a venue similar to Ööbiku in southern Estonia – the Tammuri Farm Restaurant, run by an amateur chef. The principle of both restaurants is not to offer a standard menu and opening hours but to provide seasonally inspired dishes and accept only those guests who pre-book their visit (see Vösu & Kannike 2011).
- <sup>9</sup> Similar examples of pop-up restaurants promoting local food and local ingredients are, for example, the Chamber of Taste Experience and the Community Kitchen of Peipsimaa in St. Anthony's Yard in Tartu.
- <sup>10</sup> In this sense they are quite different from the farm restaurant at the Ängavallen Farm in Sweden (see Ängavallen).
- <sup>11</sup> The website was built with the help of a professional webmaster and photographer.

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## REINVENTING HABSBERG CUISINE IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY TRIESTE

***Daša Ličen***

*Institute of Slovenian Ethnology*

*Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenia*

*e-mail: [dasa.licen@zrc-sazu.si](mailto:dasa.licen@zrc-sazu.si)*

**Abstract:** The article gives an overview of nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire in twenty-first century Trieste and recognizes it as a result of a broader shift in local identifications. More precisely, it traces nostalgia on the “typical” Triestine plates. The phenomenon that the author seeks to shed light on hence reveals itself as a metamorphosis of Trieste menus. The typical Italian pasta, pizza, and tiramisu have in the past decades been replaced by strudel, goulash, and sauerkraut, which supposedly reveal the true identity of this port city. Such dishes recall the flourishing times of the nineteenth century when Trieste reached its heyday as a part of the Habsburg Empire. Along these lines also the culinary enthusiasts prefer to emphasize the Habsburg or Central European character of the Triestine cuisine and promote it as culturally distinct from the traditional Italian one. The author argues that such nostalgic yearnings do not tell much about the past but rather about the present-day and perhaps also future Trieste.

**Keywords:** culinary nostalgia, food, Habsburg Empire, imperial nostalgia, Trieste

### INTRODUCTION

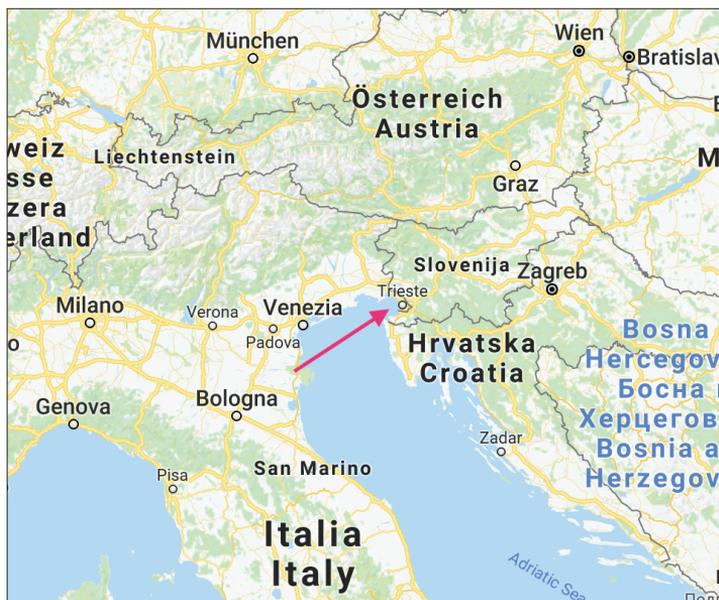
In 1912, fourteen years after Empress Elisabeth of Austria had been stabbed to death in Geneva,<sup>1</sup> a grand monument was erected in the city center of Trieste<sup>2</sup>, a city located in the northern extreme of the Adriatic. Among many monuments dedicated to Francis Joseph’s spouse, commonly known as Sissi, which sprouted all across the Habsburg Monarchy, perhaps none had a shorter lifespan than the memorial instituted in the port city of Trieste, the imperial commercial hub. After World War I and the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, Trieste became a part of the Kingdom of Italy, which unsurprisingly found it necessary to remove Sissi’s monument. The Italian national state wanted to demolish every part of the cityscape that did not fit the new political frame and could remind the inhabitants of the former Habsburg rule. The twelve meters long tribute was stored for many decades and wholly forgotten until the 1980s, when debates

about its restitution commenced. Yet, the initiative gained true strength only in 1991 when an association called *Mitteleuropa* (Germ. Central Europe) managed to collect as many as five thousand signatures in favor of the restoration of the monument. Six years and many discussions later, the monument was re-erected right in the city center, in front of the railway station.

The story of Sissi's monument, which I have portrayed more thoroughly elsewhere (Ličen 2017), does not seem to have much in common with the chosen title, at least not at first sight. However, taking the example of Sissi's monument, I attempt to demonstrate how Habsburg Trieste has been reimagined in the past three decades. The restitution of Sissi's monument reflects a reevaluation of Trieste's Habsburg past, and serves as one of the many recently reawakened reminders of the vanished Habsburg grandeur. Historian Maura Hametz (2014: 136) described this nostalgic shift as follows: "[r]einvigorated by the blossoming of Central Europe after 1989, the city now looks to the 'ghosts' of its Habsburg past, articulated in its urban spaces, its culinary and arts culture, and its built environment".

I conducted my fieldwork in Trieste in 2016 and at the beginning of 2017. During fieldwork, I regularly visited all the typical culinary loci of Habsburg nostalgia, among them restaurants, bars, and cafés, and talked to their owners and local as well as foreign visitors. I gained additional in-depth insight into the topic by visiting gastronomic lectures, culinary workshops, cookbooks, and online debates on Habsburg Trieste. The focus of the present text is thus solely on the many Mitteleuropean flavors that are currently present in the city of Trieste, although Habsburg nostalgia could be explored in the whole region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Baskar 2002: 71–95), which Trieste is a part of.

I initiate this article by briefly depicting Trieste's vivid past, then continue by offering some ethnographic insights into the culinary scene of Trieste – more precisely, by providing evidence of imperial nostalgia and identifying some foodstuffs and dishes that are supposedly typical of Trieste and Central Europe but non-existent in the rest of Italy, such as mustard, *cren* (horseradish), sauerkraut, sausages, goulash, apple strudel, *krapfen* (German for doughnuts), and other Trieste's favorites. When discussing the ethnographic accounts, I point out the absence of Slavic elements on these nostalgic plates, considering that Germanic associations seem to be preferred to Slavic ones. I subsequently provide a theoretical background to how food and nostalgia are interlaced, and emphasize that it is not about what nineteenth century Trieste really tasted like or how historically false, so to say, this popular narration is, but what it can tell us about this day and age. In view of food, the last part of my article expands on Pamela Ballinger's (2003) study of Trieste's nostalgic turn and Maura Hametz's (2014) analysis of how past is in service of present-day Trieste.



**Figure 1.** The port city of Trieste located in the very north of the Adriatic Sea (<https://www.google.si/maps/@45.4292691,12.8923936,7z?hl=sl>, last accessed on 2 February 2018).

In accordance with both, I claim that nostalgia can tell us considerably more about Trieste's present and future than about its supposedly splendid past, but also underscore why and how Slavic elements are hidden in this nostalgia. I am also conscious of the fact that the work I as an anthropologist or ethnologist do may itself be somehow nostalgic, but nonetheless expect this paper to form a part of the ongoing discussions on the topic. The present ethnography based article hence reveals the nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire, yet investigates its circumstances only in the realm of food. Moreover, it seeks to give an overview of Trieste's recent culinary trends in order to have a look beyond nostalgia and understand its role in contemporary political currents.

## TRIESTE'S PAST AND PRESENT

Trieste came under the control of the House of Habsburg in 1382, but grew from a small fishing town to an influential imperial hub only after 1719, when Charles VI granted the city the status of a free port, the groundwork for Trieste's success. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Trieste experienced a period of prosperity thanks to its free port privileges and the development of

a thriving shipping business that made it one of the most important European ports and certainly the biggest one within the Habsburg Empire (since 1867 Austria-Hungary). Not only its business, but also its population grew immensely. Trieste's population increased from about 6,000 at the beginning of the eighteenth century to as many as 240,000 inhabitants in 1914 (Kappus 1997: 172). Trieste's economic existence attracted individuals and families from all over Europe and beyond (Kalc 2008). As a result, the physiognomy of the city changed considerably. The busy port city of Trieste thus reached its highlight under the rule of Francis Joseph as the monarchy's vital outlet to the sea. Images of the nineteenth century Trieste are precisely the ones the current popular narratives mythologize, praise, and denote as cosmopolitan. Cultural heterogeneity is central to Habsburg nostalgia, to which I return below.

The nineteenth century Trieste enabled a rather peaceful cohabitation of very different people adhering to various, also non-Catholic religions, and speaking several languages. So much so that Dominique Kirchner Reill (2012: 20) talks about an active "maritime polyglotism", but all this changed in the decades after 1848, and especially from the 1860s onwards, when nationalism started gaining an increasingly important role (Cattaruzza 1992: 191; Millo 2007: 74). The seeming harmony of Trieste's heterogeneous population began to fade while pressing ethnic issues were emerging. More accurately, two national movements aimed to, at least symbolically, conquer the city of Trieste. So much so that until the outburst of World War I Trieste was, for the most part, polarized into Italian and Slovene (Kappus 1997: 176; Verginella 2009: 101). The conflict between Slovenians and Italians had indeed been vigorous but reached its climax only after the Great War, when Trieste was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy and not much of its once dominating cultural diversity had a chance to survive. In addition to that, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Trieste's annexation to Italy led to a decline in the town's economic importance. The links with Central Europe were severed and the city lost its strategic and commercial influence. Trieste went from being "città fedelissima" ('most loyal') to "Trieste italianissima" ('most Italian') and was now nothing more than a "second-rank Italian seaport" (Griffante 2015: 19).

The interwar fascist period represents the pinnacle of Italian nationalism that was persecuting and criminalizing Slovene population (Verginella 2016: 711–712), but also in general annihilating any visible signs of ethnic otherness in Trieste's cityscape (Baskar 2002: 71; Griffante 2015: 23; Klabjan 2015: 125). During World War II, Trieste was conquered by Germans in 1943, by Yugoslav partisans in 1945, and only 40 days later taken over by the allied forces. In 1947, the allied military government established the Free Territory of Trieste, which lasted only until 1954, when Trieste was proclaimed to be a part of Italy again.

National sentiments certainly started to weaken in the second half of the twentieth century, especially from the 1980s onwards, when Trieste started to long for the fame it had enjoyed before the outbreak of World War I. This is when yearnings for the times when Trieste supposedly existed as an idyllic cosmopolitan city, embraced in the safe arms of the emperor, materialized. In other words, from the 1980s onwards, the nationalist past was pushed aside and above all nineteenth century history, or rather a certain image of that period, came to the fore (Kappus 1997: 170; Baskar 2002: 83–87; Ballinger 2003; Waley 2009). From then on, Habsburg, Austrian, Central European or *Mitteleuropean* began to be preferred over Italian, which, however, should not tempt us into thinking that nationalism completely vanished from the city (to which I return later), nor into forgetting that Habsburg nostalgia does not necessarily mean exactly the same thing to different people (Baskar 2002: 76–93). Nonetheless, the nostalgia for the city's heyday and its pluri-ethnic Central European fabric seems to have been shaping Trieste's social and cultural microcosm in a renewed manner. Habsburg wistfulness can fascinatingly be discerned also in the field of food, which the following pages seek to shed a light on.

## **EATING THE EMPIRE**

In the center of Trieste there is a small restaurant called *Buffet da Pepi*. When one enters the restaurant, he or she quickly notices the smell of various kinds of pork dishes, as well as the supposedly nineteenth century imagery and furnishing giving the place, to put in plain words, a specific feeling. One of their pleased visitors described her journey into the culinary world of “authentic” Trieste as an “excursion to Austria-Hungary”. The only thing that makes the visitor suspect he or she is in the twenty-first century are various certificates hanging on the walls, which further confirm the supposed authenticity of this place. The current owner told me that the restaurant was first established at the end of the nineteenth century and had remained “the same” since then. Although they had recently expanded to a certain extent and added another room, they had reproduced the added furnishings so they looked old and came across as “genuini” (‘genuine’).

What they serve at *Da Pepi*, also known as *Pepi Sciavo*,<sup>3</sup> are generally different kinds of pork, either freshly cooked or preserved, but always in a rather simple manner. Their plates are nonetheless adored – as someone stated on the Buffet's Facebook profile, “best pork from Vorarlberg to Bukovina” (in Triestine dialect<sup>4</sup> “la miglior porzina da vorarlberg a bukovina”). Cooked pork is here served with sauerkraut, to which Triestines proudly refer with the term *capuzi*<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2.** A plate of Buffet da Pepi's meaty delicacies. Photograph by Daša Ličen 2016.

(and not with the standard Italian expression *crauti*), mustard served from big ceramic jars, grated horseradish or *cren*, and beer served in a mug (Fig. 2). The dessert they serve further reinforces their Central European character – it is the beloved apple strudel sprinkled with powdered sugar. Carnivore mood is definitely compulsory if one wants to enjoy these meat delicacies, but one can get a taste of the empire also by visiting many less “meaty” local sites. Most Triestines usually suggest *Buffet da Pepi* first when asked for recommendations though.

Also the hearty *jota* soup served in many restaurants in Trieste enables one to taste the imperial times when Trieste was a blooming port city in the glorious monarchy. *Jota* is made out of fermented cabbage or *capuzi*, beans, smoked pork, and potatoes. According to a very popular local Facebook page with a telling name *Vota Franz Josef* (Vote Francis Joseph),<sup>6</sup> Europe can be divided into two poles: the north-eastern, continental part with sauerkraut as a steady part of its diet, and the south-western, Mediterranean part with tomato as a key ingredient. The map that the Vote Francis Joseph site published in September 2016 (Fig. 3), states that also in the title “Home is where sauerkraut is” (in Triestine



By the same token, links to the former empire are alluded to through creative restaurant, café or bar names, such as *Sissi Bar*, *Buffet Impero* (Buffet Empire) or *Theresia Mittel Bistrot*. In passing, the latter is even equipped with what Trieste's municipal promotional webpage *Discover Trieste* describes as "Viennese style chairs".<sup>7</sup>

However, not only the bars and restaurants, but also many dishes recall the imperial past by their particular names. I already touched upon sauerkraut or *capuzi*, but *palacinka*<sup>8</sup>, thin and round flat cake made from eggs, milk, flour, butter, and salt, is noteworthy too. This thin variety of pancake is regular in Eastern and Central Europe, but called slightly differently in every language. When in 2000 Maura Hametz (2005: 167) interviewed Mario Suban of the *Antica Trattoria Suban*, another Triestine restaurant located on top of the so-called scale of authenticity, he claimed that "palacinche (pl. of palacincha) are palacinche. They are not crepes nor are they English pancakes or omelets". According to Mario Suban, *palacinka* is a typical Triestine dish, a result of Central European influences, hence appearing as a genuine indicator of "Central-Europeanness" in the whole area of the former monarchy.

The emphasis is thus constantly on the Habsburg or Mitteleuropean character of the Triestine cuisine, which is promoted as culturally distinctive from the Italian one. The culinary enthusiasts promote dishes that stress Trieste's Austrian or, on occasion, even more exotic Hungarian origins and its belonging to Central Europe, but let me support this statement with further examples.

Fin-de-siècle cafés are very informative examples in this regard. According to the eminent historian Pieter Judson (2016: 346–347), coffee houses were, along with some other architectural but also general cultural components, a strong part of the visual power of the Habsburg Empire, and to some extent have remained so in the area once under Habsburg rule. Vienna is considered to be the capital of refined *Kafeehäuser*, places of intellectual encounters normally associated with highbrow individuals such as Stefan Zweig or Sigmund Freud, but similar cafés have been (re-)gaining in popularity also in Trieste. The ones originating more than a century ago are always found on the touristy "must do" lists that suggest the visitors to have a bite of the famous *Sacher* or *Linzertorte* cakes. As Hametz notes (2014: 146), such cafés willfully endorse associations with Habsburg past. Moreover, it is well known that Claudio Magris, a Triestine writer renowned for his nostalgic oeuvre evoking multicultural Central European history and its legacy, likes to have his coffee, read newspapers or merely linger in *Caffè San Marco* (Ballinger 2003: 96). These fashionable cafés, now commonly described as historical, hence still or perhaps again serve as meeting points of the contemporary intelligentsia.

It is certainly true that between Vienna and Trieste, two crucial hubs of the long-gone empire, many parallels exist, but also that many amongst them have recently been re-drawn. A few Triestine pastry shops also try to come across as places where time stands still. The owners of *La Bomboniera*, for example, present their pastry shop as “typically Austro-Hungarian”, and state that their roots go all the way to 1836, when the Eppinger family employed a Hungarian pastry chef in their bakery.<sup>9</sup> *La Bomboniera*’s interior is designed in Art Nouveau style, but the working area is supposed to be more than a century old too. According to what they claim on their webpage, century-old machines are still used to produce cakes, such as the layered *Dobostorte*, *Rigojansci*, *Pischinger*, *Putizza*, *Presnitz* or again *Sacher* and *Linzertorte*, all evoking nostalgia for the Habsburg rule.

## ON SLAVIC TASTES

According to the historian Larry Wolff (1994: 360), already during the nineteenth century the category ‘Slav’ was negatively connoted by those who considered themselves to be Italian. In the decades before World War I, the Slavs were increasingly seen as inferior (Sluga 2001: 18–25), but even more so in the interwar period, when Slovenians in Trieste were subjected to violent fascist policies (ibid.: 39–63). In the decades after World War II, Slovenians were indeed granted minority rights but were still perceived as a latent Yugoslav “Trojan horse”. The state of affairs for Slovenians living in Trieste and its surroundings generally improved in the past decades (Bajc 2017: 33–37). However, negative connotations related to anything Slavic – be it Slovene, Croatian, Serbian or other – persist. Such status quo could be the reason why Slavic elements are barely present in the nostalgic culinary discourse I am analyzing. It could, however, be that the reasons lie elsewhere. I would hereby also like to claim that I am conscious of the fact that being a Slovenian myself influences my interpretation of this issue, yet I strive to, as much as possible, detach my own national belonging from the present analysis.

Already in his 2002 monograph, Bojan Baskar (2002: 86–89) mentioned that Slovenians were not very nostalgic for the former Habsburg Empire. My fieldwork, nevertheless, did not give me an impression that Slovenians would not praise the days of Trieste’s belonging to the Habsburg Empire, nor do they seem to represent the main stakeholders in what Baskar calls “Mitteleuropean discourse”. Baskar (ibid.: 90) also pointed out that Slovenians are somewhat missing from this nostalgia. Annalisa Colombino (2009: 293) in her excellent paper on marketing Trieste’s multiculturalism, which essentially stresses the same characteristics as the nostalgic narrative I am scrutinizing in this paper,

noticed that the representation of Trieste's multi-ethnic character has been highly sanitized and selective. According to her, multiculturalism is constructed in a way that excludes certain groups of inhabitants, along with the Chinese, Albanians, and others, also Serbians and Slovenians. I, too, support this claim by noticing that Slavic elements, although representing a steady segment of Trieste's social realm in the times of the empire, are, when it comes to evoking Habsburg tastes, regularly forgotten or at least camouflaged.

Today the Triestine cuisine is understood as a Central European mixture by a large number of the inhabitants of this port city and, above all, by the individuals who use their gastronomic expertise to influence the public opinion on what authentic Triestine food is – a mixture that is unquestionably greater than the nation, especially the Italian one. Also, according to Elke Kappus (1997: 170) and Maura Hametz (2014: 144), Habsburg nostalgia is seemingly oblivious to ethno-nationalist differences. The idea behind the culinary nostalgia I am analyzing is that fragments from all over the former empire shape a Central European mixture that has developed a character of its own. It is not surprising that culinary traditions from places like Brody in Galicia are not part of the culinary image Trieste is promoting today; yet, it is peculiar that Slovenians, who have at least from the nineteenth century onwards been a regular and numerous segment of Trieste's social realm, do not have a voice in this historical narration. Even if we look beyond nations and think of the Slavs as a supranational category, they are more or less an ignored part of the Habsburg nostalgia.

The nostalgic menu did not come down from heaven as a well-defined list of dishes that unmistakably form the Triestine cuisine; quite the contrary – influential gourmet authorities construct this image and carefully choose what fits in. Along these lines, it is then of no surprise that Slavic elements are curbed, while Austrian, Hungarian, and especially German ones are stressed, although the latter might, in light of the bitter twentieth century rapports between Trieste and Germans, come across as surprising (Hametz 2014: 144). Hungarian bits of the Triestine puzzle are especially curious, because, in contrast to Slovenians or Serbians, there were barely any Hungarians in the nineteenth century Trieste. I assume Hungarians were and have remained far enough from Trieste to come across as mysterious and exotic. The interest in the signs of Hungarian origin is noteworthy also because the monarchy was, as a result of the compromise in 1867, known as Austria-Hungary, a dual monarchy in which the Kingdom of Hungary became equal to the Austrian Empire.

One of the tasty cakes from Trieste, which, according to my informants, is absolutely typical, presents a very revealing case. *Presnitz* is a part of a wider family of strudels and rolled up cakes prepared with a filling made from different

kinds of nuts, raisins, dark chocolate, and rum (depending on the recipe). According to Hametz (2014: 148), *presnitz* cake “attests to the continuing resonance and even romance of Habsburg life and tastes in the Adriatic city”. Following the prevalent version of the local myth, this cake was born in the nineteenth century, when the Habsburg Empress Elisabeth (Sissi) visited Trieste and awarded what was called *Preis Prinzessin* to the creator of this novel dessert. As a consequence, the rolled cake got its name after the prize. But the etymological roots of the word *presnitz* are in fact clearly Slavic, meaning *presnec* or unleavened, as this kind of pastry is used for its preparation. Despite that, *presnitz* is spelled with ‘tz’ characteristic of German at the end, and not the Slovenian ‘c’ that actually sounds just the same. Hence, not only the abovementioned myth, but also the spelling links *presnitz* to German imperial culture.

To sum up, the promoters of the nostalgic cuisine I have put under the microscope prefer German associations over Slavic ones. The previously mentioned *palacinka* is, for instance, often spelled like in German, *palatschinka*, although it could easily be written in Italian, Slav, or some other way and not necessarily German. Although it seems like the assortment of Triestine foods simply exists in the eternally *kaisertreu* (loyal to the emperor) Trieste, it is not the case. The Triestines – the owners of restaurants and cookbook writers – select what is considered to be authentic Triestine food and what is not. Their intention is not to falsify the past, but rather adapt it to their needs. As was suggested earlier, the menu of Triestine dishes – even though clearly containing many Slavic elements – is constructed in a fashion that emphasizes the features of the German-speaking area of Central Europe and ignores the Slavic ones. Below I dwell upon why German cultural references rank higher in this nostalgic discourse.

## **GUSTATORY NOSTALGIA**

According to Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (2006: 920), nostalgia, although always manifesting itself in a variety of ways and hard to simplify, is a “longing for what is lacking in a changed present ... a yearning for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time”. On the one hand, nostalgia can be a very personal experience, and a cultural phenomenon on the other. Arjun Appadurai (1996: 78) has referred to the latter as “armchair nostalgia”. It is a feeling of loss of something one has never experienced, like in the case of food-centered nostalgia in Trieste. However, for the purposes of the present article it is not necessary to dwell on the distinction between the two kinds of nostalgia.

Nostalgia has often been attacked as a sentimental and falsifying practice that instrumentalizes the past (Angé & Berliner 2014: 4). Yet, as previously suggested, in this article nostalgia's historical accuracy is not under discussion. In other words, I am not interested in what nineteenth century Triestines *really* ate and to what extent the current culinary trends correspond to that. On the contrary, I seek to uncover what nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire, which in the last three decades has been one of the focal points of *triestinità*, can tell us about the contemporary social configurations. I consider nostalgic sentiments to be very interesting, regardless of whether they are yearning for a past that once existed or not, so irrespective of their being a result of true experiences, completely imagined or anything in between.

In the past, a naive anthropologist or ethnologist would perhaps try to “illuminate” his or her field interlocutors by explaining that they cannot be nostalgic for a nineteenth century dish they themselves have never tasted or that popular historical cafés they currently long for were in the early twentieth century hardly islets of cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness, but often irredentist nests. A plaque, for instance, commemorates early enthusiasts for “free Italy” that were meeting in *Caffé Tommaseo*, also known as the oldest café in Trieste.<sup>10</sup> However, patronizing and deconstructing nostalgia would not contribute to knowing why people do what they do. Underlining the absence of Slavic elements was also not meant to criticize the way this nostalgia is constructed in relation to the past, but should rather be understood as a means to point out it is perhaps not a coincidence that some parts of the former empire are highlighted while others are veiled.

Nostalgia can take very different forms and food is one of the ways it materializes. Already Marcel Proust in his prominent work titled *In Search of Lost Time* linked memory with the gustatory dimension. The taste of a *madeleine* dipped in a cup of lime flower tea brought him back to his childhood in Combray. Food as a powerful means of experiencing nostalgia was addressed also by anthropologist David Sutton in his work on intersections between food and memory, *Remembrance of Repasts* (2001). He concentrated specifically on gustatory nostalgia, explaining the capacity smelling and tasting have in crafting memories, to which Tulasi Srinivas (2013 [1997]), in her study of the radical change in food consumption in India, refers with the term “gastro nostalgia”. According to her, for Indians food can symbolize the long-lost utopian ideals (ibid.: 369). Along the same lines, food serves as a vehicle for recollecting memories of the “golden age” also in Trieste where, in the words of one of my interlocutors, “one can get a taste of the Habsburg Empire”.

Apropos, nostalgia manifests itself also as an influential marketing strategy. In late capitalist consumerism, the “lubricant of nostalgia” (Appadurai 1996:

76) is frequently applied to consumer goods, as is the case with yet another “typically Triestine” rolled cake with, at least etymologically, Slavic roots. Triestine *putizza* comes from Slovene or Slavic *potica*, which derives from *povitica*, denoting rolled-up dough. *Putizza* represents a fine example of commodified authenticity, which is sold in chain supermarkets, such as the (ill-)reputed *Eataly*, where it – neatly packed – represents a home-made, traditional, local and, most of all, Habsburg product. Such a *putizza* gives an impression of something lost in time and can, because of its patina, reach substantially higher market value than – at least technically – similar products.

## **NOSTALGIC FOR THE FUTURE**

In this chapter, I draw on what the historians Pamela Ballinger (2003) and Maura Hametz (2014) wrote on the subject of present-day nostalgia for the Habsburg Trieste, and discuss it in light of my own ethnographic study of the culinary dimension of Habsburg nostalgia. The central idea that I dwell on here is that nostalgia is, in point of fact, not a retreat to the past, but an aspiration for the future. Put in a more precise way, contemporary Triestines are maybe not nostalgic for Trieste as a nineteenth century emporium, but desire stable if not blooming twenty-first century economic and cultural circumstances. Ballinger and Hametz were not the first to notice the links between imperial nostalgia and contemporary visions of development in Trieste; Bojan Baskar (2002: 84), for instance, touched upon this already in his 2002 monograph, but did not explore the question in more depth.

In her article, Pamela Ballinger (2003) reviewed three contemporary books representing imperial nostalgia for the Habsburg Trieste. She was critical to how the nostalgic narrative is constructed in relation to the city’s nineteenth century actual past. According to her, the mythicized images of Trieste acquired new potency in the post-Cold War era, when Trieste became universally described as “cosmopolitan”, “hybrid” or a “melting pot”. As the Iron Curtain fell, European intellectuals on both sides remembered Mitteleuropa, not least in Italy. For many the concept of Central Europe, which, to be honest, deserves a study of its own, served as a way to escape from communism or Eastern Europe as such; for others Central Europe represented a means for entering Western Europe. Ballinger (*ibid.*: 97), however, stresses that after the fall of the Iron Curtain new possibilities for reattaching to Central Europe opened and attempts to revive Trieste’s dormant port arose also in Trieste. The invocations of Mitteleuropa thus reveal genuine political stakes. In other words, Ballinger talks of *prospective* nostalgia because current mythologizing uncovers relationships

that exist between the past, the present, and the future. Habsburg nostalgia is hence carrying a politics of the future with it.

Maura Hametz (2014) touched upon the selective remembrance of Trieste's history in a very similar way. According to her, historic Habsburg tastes have been reemerging from the 1990s onwards. Her first important emphasis is that Habsburg nostalgia aims to transcend local ethnic and nationalist conflicts that have been burdening the city for decades. As she put it, Habsburg nostalgia "provides a means to transcend the hostility and trauma associated with the decades of ethnic and nationalist conflict and violence that have marred civic, regional, and national relations in the northern Adriatic territory" (ibid.: 134). The second vital argument Hametz made is that "Habsburg nostalgia provides a vehicle to reconcile the city's Central European past with its position on the geographical periphery of Italy and western Europe" and continued with saying, "[i]t presents opportunities for development and association beyond the confines of Italy, a state that Triestines, rightly or wrongly, see as neglectful of their needs and ignorant of their particular situation" (ibid.: 131–132). Thus, by the words of Hametz (ibid.: 135), nostalgia is not a "simple glorification of the past but a means of imagining the future and reconceiving cosmopolitanness to re-position the border city and craft its political future".

According to both authors, Trieste was redefined after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The many nuances of nostalgia should therefore be understood as yearnings for the imagined imperial glories. In accord with both authors, also my ethnographic research leads me to believe that Habsburg nostalgia grew out of the inhabitants' contemporary dissatisfaction with Trieste's economic and political role as a provincial Italian town. Taking economic struggles into consideration, one can then grasp why Slavic associations tend to be neglected and Germanic ones accentuated. As Maura Hametz (2014: 143) points out, "ties to the Habsburg and the Germanic past were reinvented in light of the increasing integration of Europe and the expansion of the European Community in which Germany took a leading role". As nostalgia, on the one hand, lays emphasis on certain historical aspects, it has the power to facilitate forgetting on the other (Angé & Berliner 2014: 10).

But *štrudel* (strudel), *potica* (putizza) or *presnec* (presnitz) have been overlooked not only on the grounds of economic interests, but also as a result of decades if not centuries long animosity towards Slavs, especially Slovenians, in the city of Trieste. For many Italians Slovenians have been representing a perilous threat, to which occasional claims that Trieste is categorically Slovene only contribute. I want to point out that even though Habsburg nostalgia at first sight strives to unite the city of Trieste into a tolerant whole, older clashes persist. Deep-rooted issues of nationalism continue to survive and,

even if rather dormant today, carry the risk of re-arising. National sentiments then probably represent the other part of the answer to why Slavic elements of Trieste's culinary past are still somewhat stifled.

## CONCLUSION

Food is one of the cornerstones of our ever-shifting identities, so such tensions as choosing what is Triestine food and what it is not expose much more than what is visible at first glance. In the case of Trieste, nostalgia serves political purposes to put some distance between the city of Trieste and Italy. It brings Trieste closer to Central Europe, but foremost to the Central European economy. Strudel, goulash, jota, sausages, and other Habsburg staple dishes surpass their mere belly filling dimension and bring to light modern-day hopes for Trieste's revitalization in the united Central Europe.

It is then not astonishing that Slovene or Slavic connoted dishes are commonly unseen, at least in comparison to Hungary evoking *Dobostorte*, but even more when set side by side with plates suggesting German origins, such as *Kaiserschmarren* (shredded *palacinka*) served in the "tradizionalissimo" ('most traditional') *Vecio Buffet Marascutti* from 1914. This legendary restaurant also serves a dish called *Ljubljanska* (stuffed breaded and fried cutlet). This plate's name indicates that historical roots of *Ljubljanska* can be traced to Ljubljana, the nowadays capital of Slovenia that was once an imperial town too. *Marascutti's* menu may thus give an impression that things in Trieste are not black and white, and that nostalgic tendencies are at times more broadminded than the present article has put forward. Nevertheless, my fieldwork led me to argue that imperial nostalgia has played an active role in the last decades of Trieste's past and that in such reminiscences Slavic elements are most often forgotten. After all, on the *Buffet Marascutti's* menu *Ljubljanska* is denoted literally as "(ham-and-cheese) stuffed schnitzels",<sup>11</sup> describing cutlets in neither English nor Italian or Slovenian terms, but a variation of German.

Habsburg nostalgia, be it materialized in the form of food and food-related things or in other bits and pieces of Trieste's cityscape, is an attempt to return the past fame and success to this port city. Recognizing nostalgia's general importance is crucial, but what it will bring, if anything besides Austrian tourists, is still unclear. To further complicate the picture, it is entirely possible that, before causing any political outcomes, Trieste will transform its image again. The identities of places are, after all, as dynamic and unfixed as any other identities.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> She was assassinated on September 10, 1898, in Geneva, by a Paris-born Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni (1873–1910).
- <sup>2</sup> All place names carry at least indirect political connotations, from which I cannot completely escape in this article. It would be politically as well as historically most correct to talk of Trst/Triest/Trieste, not necessarily in that order, but I am, for the sake of simplicity, sticking only to Trieste, which I consider to be the name Trieste is today most known for.
- <sup>3</sup> *Sciavo* is otherwise a disparaging term, a combination of *schivo* (slave) and *Slavo* (Slav). Although the term *sciavo* nowadays carries very bad connotations and is, as such, considered to be inappropriate, it is unproblematized as a historical place name and regularly used by the locals in this context. It derives from the name of one of Buffet's former owners Pepi, who was Slovenian. For more details see Buffet da Pepi's website: <http://www.buffetdapepi.it/storia.php>, last accessed on 23 January 2018.
- <sup>4</sup> Triestine dialect is an important aspect of this nostalgic discourse. By using this particular dialect, Trieste establishes itself as different from other parts of Italy. Many Habsburg aficionados therefore prefer to avoid standard Italian and use the Triestine dialect enriched with many Germanic terms.
- <sup>5</sup> Often written also as *capuzzi*.
- <sup>6</sup> See Vota Franz Josef's Facebook profile at [https://www.facebook.com/VotaFranzJosef?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/VotaFranzJosef?ref=br_rs), last accessed on 23 January 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> See the homepage at <http://www.discover-trieste.it/code/18533/Theresia-mittel-bistrot>, last accessed on 23 January 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> At times spelled also as *palacinca*, *palatschinka* or *palačinka*, and etymologically deriving from the Latin *placenta* (a flat cake).
- <sup>9</sup> See La Bomboniera's webpage at <http://www.pasticceriaabomboniera.com/storia.html>, last accessed on 23 January 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> I am fully aware that a single place can represent a *lieu de mémoire* for different groups of people. Caffé Tommaseo can thus be significant to those nostalgic for the Habsburg Empire as well as for those yearning for the purely Italian Trieste.
- <sup>11</sup> See <http://www.buffetmarascutti.it/menu%20marascutti.pdf>, last accessed on 23 January 2018.

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## THE TASTE OF “ESTONIANNESSE”: COOKBOOKS AS PART OF NATION-BUILDING IN ESTONIA

**Liisi Laineste**

*Senior Research Fellow*

*Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia*

*e-mail: [liisi.laineste@folklore.ee](mailto:liisi.laineste@folklore.ee)*

**Abstract:** This paper takes a diachronic look at the culinary trends in the present-day Estonia. It sheds light on the process of nation-building enacted through recipes that refer to the social ideals, convictions, and stereotypes widely held at the time of the first Republic of Estonia (1919–1939). The idealised notions of the past create a distinct atmosphere of nostalgia that can be observed in two sources discussed in this study: *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine* (2008; compiled on the basis of notes taken down from published cookbooks and hand-written recipes from the 1930s), and *Gifts of Taste* (Ilves 2011). Behind both of these books stand women who have had an important status in society: Maria Laidoner fulfilled the role of the first lady of the state in the 1930s, and Evelin Ilves was the first lady between 2006 and 2015. The two cookbooks point at a feeling of nostalgia that the nation harbours towards the authentic, Estonian cooking first advocated in the 1930s, which combines the rustic and noble into a modern and trendy whole.

**Keywords:** cookbooks, Estonia, food, identity

### INTRODUCTION

Idealised notions of the past create a distinct atmosphere of nostalgia which is evident in different walks of life, among them culinary traditions. In this study I aim to show the role of nostalgia in present-day nation-building processes, relying mainly on two sources: *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine* (2008; compiled on the basis of notes taken down from published cookbooks and hand-written recipes from the 1930s), and *Gifts of Taste* (Ilves 2011). The common denominator of these two books is the important status of their authors. Maria Laidoner fulfilled the role of the first lady of the state in the 1930s and Evelin Ilves was the first lady between 2006 and 2015. The books represent the period of the first Republic of Estonia and the present time (twenty-first century) respectively. In

addition to this, I take a broader look at recently published Estonian cookbooks to describe the tendency of promoting authenticity that manifests in praising local Estonian food and ingredients. The analysis further examines how the “Estonianness” of foodways is constructed in present-day Estonia. I attempt to show how these cookbooks redefine the essence of the Estonian cuisine, linking the local culinary art to the Estonian nature and environment, promoting ecological thinking in cooking, idealising the cooking traditions of the Estonian middle class / elite of the 1930s, and stressing the importance of the Estonian traditions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Eating belongs among the most basic and universal needs that has to be fulfilled in order to stay alive. However, the way we think about food comes with numerous cultural implications that become evident in how we eat or talk about food, prepare it, feel about it, etc. Cookbooks, although a relatively recent invention in the face of the whole history of mankind, can be seen as a guide to the culture of food consumption. Cookbooks talk to us on multiple levels. First of all, they provide information about how to prepare food on a very personal level – after all, they are practical publications meant to be used in the kitchen. But secondly, and equally importantly, they are informative about what can be eaten and how, and thus they also reflect a larger picture (see, e.g., Brownlie & Hewer & Horne 2005: 7, who discuss cookbooks as cultural artefacts that contain “inscribed cultural tales”). Their cultural significance is evident in the way they illuminate the domestic – or, even more broadly, social – history.

I agree with Claude Fischler (1988: 275), who argues that “food is central to our sense of identity”. We are what we eat. Entire nations and groups identify themselves partly through what they see as their traditional food with all the rituals that accompany it. The sociology of consumption (of goods, including food) may be taken as a general framework that describes how external objects cross the border from outside of the human body to inside, both literally and symbolically, and this process of internalisation forms a part of our identity, supporting the continuous (re)construction of the self. The primary location for the process is “the kitchen that is the most symbolic interaction space between the house and the nature” (Żarski 2013: 150).

The politics of food, as Marianne Lien and Brigitte Nerlich (2004) argue, has plenty to do with the creation of the nation-state. Arjun Appadurai (1988) has stated that cookbooks in countries with newly acquired nationhood and regionalised cuisines act as a middle-class instrument for composing a national

culture. As Estonia was largely missing an Estonian-born and -speaking cultural elite until the twentieth century, this is a suitable starting point also in the context of this study. The dominant group establishes the culinary common ground: they define “us” through combining the elements (ingredients, ways of preparing and serving, etc.) that they feel are authentic to that particular culture, and disregard others that seem not so authentic. Contemporary Estonian national identity relies greatly on the legacy from the first Republic of Estonia, and – as we can witness in the present study – so does contemporary Estonian culinary art. Present-day foodways in Estonia display a nostalgia towards the authenticity and creativity of the recipes from the first Republic of Estonia. I attempt to show how the two cookbooks that are analysed in this paper redefine the essence of Estonian present-day cuisine. I first look at the historical background to locate the publication of the cookbooks in time and space, analysing that against the backdrop of a politically manipulated identity discourse. This discourse functions as a mouthpiece for ideas like integration, nostalgia of the “good old days”, a longing for nobility that Estonians as a nation never had, and, last but not least – the revival of national ideals after a long and difficult period under totalitarian regime.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The dominant group in the first Republic of Estonia was the upper middle class, which consisted of citizens of Estonian nationality. It was the first time in history that Estonians themselves were the ruling class in their state. For the most part of the nation’s history Estonians had lived under the rule of other more powerful (neighbouring) nations who, one after another, conquered this strategically placed country and practically used it as their colony. Tsar Peter the Great saw Estonia as a window to Europe in his attempt to expand the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century; invaders from the West considered it a great gateway to the East. Up until the twentieth century the ruling class was essentially the minority elites, for example, Baltic German and Russian noblemen living in Estonia, whereas Estonians constituted the peasantry.

The twentieth century saw a radical change in this order. By the beginning of the twentieth century most of the foreign nobility had emigrated to Russia or Germany – to the countries of their origin – which gave the locals a chance to start developing their own “upper class” culture. As Estonians became wealthier, they got interested in visiting entertainment venues like theatres, cabarets, and restaurants. The latter became more and more likely to be frequented by Estonians and thus the (Estonian) chefs working there took

a chance to introduce Estonian dishes in their menus accordingly, following the new culinary demands. Also housewives became interested in “cooking Estonian”. This led to a wave of publications: culinary books, journals, and handbooks for young housewives were being published in the 1920s and 30s. The publications taught mostly urban women how to cook according to local traditions, but also introduced dishes from other culinary regions (e.g. crème brûlée, hollandaise sauce, etc.).

Estonians, as already mentioned, were primarily rural people, both emotionally and economically closely connected to their own piece of land. This independent, small-scale farming bore crucial social, economic, and cultural implications for the identity (Unwin 1999: 157). This was turned completely around by the Soviet occupation (1944–1991), which introduced the system of collective farms with no privately owned land. The second Republic of Estonia started off with privatisation, during which much of the land was given back to the original owners. At the same time, an eagerness to join the global economic circuit ended in a rapid urban-based capitalist modernisation. This tension between the rural and the urban, between picking mushrooms and inventing Skype, is still strong in the society, shaping the identity and in some ways also affecting foodways.

In the present day, we can see a rising interest in home cooking as well. It was an inevitability during the Soviet occupation, when women had to be innovative all the time in order to cook something from nothing, although it is sometimes remembered with pride or even nostalgia (see Bardone (2013), who shows that managing to feed the whole family with the few ingredients available in the shops can perhaps be seen as a small act of subversion in itself). There are numerous cookbooks, blogs, magazine and newspaper cooking columns, etc., being published, translated, and re-printed daily as cooking has come into vogue. Among these, there are a few that are designed to make a deeper impression than just provide information about how to prepare a quick and healthy meal for one’s family. I suggest that the latter are especially likely to be closely tied to the self-identification of a nation because they take time to tell a story about the recipes that they contain and in some cases do it also in other languages besides Estonian in order to project the quest for Estonian cooking towards the outsiders, the foreign audiences, strengthening the identity through their recognition and appreciation.

This is the case with *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine* (2008). The book features recipes in three languages – Estonian, Russian, and English. *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine* is definitely not just a book of recipes – it is a trilingual cookbook with a message. In this article, I first look at the historical background to locate the book in time and space, and then interpret its message in the context of

a discourse that functions as a mouthpiece for ideals like integration, nostalgia for the “good old days”, a longing for nobility that Estonians as a nation never had, and, last but not least – the revival of national ideals after a long and difficult period under totalitarian regime.

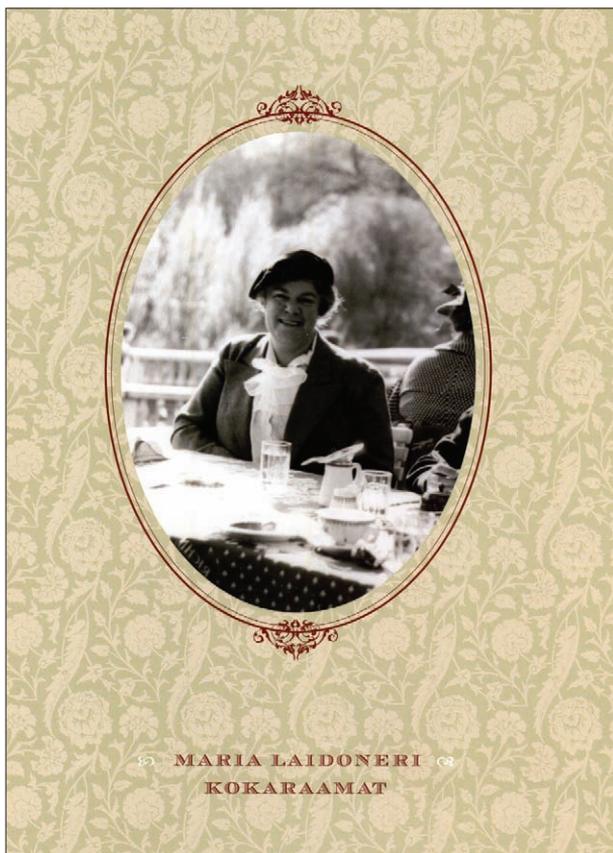
By comparison, I also refer to another cookbook, *Gifts of Taste* (2011), a bilingual (Estonian and English) publication, written by Evelin Ilves, the ex-wife of the previous president of Estonia, written during the time when they were in office. The numerous pictures in this book and its special section dedicated to authentic Estonian food offer a perfect (diachronic) comparison to *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine*. On the whole, the two books show how the first ladies of a state, at different though crucial times in terms of national identity, gave their share in constructing the Estonian identity through recipes.

Thirdly, I look even more broadly at recently published cookbooks to establish a trend towards stressing the authentic, local, and thoroughly Estonian food.

## ANALYSIS

### *Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine*

Maria Laidoner (née Kruszevska), born on 7 December 1888, was a daughter of a Polish nobleman. She married an Estonian general, Johan Laidoner (1884–1953), and came to live in Estonia. Her husband, being a highly honoured politician and one of the country’s most famous military officers, undoubtedly belongs to the national pantheon of Estonia. From the introduction to the cookbook we can read: “At the age of 35 he became the Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Armed Forces, and under his determined leadership Estonia won the War of Independence (1918–1920)” (*Maria Laidoner’s Cuisine* 2008: 12). This was a heroic victory, all the more so because it was unbelievable: the small Estonian army winning battles on two fronts simultaneously, against Russia and Germany, after years of devastating warfare. Johan Laidoner was respected not only as a competent commander-in-chief who had led Estonia towards the own nation-state; he was also a diplomat and statesman. Although he never became president, he and his wife performed a similar role among the political and intellectual elite of the period. As Konstantin Päts, the President of Estonia at that time, did not have a wife, the Laidoners often organised and presided over important official dinners, and Maria Laidoner acted as the first lady of the state. She was well-educated, had graduated from the Tallinn Conservatoire (now the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre), and was socially very active. From General Laidoner’s correspondence with his wife Maria, some of which is reprinted in the cookbook to give the flavour of the times, we learn about the



**Figure 1.** Maria Laidoner's *Cuisine*. Book cover (designed by Signe Kaljurand).

social life of the elite of that period, and about the responsibilities and obligations they had. These included festive lunches and dinners, gatherings, balls, and tea parties. It was Maria who organised the menus and supervised the cooking, serving, and laying tables. As she was dedicated to Estonian language and culture, she often took the role of introducing Estonian dishes to foreign guests – her recipes bear a strong connection to local ingredients and ways of preparing food. Up until the beginning of the Soviet occupation of Estonia, she carried this responsibility, and her social events were renowned for her culinary masterpieces (ibid.: 12). She died at the age of 90 in Jämejala, near Viljandi, Estonia, in 1978.

Her correspondence frequently addresses the topic of cooking and all her guests were impressed by her art. One of the main sources she used was a famous cookbook written by Elena Molokhovets, titled *Podarok molodym khoziaikam* (A gift to young housewives) – an extremely popular book at that time (given it was published in more than 20 editions)<sup>1</sup>. Being herself a member of the nobility, Molokhovets was notorious for making clear class distinctions, and her book

carried a strong potential of elevating the nouveau-riche / middle class among the nobility; or, in the case of Estonia, a potential of forming the nobility in the first place. Laidoner made use of ideas coming from other culinary traditions as well, describing, for example, how to make Jerusalem artichoke soup (Maria Laidoner's *Cuisine* 2008: 61) or dessert wine zabaglione (ibid.). Thus, we can say that Maria Laidoner's recipes are informed by various sources: Polish, Russian, and generally European.

### **The story of *Maria Laidoner's Cuisine***

Maria Laidoner's cookbook, published in 2008 by the Estonian War Museum / General Laidoner Museum, was a success on the bookstore shelves. Its copies are constantly lent out from libraries. The publishers of the book aimed to compile a set of recipes in a representable form, to be given as a gift to diplomats and guests of the Republic of Estonia (Maria Laidoner's *Cuisine* 2008: 13). On a more covert level, the book also tries to revive the atmosphere of the first Republic of Estonia, reprinting authentic photographs of the Laidoners' residence by the sea and the luncheons that took place there. The pictures alternate with extracts from Maria's letters.

The culinary convention cultivated by the then new Estonian nobility of the first republic is recreated by a combination of images – both old and new photographs – and texts (recipes and letters). Furthermore, the book seeks to re-install the ideals, tastes, and habits valued then into today's world, and to integrate the Estonians of different ethnic backgrounds (and educate the foreigners) through the consumption of food. Maria Laidoner was, after all, a perfectly integrated foreigner who had come to Estonia, learned to speak the language, and followed the customs as well as cooked local food. The aims of the cookbook are summarised in the preface: it is a publication of historical material, an example of the cooperation between different nations, and a classical cookbook all in one – a story of integration. A reference of how the idea of the book was born dwells on the same idea, as the photographic album together with Molokhovets's cookbook (1899 edition) was brought to the museum by a Russian-speaking young woman who had found them in the course of construction works in her attic, which makes the gesture "the best evidence of the fact that integration has been successful in the second period of independence here in Estonia" (ibid.: 13).

Recipes, mostly taken from Molokhovets's cookbook (dating from the turn of the century) and Maria Laidoner's letters (dating from the 1970s) form an artistic whole. The pictures and letters reprinted in *Maria Laidoner's Cuisine* tell volumes about the meaning of food and the sentiments of national identity



*I am Polish by origin. My grandfather was part of an old Polish noble family, who Lemkowicz wrote about in his novel *By Fire and Sword*. After the suppression of the Polish uprising my grandfather was put into prison as an accomplice in the riot. Polish universities were closed down. My father was not admitted to the Russian university, as he was the son of a rebel, and he was not allowed to go to study abroad either. My father used all of the possibilities that were open to him to study and started working in engineering. Because of his work he was not able to be at home much. I was the fifth child in the family. My mother divorced my father and remarried. My stepfather was very fond of me – he was the sunshine in my childhood.*

**Figure 2.** Interior of the Laidoners' mansion. Maria Laidoner's Cuisine, p. 17 (book design by Signe Kaljurand).

that it carries. Added to the texts in three languages, the letters are laid out as handwriting to enhance the feeling of authenticity. She wrote the letters in her late life in Estonia. By then she lived alone, her husband had been taken to Siberia (where he died in prison), and their son had committed suicide. She describes how visits by her (mostly Estonian) friends brought happiness in her days and something good on her table:

*Some ladies came to see me on the first day of the holidays. I made pasha – it turned out nicely and it made me proud. I also made my favourites – “salty” pies – and they turned out well, too. One of my friends brought homemade white bread, another brought a homemade cake and another bought a cake. I coloured, very primitively, some eggs. (ibid.: 31)*

While writing the letters, she chose to use Estonian and added but a few foreign words in between (e.g.: "first I will make some nice pies and plov and the things I promised to make to my friends – *пельмени*"; *ibid.*: 22). Thus, she is presented to today's readers as the embodiment of a well-integrated immigrant, who, although Polish, mastered the Estonian language and found a way into the hearts of the locals. Maria's letters as well as the recipes ordered as four-course menus, and the advice section at the end of the book refers to the "good old days", an almost mythological past where receptions were grand, ladies and gentlemen were well behaved, and food was plentiful. A telling passage in the advice section (which she had copied by hand from Molokhovets's book) reads as follows:

*Tea is served on a long dinner table covered with a clean tablecloth. A small table with a samovar is put at one end of the table. A tray of fruit, such as apples, pears, oranges, mandarins and grapes is placed in the middle of the table. On both sides of the fruit tray piles of dessert plates are placed crosswise with the table, and dessert knives made of silver or bone are placed next to the plates. [...] Small plates with thin slices of veal, ham, beef, hazel grouse, turkey or chicken, tongue, rabbit, Russian cheese or cottage cheese, grated green cheese et al are placed symmetrically around the bread tray in the form of a crescent. (*ibid.*: 153)*

This description forms a striking contrast with the reality of the times that Maria Laidoner actually wrote the letters. In the last decade of her life she experienced deep totalitarian stagnation when everyday reality consisted mainly of food shortage and worshipping simple working-class heroes who had nothing in common with the bourgeoisie lifestyle she had known in her youth.

Brought to the present times, the perception of this contrast is even sharper – the idealisation of the first Republic of Estonia often goes hand in hand with imagining the hardships that Estonia had to endure in the Soviet period. In this juxtaposition, the bourgeois society of 1920–1940 emerges as "the golden times" for the present-day reader. It appears as a winner in all its aspects, and food plays an important role in this sum. The nostalgia that food has the power to create has been noticed before: Sutton (2001) sees food as an incubator of memory, complete with its power to stimulate nostalgia. Both food and memory have a strong relationship with identity. Very often we remember the food from our childhood as ideal and the experience originating from our mothers' our grandmothers' kitchens shapes the preferences in later life. Home and food, especially when combined, evokes feelings of comfort and security. Our tastes are to a great degree determined by cultural patterns emerging from the culinary traditions (Žarski 2013) and the early experience thereof. To put it briefly, 'if "we are what we eat", then "we are what we ate" as well' (Sutton 2001: 6).

The recipes combine the exotic (e.g. Slavic, European) and the homely (locally Estonian) into fine dishes such as boletus soup with deer pasties (Maria Laidoner's *Cuisine* 2008: 82–93). Many of them give the reader a taste of grandeur of the past times:

*Pheasant with roast beetroot: Clean the pheasants. Wash the vegetables. Cut the beetroot into two or four pieces and halve the onions and carrots. Put the ingredients in a cooking or cast-iron pot. Pour in water and red wine and add the caraway seeds and rosemary. Add salt. Place the pheasants on top of everything and cover them with a thin layer of lard to make the dry pheasant meat more juicy. Chop the butter and put the pieces on the vegetables. Season with ground juniper berries and black pepper.* (ibid.: 121)

*Maria Laidoner's Cuisine* is precisely an exercise in nostalgia for “the childhood of our nation”. Moreover, Maria Laidoner personifies something more than just the good times and prosperity of the first Republic of Estonia. Through a frequent reference to Molokhovets's book and culinary traditions known among the nobility of Eastern Europe, she helped to build the local Estonian upper middle class through novel and noble tastes: that of crême caramel, hollandaise sauce, roasted quails, caviar – but also local fish, chanterelles, berries, etc. By mixing the internationally renowned dishes with simple Estonian food, she then created a new culinary tradition that now, after the 1990s, harmonises well with the ideas of Estonian national food: deeply rooted in the local, but open to the outside world. As the director of the Estonian War Museum writes in the preface, the recipes collected into the book are “tasty, exciting, simple and very Estonian” (ibid.: 13). Last but not least – the cookbook itself, published in 2008, symbolises the revival of national ideals after a long and difficult period under the totalitarian regime.

### ***Gifts of Taste***

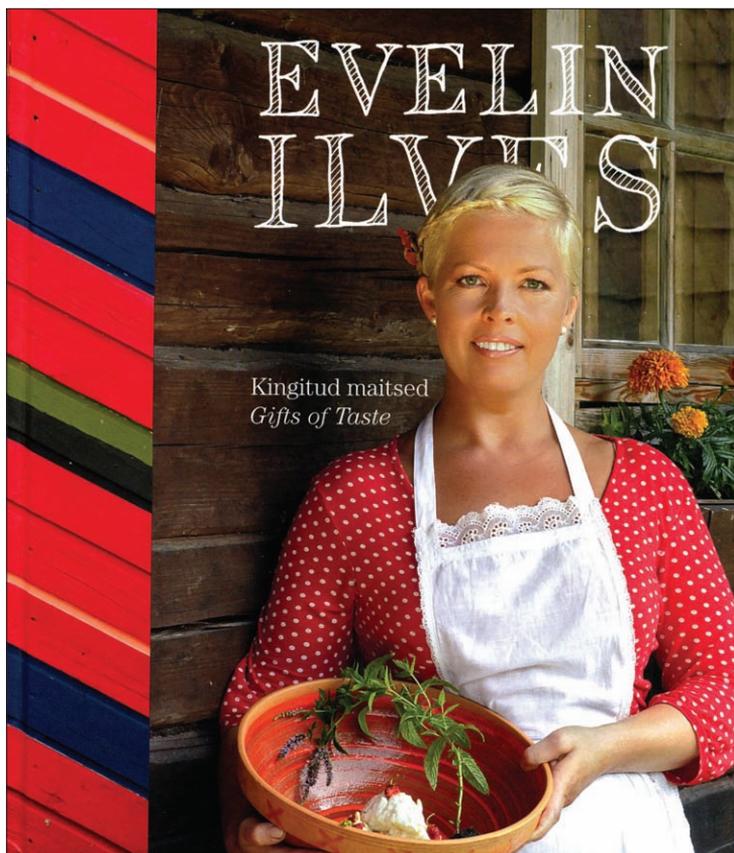
Evelin Ilves, the ex-wife of the former President of Estonia (Toomas Hendrik Ilves), is still a visible public figure. Her interest in locally designed Estonian fashion has brought her and her outfits to the attention of the press both in Estonia and abroad. So have also her statements about sports, gardening, handicrafts, health, and – perhaps above all – food. Together with her husband, she used to manage the Ärna homestead in southern Estonia, where the couple often entertained dignitaries on diplomatic visits from all over the world. Before 2006, she was known to the wider public as the project leader of the controversial state-commissioned branding project aimed at making Estonia more attractive

for the foreign visitors, thus being involved with questions of national identity, the propagation of Estonianness, and designing the image of the state. The aim of the project was to advertise Estonia as a desirable tourism and business destination.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a cookbook that introduced foreign recipes to Estonians and Estonian culinary secrets to foreigners followed quite logically from her interests. Her contribution to the discourse about contemporary Estonian food is remarkable (Annuk 2013: 139) and she often speaks up on this topic. Presently she continues to be active in the culinary scene and in the summertime runs her own home restaurant in Hiiumaa, one of the islands in western Estonia.

### **The story of *Gifts of Taste***

Evelin Ilves's book titled *Gifts of Taste* was published in 2011. Similar to *Maria Laidoner's Cuisine*, it takes the reader on a trip into discovering the world of tasty yet simple food. The book is comprised of two parts: the first six chapters deal with recipes given to the president's wife on diplomatic travels around the world (though largely concentrating on Europe), and the last chapter is dedicated solely to local Estonian recipes. All of them begin with a story of how the dish reached the president's family, written down in a colourful and warm style. The stories are brought to life by illustrative pictures. After the book launch event in Abja bookshop<sup>3</sup> Evelin Ilves announced on the official webpage of the President of Estonia: "There's no simpler, quicker or more enjoyable way of expressing your country's values or capturing the intricacies of its climate and moods and what they have to offer than through local food."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the warm, positive moods and impressions that come with cooking form the centre of this book – photographs accompanying the stories of the dishes are a vivid declaration of this. The artist who designed the book states that "Evelin's simple, heartfelt recipes are matched perfectly by Marksteen's [Marksteen Adamson's] photos, which really give them a 'just out of the oven' feel" (ibid.). The publishers have stressed the values that the design represents, stating that the simple style lets the pure tastes rise to the pedestal.

Evelin Ilves starts every "gift" recipe in the first six chapters with a story of how she came to know the dish. The Estonian chapter at the end of the book is slightly different. In its introduction, the author points to the short and yet-in-the-making history of Estonian cuisine: "As a new player, we are just starting our invasion of the world. And that's great – it means each of us has a say in what the special Estonian taste is" (Ilves 2011: 199). There is an openness to novel tastes in Estonian cooking that she recognises as a positive thing, but this is right side by side with the features of a laconic, practical – in many ways, deeply Nordic – cuisine. She adds that for her, the authentic Estonian taste is



**Figure 3.** *Gifts of Taste*. Book cover (designed by Dan Mikkin).

“pike perch, chanterelles, cheese curd and wild strawberries” (ibid.). There is still a strong stress on the accompanying story of how the recipe reached her, but here the sentiment is expressed with a considerable dose of patriotism and a feeling of local identity – like in this extract describing the arrival at Ärna homestead:

*The road that leads to our farm ends there. If you stand in the middle of the yard, surrounded by forest, it seems that all roads lead here and lead out to the world from here. There are no hinterlands. The place where you have your home is the centre of the world, the most important place in the world. I like the feeling you get when walking barefoot – as if your roots were burrowing into the ground and drawing new energy. (Ilves 2011: 239)*

A recipe that is at the core of the second, Estonian part of the cookbook, is the one for black bread – the typical Estonian rye bread, very dark and made with

special bread leaven, not yeast. Ilves describes the leaven like a living being, which, together with the good intentions of the baker, gives an authentic taste to the bread: “Bread has personality. This means that one must treat it very sensitively. Already in ancient times people knew that if you think bad thoughts while making bread, the bread won’t turn out right” (ibid.: 245). In fact, her description of bread-baking is more than a recipe; to put it poetically, it is an ode to bread. Evelin Ilves takes her time to describe the old art of bread-making, passed on from grandmothers to granddaughters. Through her emotional text and the similarly singular photographs, it is almost possible to feel the smell of freshly baked dark black rye bread.<sup>5</sup>

*If, when you take the bread out of the oven, it turns out that the bottoms are a bit doughy and light in colour, simply put them back in the oven without the pans for 15 minutes. If you wish, you can brush the freshly baked bread with fresh farmer’s butter. I recommend that you let the bread cool for at least an hour before cutting. Warm bread is doughy! Of course, it is difficult to resist the fragrance of warm, freshly baked bread, but it’s worth it. (ibid.: 247)*



**Figure 4.** Visualising authenticity. *Gifts of Taste*, p. 240 (photographs by Marksteen Adamson).

Another star of the Estonian section of the book is fish. Different types of fish dishes have been on the Estonian traditional menu for centuries (fish dishes were also present among Maria Laidoner's recipes). Pike perch, already mentioned as one of the typical dishes in Estonian cuisine as defined by Evelin Ilves, is closely followed by all other kinds and sizes of salt- and sweetwater fishes: eel, herring, carp, sprat, etc. In the introduction to one of the many recipes of fish dishes she writes:

*Only 44 people live in Kiideva year-round, but in the summer all 64 farms are filled with activity. Coastal people are very good with fish. Thus, we tasted the world's best marinated Baltic herring in the village elder's home. [...] Put the 100 gutted fish in the marinade [1 liter cold, uncooked water, 6 tbsp coarse sea salt, 6 tbsp sugar, 6 tbsp vinegar]. Let marinate for 24 hours, then debone – now the spine can be removed easily! Roll each fish up and place in a can or jar alternating layers of fish with finely chopped onion, garlic, fresh dill, and a dash of oil. Repeat layer by layer. On the next day, you'll have a wonderful, delicately salty mouthful. Enjoy with boiled new potatoes, or homemade rye bread. A glass of buttermilk is also a wonderful addition. (ibid: 209)*

Thirdly, among the most typically Estonian dishes are, quite similar to Maria Laidoner's cuisine, mushrooms from the forest. The king of Estonian wild mushrooms is the chanterelle, abundant in Estonia in late summer and early autumn, most often in pine forests, where their yellow caps can be seen from afar. It is a seasonal delicacy that most people use as a valuable addition to their menus, and everyone has a place in the forest, well kept in secrecy, where they go to pick them and which was already known by their grandparents and their parents. Evelin Ilves writes:

*If I am asked what is the most typical Estonian dish in the late summer, I would definitely say chanterelle sauce with new potatoes. This taste cannot be duplicated or replaced. Chanterelles have a Nordic stubbornness that makes it impossible to grow on farms. Wildly delicious! (ibid: 253)*

Toomas Hendrik Ilves states in his foreword to the (at the time) first lady's cookbook that our tastes are determined by our surroundings and upbringing, but a "national taste" is by no means a unified or immutable phenomenon (ibid.: 12). Tastes change through generations, and what is stressed at one time or another is as much a matter of practical reasoning as it is an emotional choice. In these two cookbooks that I have described so far, the emotional choice of creating simple, homely, and yet noble food rises to the forefront.

### **Other recent cookbooks stressing the Estonian culinary identity**

Home cook Maru's book *Maru maitsev maailm* (Maru's Tasty World) was published in 2008, and although this is only in Estonian with no translated recipes, it offers an insightful comparison to the first two books in its attempt to define the national and typically Estonian in the kitchen. A few examples of her text reveal the poetic language she uses in describing food that suits the passing of seasons in Estonia. She approaches her cooking through the four seasons, defining the local tastes through metaphors and images:

*My hunter-and-gatherer's blood starts rushing as soon as there is enough rain, and the smell of wet moss is noticeable even in town. Picking mushrooms is something much more than just hunting down the fungi. It means a wonderful walk through the woods, fresh air, the need to finally look myself in the eye and listen to what is going on in my head and heart. Maybe even to get to know myself...<sup>6</sup> (Maru 2008: 96)*

And even more typical:

*The sky has suddenly risen high up and the clouds have become unreachable. The days spread themselves out pleasantly, tempting us outside. The sound of melting snow dripping follows us everywhere. The water drips on everything around me for at least a week – on iron, stone, from branches on the mud... I would like to weave this into my dishes, to feel it in the delicacies. But how is it possible to cook something that would taste like the sound of the melting snow? (ibid.: 14)*

The image of wanting to cook a dish that would taste like the sound of melting snow is a simple yet effective way of seeing Estonian cooking as an extension of the Estonian landscape, climate, and nature. It combines the elusiveness of catching the true essence of the national taste, yet conveys the love for nature that provides the ingredients for Estonian cuisine. The philosophy is straightforwardly reflected also in the first ladies' cookbooks – value local ingredients, take time for cooking, and enjoy the dishes with close family and friends. Again, we see the stress on the local ingredients, and the often-mentioned love for mushroom- and berry-picking in the forest, but also the high value of fish and of course the classical item, the dark rye bread.

A book dedicated to the art of bread-making is a recent (2014) bilingual new cookbook by Evelin Ilves, *LEIB: Ilo ja vägi / BREAD: The Beauty & the Might*. This time the author travelled in Estonia in search for recipes and stories of the women baking bread both in remote and central parts of Estonia. Its aim is to present the story of bread as felt and told by 18 different women in Estonia. The book contains recipes for making bread, but also tries to capture the ineffable –

the power behind the old art. Evelin Ilves reflects on her relationship with black bread as “an eternal love, an all-powerful prayer”:

*We in Estonia have a special relationship with bread. ... I knew I wanted to capture all this in this book – the story and face of bread, the beauty and strength of women, the unbelievable diversity and power of our nature. All this combines in the Estonia that has sustained us here for millennia. This is the Estonia that captivates us every day and sometimes causes pain. And this is the Estonia that day after day ever more boldly confirms to the world that miracles are possible. That everything is possible when you live with your roots deep in the ground, and are carried by strong wings.* (Ilves 2014: 10)

Evelin Ilves, who herself has been baking bread for over twelve years, said in a radio interview after the book had been published that in this book she wanted to show what the one who bakes needs to give to the bread in order for it to taste good and, even more importantly, for the energy to materialise fully.<sup>7</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Cookbooks are by their nature heterogeneous: there are some used by consumers as reference materials, with basic cooking techniques or classic recipes, or specialised texts dealing with cooking for children or vegetarianism, whose importance shifts depending on lifestyle and life stage, or handwritten journals passed from one generation to another, uncovering family and social history, etc. (Tonner 2008). The examples mentioned and analysed in this article fall in one category – the cookbooks that are designed to establish and shape culinary identity.

All of the books that have been referred to in the present paper stress the importance of traditions and authenticity in local cuisine. A particular aspect that functions as a locus of identity is memory of old times, where closeness to nature was combined with a certain grandeur of nobility or upper middle class. Another aspect that is felt throughout the examples is the connection between generations of women, the caregivers who traditionally cooked for the entire family. To some extent these recipes become an exercise in nostalgia, an attempt to recapture a bygone era, which allows for Estonians, now primarily living in cities and towns, to flirt with a lifestyle more representative of the past than of the present.

The culinary identity of Estonians was, to a considerable degree, translated from the nations with an established aristocracy as an act of borrowing reputation through foodways. After the long period of Soviet occupation and the following rebirth of the Estonian state in 1991, the same recipes were brought

to life, this time translated into English (and Russian, in the case of Laidoner’s cookbook) for the international audience. Thus, some cookbooks are directed outwards, not only to Estonians themselves – as an act of constructing a traditional culinary identity to be recognised on a grander scale than just within the country. Everything authentic, even if combined with the exotic and borrowed, has been brought to the forefront.

Although the meaning and values of different foodstuffs and dishes change together with the changing social status of the consumers, the re-creation/reformulation of their status is what matters. What these analysed cookbooks express is exactly the re-writing of history in a way that brings culinary nostalgia and authenticity into the discourse of national identity, and through that contributes to the process of nation-building. They convey nostalgia, stepping closer to realising the ideas of authenticity, tradition, and national cuisine. Estonia as a country with a relatively short history of independence seems to need it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Read more about the book, especially concerning its popularity at the time of its publication, at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Gift\\_to\\_Young\\_Housewives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Gift_to_Young_Housewives), last accessed on 17 January 2018.

<sup>2</sup> One of the first times the logo appeared in Estonia is documented in this news text: *Eesti märk on “Welcome to Estonia!”* (The Brand of Estonia is “Welcome to Estonia!”), Delfi.ee, 26 April 2002 (see <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/eesti/eesti-mark-on-welcome-to-estonia?id=3518619>, last accessed on 16 January 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Abja is a small village in the vicinity of Äрма farm. Holding the book launch event in this remote place can perhaps be seen as a tribute to the countryside and its authentically Estonian cuisine. The official launch was held at the Helsinki book festival, signalling the orientation towards foreign audience.

<sup>4</sup> See *First Lady’s Cookbook Published Today*, 20 October 2011. Available at <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/president/evelin-ilves/evelin-ilves-media/6657-first-ladys-cookbook-published-today/index.html>, last accessed on 24 January 2018.

<sup>5</sup> This line of her interest received a follow-up in the form of another book by Evelin Ilves, *LEIB: Ilo ja vägi / BREAD: The Beauty & the Might*, published in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Translations of excerpts from this book are made by the author.

<sup>7</sup> Her preoccupation with women as a symbol of the persistence of the nation (manifest partly in their bread-baking ability) forms the backdrop for this book; the interview follows the very same reasoning (see Evelin Ilves: Leib pole põgenemispaik (Evelin Ilves: Bread is not an escape), available at <http://menu.err.ee/v/uudised/inimesed/893a3114-cfbd-494e-ad44-8ee93bb3c5b5>, last accessed on 18 January 2018).

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# TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY ECONOMY: CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH BREAD-MAKING

*Ivanka Petrova*

*Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum  
Sofia, Bulgaria*

*e-mail: [ivanka.petrova@iefem.bas.bg](mailto:ivanka.petrova@iefem.bas.bg)*

**Abstract:** The trends of healthy nutrition spreading worldwide can be observed on the example of the expanding consumer niche oriented to the demand for hand-made bread baked in small bakeries. Based on a specific example of a group of bread-makers, the owners of small bakeries in Bulgaria, the article discusses the ways of constructing cultural heritage and its particular use as a resource in this economic context. Apart from laying emphasis on the use of maximally high quality products in bread-making, the small entrepreneurs also apply cultural methods in order to construct the image of bread as a cultural value, inherited from the past, and to conceptualise the ways and technologies of its production as social actions marking “a return to traditions”. The research presents the narrative strategies of the bread-makers, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage. I identified these strategies in the self-presentation of the members of the branch organisation, the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers, during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv between the 23rd and 26th of April 2015.

**Keywords:** bread, bread-making, cultural heritage, narrative strategies, small entrepreneurs, traditions

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades we have observed an increased interest in cultural heritage and its various forms, presentations, and uses related to the field of economy. Nowadays not only the use of natural resources, but also the reconstruction of the past, as well as the promotion and propagation of cultural heritage, have become an essential part of different economic spheres, and especially of tourism industry (cf. Cohen 1988; Brewer 1994). Local history, natural landmarks, memory, traditions, elevated to the status of “heritage”, are rediscovered, loaded with new meanings, enriched, and have become important resources and a part

of the basic capital of tourism and of other areas of production, trade, and services. A great number of local entrepreneurs are among the important agents in this process (Petrova 2015). Based on a specific example of a group of bread-makers, the owners of small bakeries in Bulgaria, I will discuss in this article the ways of constructing cultural heritage and its particular use as a resource in this economic context. My research is a part of the scientific project “Transformations of local agricultural practices under conditions of Europeanisation and globalisation”<sup>1</sup>.

The trends of healthy nutrition spreading worldwide can be observed on the example of the expanding consumer niche, oriented to the demand for bread, made by hand and baked in small bakeries. The small entrepreneurs, owners of such bakeries I investigated in 2015, claim that in the process of their professional work and by its results they have been endeavouring to fit in that niche oriented to healthy and nature-conforming nutrition. Apart from laying emphasis on the use of maximally high quality products in bread-making, they also apply cultural methods in order to construct the image of bread as a cultural value, inherited from the past, and to conceptualise the ways and technologies of its production as social actions marking “a return to traditions”. The entrepreneurs display the production and marketing of a product of a very high symbolic value, exceeding and even incomparable with its market value. In this way small bread-makers practically become part of the generation of cultural heritage. However, this process is accompanied by the desire of the bread-makers to pass on to the contemporaries the knowledge and practices related to the preparation of bread, perceived as heritage and value. This way the producers themselves take also the role of mediators and try to influence the change in attitudes, in relation to the product, in diet, and even in everyday life of the customers. Naturally, the cultural valuation of the hand-made bread produced by bakeries also aims at its economisation. The rise of an economic product to the rank of cultural heritage further enhances its market value and thus heritage becomes a resource, a means of providing income as well as a medium for the successful development of the business enterprise.

In this article I present the narrative strategies of small bread-makers in Bulgaria, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage. I identified these strategies in the self-presentation of the members of the branch organisation, the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers, (constituted in 2014) during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv between the 23rd and 26th of April 2015. I managed to conduct interviews with three of them as well as with one of their apprentices; I also documented their interaction with the audience to whom they offered to taste, free of charge, the loaves of bread kneaded and baked on the spot (Fig. 1–2).<sup>2</sup> I supplemented the information I had collected with a review of the internet page of the organisation and the



**Figure 1.** The Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv in 2015. Master-bakers Georgi and Alexei offering the fair visitors their produce. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.



**Figure 2.** Master-bakers Georgi and Dimitar intercommunicating with the visitors of the Crafts Fair. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.

pages of its individual member enterprises<sup>3</sup> (12 small bakeries from different Bulgarian towns and cities)<sup>4</sup>. In September 2015, I conducted field research in five small enterprises, members of the guild, which are located in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Haskovo, and Sliven.

## THE CRAFTS FAIR IN PLOVDIV

The handicrafts fair was first held in Plovdiv in 2012, on the initiative of the Regional Chamber of Arts and Crafts. Since then, it has been organised on four days twice every year, in the spring and in the autumn. The organisers' objective has been to present and popularise the traditional arts and crafts still existing today in their wealth and diversity, and to help enhance the craftsmen's prestige in society. The spring fair is held in a part of the main street, where in the early 1940s the workshops of leading craftsmen of Plovdiv were located. The autumn fair is held in the old part of the city.

Every time the Crafts Fair begins with a procession of the participants along the main street or in the old part of the city. Most of the craftsmen turn out in traditional costumes or outfits characteristic of their respective craft. An opening ceremony is held by the mayor and the organisers in one of the central city squares. Participants are from different parts of the country; there are also guests from neighbouring countries, for example Serbia and Macedonia. The number of craftsmen presenting their crafts has been growing with every passing year and in 2016 it amounted already to 85, displaying 25 handicrafts.<sup>5</sup>

During the fair, besides selling their produce, the craftsmen also give demonstrations of their production process or part of it. At every fair emphasis



*Figure 3. Master-baker Dimitar kneading dough in front of the audience at the Crafts Fair. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.*

is laid on some of the crafts and an initiative is launched with the aim of drawing public attention to the work of craftsmen from that sphere; for instance, a ceramics workshop, a wrought iron studio, or a workshop of carpet weaving is organised. Contests are also held among master craftsmen from all over the country, for instance, in pottery making. The Spring Fair of 2015 I studied, the fifth one in succession, focused on bread-making. The organisers were the Plovdiv Municipality, the municipal enterprise “Tourism”, the Regional Ethnographic Museum in Plovdiv, the Regional Chamber of Crafts, and the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers. The main event during the Crafts Fair was declared to be the fair of the bakers, during which the participating master-bakers opened a makeshift bakery in the street where they kneaded dough and baked bread in front of the audience during the four days of the fair (Fig. 3).

## **HISTORY OF BREAD-MAKING IN BULGARIA**

The preparation of bread has been one of the oldest human activities, and bread itself is one of the earliest products in history. It occupies a central place in the history of agrarian societies. To this day bread is one of the staple foods. For Bulgarians bread was a staple food up to the middle of the twentieth century (Vakarelski 1974: 212). In traditional Bulgarian culture, characteristic of the pre-industrial society and surviving in the village environment up to the middle of the twentieth century, bread for daily consumption and for holiday feasting was kneaded and baked by women in the peasant families (Yaneva 2010: 203). Bread-making for everyday use was considered to be one of the hardest house-keeping obligations and was done once a week (Markova 2011: 80). Researchers have noted that in traditional culture bread-making was the woman’s basic socially differentiated activity, related, above all, to her reproduction abilities (Yaneva 2010: 211–212). Bread for daily use was usually made of mixed flour (wheat, barley, and maize), while ritual bread – most often of wheat flour (Markova 2011: 81).

During the Middle Ages, bread-making developed as a craft in Bulgarian towns to meet the needs of the urban population. Along with other crafts it went beyond the circle of household production, becoming part of the process of reaffirmation of the crafts as a third sector, apart from agriculture and stock-breeding (Primovski 1981: 111). During the period of the Ottoman rule of the Bulgarian lands (1396–1878), crafts, including bread-making, were encouraged and developed successfully. The concentration of a great number of people and administration in towns, as well as the expansion of the Ottoman army, resulted in a tangible strengthening of the crafts, related to supplying food to the people.

Data can be found in sources regarding the development of bread-making and the other crafts turning out food (Stoianov 1999).

After the liberation in 1878 and as far as the establishment of socialism in 1944, bread-making remained one of the crafts unaffected by industrialisation and foreign competition. It survived as it was among the staples in the Bulgarian livelihoods, meeting daily needs and turning out goods of fast circulation for the local market alone. Bread-making and trading in bread in towns was done at one and the same place – in the craftsman's bakery, where the baker was working with a few helpers and apprentices. A bakery was operating in almost every town district, meeting the daily needs of the neighbourhood population of bread and pastry. Women in the villages continued to make bread for daily use at home. In either case the production was hand-made; the technologies used were familiar and mastered: kneading with yeast, long fermentation, and baking in special stone or earthenware ovens.

Under socialism (1944–1989) bread-making became industrial, and bread-making factories started to be built in every town back in the 1950s. State-owned bread bakeries were established in the villages to secure meeting the everyday needs of the peasant families, since women had been enlisted in everyday work on the cooperative farms and very little time was left for housework. Bread-making was separated from the trade, which was done in specialised bakeries. Up-to-date machines for dough kneading and electric furnaces for baking were used in the bread factories. Factory manufactured yeast was extensively used, which radically curtailed the time for bread leavening. In these enterprises manual labour was greatly restricted, while the work of the master bakers in the craftsmen's bakeries, which had survived after the nationalisation of 1947, was made much harder, because of the restrictive state policy towards private entrepreneurs. Gradually, most of these craftsmen's bakeries were closed down. The remaining bakeries turned into enterprises offering and supplying the service of baking home-made dishes and Easter cakes, since an oven was not available to every household in town. In the 1970s these ovens also gradually finished working, and were substituted by the combined cookers installed en masse in urban and rural households. Mostly three types of bread were on offer under socialism, made of wheat flour of different quality. Hand-made bread was offered comparatively rarely in the villages and some town shops at a higher price; it had been made in the bread factories or village ovens out of high quality wheat flour, the only difference being that it had been hand-kneaded.

After the changes of 1989 in Bulgaria, privately owned bakeries began to emerge, while the major state bread-making enterprises were closed down or privatised. By the end of 2015, bread-manufacturing enterprises in the country numbered 353, among them both large private bread-making plants and small

family-owned bakeries.<sup>6</sup> The range of the kinds of bread has been most varied, and flour from different cereals has been used.

### **SMALL BAKERIES AS RESEARCH OBJECTS**

All the enterprises I have studied are family bakeries: they have been jointly established by spouses and are relatively new, set up during the past 7–8 years (Fig. 4). The entrepreneurs are between 30 and 50 years of age. As a rule, the husband is in charge of the selection and delivery of materials, kneading and baking of the bread, while the wife helps in the production process and makes cookies. The selling of bread and pastries is usually done by both; the same refers to managing the documentation. The bakeries have two parts: the premises where the ingredients are kept and baking takes place, and the trading premises located directly in front. Some bakeries are in the city centre, others in urban districts. They usually occupy ground floors of new buildings; only one is in an old former bakery, built in the 1930s, and yet another in the entrance hall of a big supermarket store.



*Figure 4. Master-baker Delcho and his wife Maria in their family bakery in Haskovo. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, September 2015.*

Some of the studied enterprises also employ – besides the spouses – other men and women, whereas men are in charge of activities requiring physical force, while women usually make snacks and sell the produce. When the employees are very young and know nothing about the production process, the owners declare them to be their apprentices. The largest enterprise in terms of employment (nine) is the *Bakery Art* of master Dimitar. In their interrelations with customers and employees the entrepreneurs are referred to as masters – an address typical for craftsmen both in the past and today.

The couples working in the enterprises studied are most often engaged on a par with their employees, supervising and managing the processes of production and marketing. If the owners' family has high school children, they are also enlisted in their off-school time. The labour organisation thus presented is similar to the distribution of labour in the town craftsmen's bakeries from the early twentieth century. When it is a matter of public events, i.e., interviews to the media, participation in fairs or in food presentations, basically men are involved, while their wives are taking care of the production and trade in the bakeries.

## **NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF THE BREAD-MAKERS**

First, I discuss *the strategy of cultural opposition*, used by the bread-makers in their presentations during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. This strategy declares an anonymous loaf of bread, manufactured in bread-making plants by high technologies, to be harmful to health because of the multitude of artificial additives. It is opposed by the bakers to “the real bread home-made by hand”, which they knead, bake, and offer in their enterprises. They present bread-making as a process, radically different from the modernisation processes of mass factory production. Vladimir, a master-baker from Pleven, said the following in the interview:

*At the factory everything is made by machines and with additives, whereas I do everything by hand and use natural products. The technologies are completely different. Our bread is part of the art of living a healthy life in harmony with nature. Factory-made bread is inferior to boutique bread. Bread is no longer meant just to fill your stomach.*

Secondly, I would point to *the strategy of adding emotion to the maker-buyer relationship*. During the Crafts Fair the producers of bread in their conversations with the fair attendees laid emphasis on the fact that when the product is sold in their bakeries there is a direct connection between people, which is not

random and occasional but is repeated in the course of time. In this way there is no anonymity: direct contact between the customer and the producer is made and information is passed on to the consumer about the quality of materials and the product (Fig. 5). The internet page of the bakery of Georgi, a master-baker from Plovdiv, features the following information: “We offer people a live contact with the master-baker, who has made that bread for you. We WANT TO DO and ARE DOING OUR BEST to bring the baker’s craft back to your town, neighbourhood, and street”.<sup>7</sup>

As a third narrative strategy, I have identified *the strategy of mythologising the product*. During the Crafts Fair master-baker Dimitar from Plovdiv repeatedly explained to the fair visitors that the loaf of bread had been alive until put into the oven and therefore one had to treat it respectfully, like a living being. According to master-baker Georgi, bread often serves as medicine; he was telling those present how asthma could be treated by eating roasted rye bread. Georgi often addressed the visitors with the following words: “Bread is invaluable today. Today we do not sell loaves of bread. We hand them out to the people. But you may ask about bread.” Vladimir emphasised his beliefs by saying: “There is something good in every grain. And we strive to offer you ever more numerous healthy products – to take what is good from every grain.”



**Figure 5.** Direct contact between a bread producer and a little buyer at the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.

Another narrative strategy is *the strategy of idealising the bakers' work and their production and making it sacred*. Dimitar was explaining to the fair attendees: "Bread is made with love and good intentions. Everything else is just a recipe. And we must make it with positive energy, because otherwise it would not do." On the internet page of his bakery we can read the following: "For me making bread is like meditation: I experience supreme bliss while kneading bread. When the dough is kneaded with the master-baker's love and from quality products – this is what good health is."<sup>8</sup> This is what master-baker Georgi was telling the visitors at the Crafts Fair: "We have the most important backing – we have been chosen by the Lord because we are making bread, and each one of the bakers has forty sins absolved."

The last narrative strategy I have identified is *the strategy of "going back to traditions"*. The master bakers explained to the customers that the technology of making bread with live yeast used by them in their bakeries has a millennial tradition and could not be compared to the use of the yeast sold in the shops. During the fair the bread-makers explained to the visitors that the practice of kneading using live yeast as it has been known to our grandmothers should be mastered in home conditions. Master-baker Vladimir commented in the interview: "It is already time young women and our daughters learned how to make bread, but not in the baking machine; they should rather learn to knead by hand." Dimitar's words addressed to the customers give us an idea of the traditions of bread eating and its place in the traditional Bulgarian home:

*Once we first placed a loaf of bread on the table; now lukanka<sup>9</sup> comes first. That's why we are not healthy... Bulgarians have somewhat forgotten about bread. What they put on the table is salad and rakiya<sup>10</sup>, while bread is placed aside... I have been singularly striving to go back to the traditions of old time and to revive creativity, because man has been made to create.*

The internet page of Georgi's bakery features similar information:

*Bread had been present everywhere; once upon a time bread dough kneading was done only by housewives wearing clean clothes and saying a prayer. Let us place the loaf of bread back in the centre of the table, where it rightfully belongs. Our bread is not made with the purpose of trading it as merchandise; it is made with the aim of bringing back the quality and tradition of bread on your table.<sup>11</sup>*

## **BREAD-MAKING AS CULTURAL HERITAGE: CONSTRUCTION AND INSTRUMENTALISATION**

The process of transforming the production of a commodity into cultural heritage is realised through these narrative strategies. The construction of cultural heritage occurs in the framework of two processes: one of them is connected with its conceptualisation as a value, and the other – with the efforts to preserve it and pass on to the future generations. A number of authors have noted that cultural heritage is not something granted; it is being constantly created. It turns out to be a product of the actions of local actors, of communities and policies aimed at putting certain resources to good use (cf. Hemme & Tauschek & Bendix 2007). American anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) defines cultural heritage as a way of making culture by drawing on the means from the past and producing something new. The view of structuring cultural heritage serves as a starting point in investigating the question of the practices related to its creation as well as its valuation. The elements of the traditional material and non-material culture, described by the assignment “heritage”, are largely ennobled; they are placed within a new referential framework and are given new meanings (Hemme & Tauschek & Bendix 2007).

The structuring of cultural heritage is associated with the separating of cultural fragments and practice from the ordinary context by individual actors, groups or institutions. During the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv, a way of making bread at home, common in traditional culture, was displayed in front of an audience in the city’s main street. One of the objectives of these demonstrations was associated with enhancing the symbolic capital of bread-makers through their self-presentation as positive “characters”. On the other hand, during the demonstrations and interactions with the audience the bread production was given a high symbolic value by styling it as heritage. It was tagged with antiquity, authenticity, tradition, and originality.

As David Lowenthal writes, cultural heritage as a value by itself refers simultaneously to the past and future, while as a meta-product of late modernity it is based on historical fragments and fabrications; it reflects the typical simultaneousness and non-simultaneousness of the late modern generation of culture (Lowenthal 2000). The case under consideration involves a simultaneous existence of old technologies of bread-making, practiced and highly valued by bread-makers, and modern tools of labour (electrical ovens for bread-baking), which were on show at the Crafts Fair and which were of service to the bakers for their presentations. Relevant here can also be the meditations of Hermann Bausinger, who has argued that the awareness of traditions, and the emergence of cultural heritage, is an aftereffect of modernisation, which by its fast

advancement threatens to change what had once been self-evident. Modernisation, in his view, transforms the tradition into worth, value, and the object of choice (Bausinger 1991).

Markus Tauschek notes that the multifaceted use of the past can be encountered in the present, which is highly assessed, while the traditional customs, rituals, and practices have been referred to the resources judged as significant (Tauschek 2007). Through the presentations of the bread-makers, observed during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv, the ways and technologies of making bread, as well as its consuming known from tradition, have been placed within a new context, namely the one of the global trends of healthy nutrition. The traditional knowledge and skills acquire a different significance and also a new value. They further serve to improve the quality of life and lend new significance to the social presentation of the professional community of bread-makers. As cultural heritage they are referred to the past, but have turned into something new. All the knowledge and skills related to both the past and future are equipped with high symbolic value by the master-bakers as local actors. In their interactions with the audience during the Crafts Fair as well as in the interviews the entrepreneurs present their knowledge as subject to preservation and transmission to descendants. Here the emphasis is on the extensive knowledge of the bakers and on their efforts and willingness to involve the visitors in these traditional values, elevated to the rank of cultural heritage.

The cultural mechanism, whereby new historical fragments are split from the past and have meanings oriented to the present time, is not new. In the course of the late modern generation of heritage underway, however, the functions of that instrument usage are being ousted from ideological to economic use (Hemme 2007: 247). The demonstrations of the master-bakers during the Crafts Fair had the main purpose, alongside enhancing the social image of bread-makers, of drawing the attention of potential customers and advertising their companies and products.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that heritage is just assumed to be old, but it is actually a cultural generation of the present, looking for its refuge in the past. In the process of generating heritage, the cultural fragments, detached from their common usage, start a second life as representations of their own selves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 370). An essential moment in this process is their being charged with value. During the Crafts Fair the heritage was presented by the master-bakers as knowledge to the external community (the numerous attendees of the fair). Thus inheritance is used as an important resource for the food industry. The close relationship of the small bakeries with Bulgarian traditional culture, the valuation of old technology, knowledge, and skills for the preparation of bread, and the economic use of cultural heritage

finds expression in the narrative strategies presented during the demonstrations of the master-bakers.

Ingo Schneider notes that the transformation of a traditional cultural form into cultural heritage raises tradition to another level and deprives it of its self-conceptualisation (Schneider 2005: 2). The vitality of the cultural heritage has less in common with the continuity of tradition and is more strongly related to the intensity of what is being experienced. Defining their own tradition in a new way by declaring it to be cultural heritage, local people simultaneously develop, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 58) notes, a new understanding of a practice quite common in the past. That is, a transfer of one tradition to a new reflexive framework is achieved, the actors being overburdened with symbolic capital.

## CONCLUSION

According to Robert Peckham, for most people heritage today has two related meanings: on the one hand, it is associated with tourism and with the institutions that are interwoven with its evaluation, management, and preservation. On the other hand, cultural heritage also means a sum total of shared values and collective memories; it contains inherited customs and a sense of accumulated common experience, which is put to the fore as a “birth right” and finds expression in a specific language and other cultural presentations (Peckham 2003: 1). This is just the case with the abovementioned observations of the heritage structuring during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. Through the presented narrative strategies bread-makers join the process of transformation of the traditional practices, knowledge, and skills into cultural heritage. An excerpt of the internet page of the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers features a similar objective:

*We may be regarded as new Don Quixotes. Upholding the idea of the fine Bread, the true art of the Bread-Maker, the right to hand down our craft to the young, we shall stand up against industrialisation and the modern technologies by upholding the behest and the customs of our forefathers.*<sup>12</sup>

Cultural heritage is successfully instrumentalised by these actors as a resource for the economic development of their enterprises. Thus heritage is an object – of identification, preservation, and revitalisation, but also a means to achieve certain objectives – promoting social and professional positions, income, economic growth, etc. Cultural heritage is conceptualised by the surveyed small entrepreneurs as a value left by previous generations, which must be preserved and passed on to the next ones, to continue its ‘authentic’ existence. During

the Crafts Fair the heritage constructed in the bakers' presentations was oriented mainly towards outsiders, visitors to whom it had to be presented with the aim to provoke their interest. The example of the studied small entrepreneurs shows how the cultural heritage is constructed in the present economic and social context and how it functions as a flexible system open to different interpretations and innovations. Heritage, as a concept in their enterprises, is also closely linked to both tradition and modernity, past and present. The practices and the narrative strategies reflect the entrepreneurs' efforts to use the cultural heritage as a resource to achieve certain goals, but also to protect the heritage. They seek not only to benefit from the resources, but also to help their preservation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The project led by Assoc. Prof. Petar Petrov has been run by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies and the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since 2015, and is financed by the Bulgarian Research Foundation (project № DFNI-K02/16).
- <sup>2</sup> The empirical material collected during the Spring Fair contains interviews with a total duration of eight hours, eighty photographs, and seven short videos, submitted to the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies by the end of 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> I conducted investigations on the Internet mainly within two periods: May–September 2015 and August–December 2016.
- <sup>4</sup> See <https://bulgarianguildbakers.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> See <http://news.plovdiv24.bg/633222.html>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> See [http://www.capital.bg/biznes/stoki\\_i\\_prodajbi/2017/01/25/2901564\\_prodajbite\\_na\\_hliab\\_i\\_hlebni\\_izdeliia\\_sa\\_narasnali\\_do/](http://www.capital.bg/biznes/stoki_i_prodajbi/2017/01/25/2901564_prodajbite_na_hliab_i_hlebni_izdeliia_sa_narasnali_do/), last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> See <https://masterbaker.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> See <https://bg-bg.facebook.com/pages/Bakery-Art/433086113457670>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Dried sausage (Bulg.)
- <sup>10</sup> Brandy (Bulg.)
- <sup>11</sup> See <https://masterbaker.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> See <https://bulgarianguildbakers.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.

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# COOKING WITH HUMOUR: A STUDY OF BELARUSIAN HUMOROUS FOLKLORE ABOUT FAMILY COOKING TRADITIONS

**Anastasiya Fiadotava**

*Postgraduate student*

*Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore*

*University of Tartu, Estonia*

*e-mail: zhvaleuskaya@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** This paper is a study of Belarusian humorous folklore revolving around cooking. It examines two different types of folklore text: jokes collected on the internet, and humorous anecdotes in family lore about cooking, the latter collected through fieldwork. By comparing the two kinds of humour, the paper investigates to what extent the values and attitudes manifest in my interviews mirror those found in internet jokes. The research shows that while there can be some parallels between the two types of humour, their forms, topics, and functions differ greatly and reflect separate aspects of Belarusian foodlore.

**Keywords:** cooking, family anecdotes, foodways, humour, jokes

## INTRODUCTION

As a central element of culture, cooking has always been surrounded by folklore and, accordingly, has inspired plentiful folklore research (see, for example, Shosteck 1979; Schofield 1989; Skaarup 2013). These studies mainly explore cooking habits, styles, and rituals within a certain ethnic group, and demonstrate how close the ties between cooking and other aspects of culture are.

However, many localities, including my home country, Belarus, have not yet seen much research on cooking folklore. Belarusian cooking traditions and folklore have generally been studied by ethnologists (see, for example, Korzun 1992 [1976]; Navagrodski 2000) and to a lesser extent by folklorists (Samakhval 2011). Most of these works do not focus on cooking only, but mention it in the broader context of Belarusian cuisine and its manifestations in culture. A significant part of these works are dedicated to traditional dishes and their main ingredients, foodways of Belarusians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

and dishes that were eaten on special occasions (family and national holidays). Cooking practices have also been discussed in terms of gender distribution, technological aspects, and cooking utensils.

As eating out was (and in most Belarusian families, still is) restricted to special occasions, cooking bears a strong association with home and family. Thus, folklore centred on cooking provides a reflection on family life, gender roles, and values associated with domesticity.

In this paper, I examine the wider implications of cooking through the prism of humorous folklore. While doing so, I outline some of the topics of humorous folklore associated with cooking. I specifically focus on two kinds of humorous folklore: canned jokes circulating online, and family folklore shared with me in the 60 interviews I conducted with Belarusian couples.

The idea behind analysing humour from public, mass-circulation sources and the situational, ‘insider’ humour of family traditions is to see if the two share the same values and notions of family life. By drawing parallels and identifying differences between the two kinds of humour, I aim to elucidate whether and to what degree the humorous family anecdotes shared by my interviewees display values and attitudes similar to those of internet jokes.

## DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

This paper relies on two main groups of sources. First, I used jokes that were shared online by the users of two of the most popular Belarusian news websites and forums: *tut.by* and *onliner.by*. In these forums people can post jokes and react to jokes posted by others. This mechanism of quick joke transmission is, in a way, similar to oral communication (Thielemann 2011: 151). I picked 80 jokes that were related to cooking. In several of these, cooking is mentioned only in passing and does not constitute the core of the joke, although most of the jokes are dedicated primarily to cooking. The majority of the joke narratives that I found were situated in a family setting.

To provide some historical context, I have also used some cooking-related jokes published in the nineteenth century, and Soviet-era joke collections (see, for example, Fiadosik 2005 [1984]; *Narodnyja* 1961). The former were largely collected by folklorists, while the latter were published for mass consumption. While admittedly a very heterogeneous set in terms of collection and circulation mechanisms, levels of censorship, and the historical context of origin, jokes from the three eras (pre-Soviet, Soviet, present-day) still pertain to the same or similar folklore form and share a similar structure. Moreover, as I show in the ‘Jokes about Cooking’ section, they display a remarkable continuity in terms of

both plot elements and embedded values, which creates a basis for comparison and analysis of the recurrent tropes and features.

My second source was humorous family anecdotes gleaned from oral interviews with Belarusian respondents, which I conducted in 2016 and 2017 for a project on humorous dyadic traditions in Belarusian families. By ‘family anecdotes’ I mean “accounts of events that have taken place within living memory and within one’s own family circle” (Holbek 1990: 103). This sample includes 60 interviews with Belarusian couples, with the age of respondents varying between 24 and 66 years. Most of these couples were married officially while some younger couples were in common-law marriage but had been living together for more than a year as of the time of the interview. Some of the interviews involved both the husband and the wife. In cases when interviewing both partners was not possible, I asked my interviewees to discuss the questions of the interview within their family before the actual interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Skype/Viber. In some cases (when they involved older people living outside the Belarusian capital of Minsk) they were conducted by telephone.

All of my interviewees live in Belarus, with the exception of two couples: one is based in Israel and another in Singapore. Most of the couples live in Minsk, others are from Mogilev, Brest, Slutsk, and Maryina Horoka. The interviews were conducted in Russian and Belarusian. All translations used in this paper were made by me.

The interviews primarily focused on family humour, funny personal stories, puns, and humorous rituals shared by family members. I asked respondents to share their humorous memories and funny nicknames with me. I was also trying to establish what kinds of triggers (appearance, peculiarities of speech, hobbies, (in)ability to do something) generate laughter within a family. One of the questions was dedicated to food and cooking related humour. I asked my interviewees to share memories and stories related to cooking, to tell me if and how they laugh at each other’s cooking, whether they have any funny traditions related to cooking, and so on. I also asked them about the practical aspects of cooking in their family: who does the cooking, how they divide the responsibilities in the kitchen, whether cooking at weekends and holidays differs from regular cooking. This proved to be one of most rewarding questions: almost every family had a funny story or two to share. The stories often involved self-deprecating humour and were directed towards the story-tellers themselves. However, they also provided a commentary on husband-wife relations and family life in general.

In order to respect the confidentiality of my respondents, I have omitted their names when discussing their stories in the paper. In cases when naming

is necessary (for example, a husband talks about his wife or vice versa) I refer to my respondents by using pseudonyms.

The two data sources have differences on various levels. Firstly, they differ in terms of genre. Jokes collected from the internet fit more or less to the definition of a joke as a genre: “a short narrative ending in a humorous punch line” (Attardo 2014: 417). Specifically, internet jokes can be categorised as a subclass of canned jokes, i.e., jokes that are “re-created from a pre-existing model the speaker has memorized” (Attardo 2015: 172). Conversely, family lore about cooking manifests in a variety of forms, some of which are difficult to attribute to a particular genre. While there are certain narrative folklore items, there are also funny phrases, quotes, and comments. Canned jokes may also be a part of family lore, but, as I show later on, they are always adapted to the context of a particular family.

Humorous family lore is sometimes difficult to classify as belonging to a specific genre. In many cases such humour fits into the category of dyadic traditions, defined by Elliott Oring (1984: 20) as “behavioral and linguistic routines that are generated, endowed with significance, and maintained within the dyadic relationship”, i.e., a relationship between two people, such as wife and husband. In cases when a family consists of more than two people, their humorous family anecdotes cannot be considered dyadic anymore. In some instances, we can speak of dyadic traditions involving two members within a family, in other cases traditions are shared among all family members.

Secondly, the audiences for these folklore sets are different. The readership of canned jokes that are posted on the internet is generally anonymous, so the jokes are mainly rooted in the general cultural background of the users of a particular online community. Consequently, jokes found online are based on generic fictional situations that might take place in the given cultural context, rather than on real-life events. In contrast, in the case of family lore, the audience is never anonymous. Humour is addressed to a particular person and is based on a specific family anecdote. It is extremely context-dependent and cannot always be understood by people outside of the family.

However, these two sets of data still share a very important feature: they are linked by the concept of humour and its mechanisms. Both kinds of humour discussed in the present paper are manifestations of verbal humour, which, according to Raskin’s (1985) semantic theory, arises from a coexistence of two opposing semantic scripts. One of the scripts is more obvious than the other and is thus anticipated by the audience, while the other, unexpected script produces a sense of incongruity, leading to a humorous effect. This mechanism is especially evident in the jokes that have a punchline, but can also be applied to family lore. There, humour often emerges when a person’s behaviour or words

fail to meet the expectations of other family members. These expectations may be based on the general cultural context of Belarusian family life, or on a specific situation in a given family. Sometimes incongruity emerges when a usual or well-known phrase is appropriated in an unusual context. This basic underlying principle of humour production means that, for all their formal and contextual differences, online jokes and family lore are fundamentally manifestations of the same phenomenon of verbal humour.

## **JOKES ABOUT COOKING**

Jokes about cooking have existed in Belarusian folklore since at least the late nineteenth – early twentieth century, when systematic collection of folklore began in the Russian Empire (which at the time encompassed the territory of present-day Belarus). These jokes were rare and mainly mentioned cooking just briefly alongside other domestic chores. In still rarer cases, when cooking was a central activity of these jokes, humorous effect was achieved by showing the woman's (wife's) lack of cooking skills. The following joke may serve as an example:

*“Does your young wife cook well?”*

*“She does cook well; it is just difficult for me to eat it.”*

(Fiadosik 2005 [1984]: 230<sup>1</sup>)

Jokes of this time period usually mentioned cooking in the setting of a rural family (or did not specify the setting at all as in the example above), as folklore was mainly collected among Belarusian villagers by researchers such as Alyaksandr Serzhputouski, Eudakim Ramanau, Pavel Shein, and others who conducted their research on behalf of the Russian Geographical Society, which sponsored and coordinated their fieldwork. Cooking is a chore attributed mainly to women. A woman was supposed not merely to be able to cook, but to cook varied and elaborate dishes in order to comply with societal expectations (Navagrodski et al. 2009: 109–110). In humorous folklore of this period of time men take up cooking only in the occasional situation when gender roles are reversed (a husband treats his wife to a meal under some unusual circumstances) and the humour is in fact generated by this role reversal.

Similar jokes existed in the twentieth century, when Belarus became part of the USSR. Soviet authorities strictly censored the jokes that were published and therefore we cannot consider printed folk joke books to be a faithful representation of the oral folklore that circulated at this time (Melnichenko 2014: 34). However, this relates primarily to political jokes, which differed considerably in the official and the alternative discourses. Apolitical jokes (including those about cooking) were not subject to such severe censorship. Consider the following joke:

*“I read in today’s newspaper that one should eat more than three kilos of salt each year,” a young wife says to her husband at lunch.*

*“Sure, honey,” replies the husband, eating the oversalted soup, “but not all at once!” (Narodnyja 1961: 23)*

The jokes that were published in state journals and joke books did not necessarily circulate widely in society. In the case of this joke, however, even if it was not part of the oral tradition at the time of its publication, it has definitely become popular and can still be found on the internet (for example, *Anekdoty pro sol’*) and in oral circulation (I heard a variation of this joke from one of my family members several years ago).

Modern jokes about cooking have inherited much from their nineteenth and twentieth century predecessors. In these jokes cooking is still a woman’s role, especially if the woman also happens to be a wife. A woman unable to cook typically remains the butt of the joke:

*The husband comes home and sees that his wife is in tears:*

*“What happened, darling?”*

*“I baked a cake for you, but Sharik<sup>2</sup> ate it!”*

*“Don’t you cry darling, I will buy you a new dog.”<sup>3</sup>*

*A wife says to her husband:*

*“Didn’t I ask you not to disturb me? It’s your fault that I dropped the cookbook, it slammed shut and now I have no idea what I’ve cooked for lunch.”<sup>4</sup>*

*The morning after the wedding. The husband sees his wife in tears in the kitchen.*

*“What happened, honey?”*

*“I’ve been boiling this damn egg for two hours and it is still hard!”<sup>5</sup>*

Such representation of cooking within a family is far from unique to Belarusian folk humour: see, for example, Brzozowska (2012: 65) and Laineste (2012: 41) for parallels from Polish and Estonian folklore respectively.

Women can also be mocked for not doing the cooking at all, although it is deemed to be their responsibility:

*A busy highway at noon. A woman driving a Mercedes hits the brakes abruptly and a Zaporozhets [a cheap and very basic Soviet-era car] crashes into the back of her car. The driver of the Zaporozhets also happens to be a woman. Which driver is at fault?*

*Both. They both should have been at home cooking lunch.<sup>6</sup>*

This is not to say that only women are laughed at due to their lack of cooking skills. Men also sometimes become the butts of the jokes about cooking. However, the focus of these jokes shifts. The humorous effect is often generated by the fact that men cook only occasionally:

*After the wedding night the husband wakes up, gets up quietly and goes to the kitchen. He makes coffee and sandwiches, puts them on a tray and brings them to his wife:*

*“Oh, honey, how sweet of you!”*

*“See how this is done? Starting tomorrow morning, you will do it every day.”<sup>7</sup>*

Even when there are two jokes with an almost identical structure (the perfect woman/man), the relationship of the two genders to cooking is portrayed differently:

*Four rules for a happy family life: 1. You should find a woman who cooks well and takes good care of the house. 2. You should find a woman who makes a lot of money. 3. You should find a woman who loves sex. 4. These women should never meet each other!<sup>8</sup>*

*1. It is important to have a man who helps you at home, does the cleaning, sometimes cooks, and has a job. 2. It is important to have a man with a sense of humour. 3. It is important to have a man whom you can trust and who won't lie to you. 4. It is important to have a man with whom you have a good time in bed and who likes you. 5. And the most important thing. It's very, very important. These four men must not know each other!<sup>9</sup>*

Sometimes the humorous effect is based on the fact that men can cook only the most basic dishes:

*I decided [masculine form] to make mashed potatoes and cutlets for dinner, and pancakes as a dessert. So here goes... It's clear how to make mashed potatoes and pancakes, but I'll be making cutlets for the first time... I've looked through lots of different recipes, everyone makes them a bit differently, but I get the gist and will be making pelmeni [meat dumplings widely available in stores as a convenience food and associated with bachelor lifestyle].<sup>10</sup>*

The language that describes cooking activities is also sometimes gender-specific. Terms that refer to cooking can gain a different meaning in men's vocabulary:

*Mother is frying cutlets in the kitchen. Vovochka asks her:*

*“Mum, is a flight attendant a fish or a cutlet?”*

*“What kind of question is that?”*

*“Well, yesterday Dad told his friend over the phone how their entire crew was frying [zharili, a slang for ‘have sex with’] a flight attendant.”<sup>11</sup>*

Such a difference between a man’s and a woman’s role in jokes about cooking is not incidental. The situation reflected in jokes mirrors the patriarchal division of labour in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paradigm required the husband to work and earn a living and the wife to stay at home and do the household chores. Even when in the twentieth century it became typical for women to work alongside men, the wife was still the one to do most (if not all) the chores.

However, the emergence and growing popularity of cooking jokes does not simply reaffirm the patriarchal paradigm. It also points to a clash between the traditional model of family life and modernity.

This can be paralleled to the blonde jokes in American humour. Blondes are portrayed in these jokes as stupid and overly sexual. It has been suggested that these jokes emerged in response to a significant change in women’s status, whereupon women became active participants in the previously male realm of career-making. In this realm, women had to appropriate a role that was totally different from the one they used to perform (Oring 2003: 58–70). Thus the ultimate focus of blonde jokes is not on the blonde, but on changing values (Davies 2011: 112).

Belarusian jokes about cooking display an opposite trend. Since cooking is regarded as one of the most traditional women’s chores, women are mocked when they do not or cannot cook. Men, in contrast, are laughed at when they dabble in cooking. However, the tension between conservative values and the changing reality of family life is resolved in a totally different way from the one in the blonde joke cycle. The blonde as a joke archetype acts too feminine (in a traditionalist sense), failing to adapt to women’s new status as actors in a rational world. In contrast, women in cooking jokes are laughed at because they deviate from the feminine ideal of domesticity. Moreover, some of these jokes (for example, the one about the traffic accident) provide a kind of meta-commentary on modern reality, which differs greatly from the traditional views on gender roles in Belarusian society. In this way, cooking jokes are not necessarily about cooking as an activity per se, but rather about cooking as a symbol of clearly delineated gender roles. Cooking jokes indicate that the world has changed, but there is still pressure on women to perform their household duties with little help from the men with whom they share the household.

## **FAMILY COOKING TRADITIONS**

In this section I provide an overview of the family folklore revolving around cooking, which my interviewees shared with me. By no means do I claim that the patterns I have traced can be considered representative for the entirety of Belarusian society. The sociological diversity of my research is too limited to allow for such claims: most of my interviewees represent the middle class and all of them live in urban (or suburban) areas. I readily acknowledge that family cooking traditions are very likely to differ greatly in other social groups as well as in rural areas.

Yet the aim of this section is not to provide a comprehensive overview of Belarusian family cooking traditions. It is, as I briefly discussed in the methodology section, to see if assumptions about gender roles found in cooking jokes circulating online correspond to the reality of my interviewees' family lives.

Using interviews rather than participant observation supposes a certain degree of subjectivity on the respondents' part, and reflects primarily my interviewees' own perceptions of cooking and a wider role division in their families, as well as relevant societal norms. Consider the following example involving a husband and a wife (both 27 years old). When I asked who does the cooking, the wife replied that the two have breakfast separately but try to eat dinner together, and it is generally cooked by her. Then she said: "At weekends I sometimes make Nikita cook..." Then she immediately corrected herself: "Ask him, not make."

Here we can see the ambiguity of the situation. On the one hand, the husband is probably reluctant to cook at weekends and getting him to do so involves a degree of coercion on the wife's part. On the other hand, she did not want to give the impression of being a 'family dictator' during the interview, so she corrected herself to present the situation in a more cooperative light. This example is fairly typical. As Mats Alvesson explained, an interview is inevitably a process of impression management, where respondents engage in "moral storytelling and promotional activity" in order to construct a positive image of themselves (Alvesson 2003: 21). Given that it is natural for people to stress their good morals, "moral storytelling" cannot be a reason not to rely on one's interviewees. However, it should be taken into account while analysing the interviews. This emic approach to cooking within Belarusian families gives my interviewees a possibility to reaffirm their views on how cooking is (or should) be done in a family.

Out of the 60 families that I interviewed, only in seven cooking was exclusively the wife's domain. In still fewer families did the husbands offer no help with the washing up either. One of my female interviewees told me her husband

“comes to the kitchen only to eat”. This does not mean, however, that husbands not involved in cooking stay away from all domestic chores completely: they may do the cleaning, help with hanging out laundry, and have other household duties. An interesting story came from one of my male interviewees, aged 50, who claimed that he baked a Napoleon cake for his first date with his future wife, but has done nothing at all ever since.

In some of the other families the husband only cooks in the absence of his wife. One of my male interviewees, for example, said that he can cook everything because he often travels on business and has to cook for himself, but he never cooks when his wife is at home.

In many families cooking is divided between husband and wife, but the wife still does the bulk of it. Sometimes the husband cooks only a few ‘special’ dishes. Several families mentioned pancakes and *draniki* (Belarusian potato pancakes) as a predominantly male dish. In two of the families the tradition of men cooking pancakes has existed for two generations. There are families where the husband cooks on special occasions (for example, at weekends or in the morning, or when many guests are expected). Interestingly, men’s specialising in cooking weekend breakfasts is not unique to Belarusian, or even Slavic family traditions, and can, for example, be found in the United States as well (Adler 1981: 48).

In many cases the division of labour is more pragmatic: the one who has more time at the given moment cooks. This is particularly relevant in families where one or both spouses do not have a fixed 8-hour day schedule. Sometimes the wife and the husband decide that one will cook the main course and the other one the side dish; sometimes one of them starts and the other finishes the cooking. Some of these couples claimed that the division of cooking responsibilities between the husband and the wife is more or less equal; in others, it was the wife who cooked more.

Finally, there were three families that testified that it was mainly (or even almost exclusively) the husband who cooked. Interestingly, unlike most of the families where cooking was the wife’s responsibility, all three of them immediately provided a justification (even though I did not ask for it). In one case, the husband explained that he enjoyed cooking (in contrast to his wife who did not like it at all). In the second case, the wife was the breadwinner who spent most of her time at work, while the husband stayed at home and was responsible for all the household chores. In the third case, the wife confessed that she “wasn’t brought up for all these chores”. She seemed to believe she was unique in this regard and sounded a bit uneasy about not doing cooking at all. When I reassured her that the situation was exactly the same in my family, she showed a degree of relief and even suggested a reason for us not conforming to the do-

mestic wife ideal: “At this time [in our late teens, I assume] we were too busy studying [to learn to cook]”. It is also worth mentioning that in all these cases (including mine), the husband and wife were both under 30. Given the limited sample, this might be a mere coincidence, but it could also indicate a gradual shift in gender roles in present-day Belarusian families.

As we see, families display a variety of cooking practices that go beyond the stereotypes found in mass-circulation jokes. However, there is some degree of correspondence between jokes and reality: for the most part, cooking does remain the woman’s responsibility even though in many families the husband cooks occasionally. That said, many of the stereotypical joke plots seem to be irrelevant, as the husband’s involvement in cooking is nothing exceptional and the division of labour is often based on the availability of the spouses more than gender. In the following chapter, I discuss how this relatively new reality manifests in humorous family anecdotes.

## **HUMOROUS FAMILY ANECDOTES ABOUT COOKING**

Humorous family anecdotes usually have a very different form as compared to folk jokes found online or in joke collections. They are more situational, heavier on implication, and much less fixed in structure. That said, some families I interviewed do use canned jokes to refer to cooking within their family. Here is one of such jokes:

*A lady meets a man, treats him to dinner and says:*

*“That’s it, now you are mine [moy].”*

*He replies:*

*“Wash it [moy] yourself!” (female, 40)*

The interviewee shared this joke to illustrate the fact that in her family she does all the cooking and dish-washing. Her intention when telling the joke seemed not to be to mock her husband; rather, she wanted to describe the cooking situation in her family more vividly.

In another case, a female interviewee of 49 illustrated how her family appropriates and adapts jokes:

*A colleague told me a joke at work; I came home and retold it:*

*The husband opens the fridge and there is nothing inside. He asks the wife:*

*“What do we have for dinner today?”*

*“The same as yesterday.”*

*“Is there nothing to eat again?”*

*“Yeah, I’ve cooked it for two days.”*

*I tell this joke to my husband and he says: "Oh, Inna, you've cooked like this for the whole week!"*

*We tell jokes and then turn them into our own.*

Canned jokes are often adapted to a specific context in face-to-face communication (Zajdman 1991). While retaining their basic structure and punchline and thus remaining funny, they are customised to reflect a situation in a particular family rather than some abstract values of an abstract group of joke-tellers and listeners.

In another case my interviewees reported using the following Q&A joke:

*"Would you care for a coffee in bed?"*

*"No, I would rather have it in a cup." (female, 46)*

Sometimes other folklore genres are used to refer to cooking. One example was cited to me by a 25-year-old husband:

*We were cooking draniki not so long ago, and we had to grate a lot of potatoes. We divided the work: I was peeling the potatoes and she was grating them. I finished peeling and said: "Saw it, Ira, saw it".<sup>12</sup> I like inserting these quotes from The Twelve Chairs<sup>13</sup>.*

Here we see an example of how a humorous folklore item that was not originally related to cooking can be applied to it. In this case, the quote refers to both the physical action (grating potatoes is somewhat similar to sawing) and the situation at large (in the novel, the line "Saw, Shura, saw" encouraged the recipient to continue physical work while the utterer did nothing himself).

In most cases, however, family folklore seems to comprise puns, situational humorous remarks, and personal humorous narratives. These genres do not have such precise features as joke (brevity, plot, clear structure, etc.), and can encompass a variety of folklore elements. The content of humorous family anecdotes is also specific: it relies primarily on the family's own experience rather than on widespread plots.

Much like jokes found on the internet, humorous family anecdotes can sometimes be directed towards the spouse who does not know how to cook in general. Unlike internet jokes, however, in the humorous anecdotes of my interviewees I did not see such a clear gender demarcation: it was not necessarily the wife's inability to cook that was mocked; often it was the husband who was made fun of.

Here is an example of when the wife is being laughed at, told by the wife herself: "We joke that on a scale from 0 to 10, my housewife skills are at -2" (female, 24).

And then, from a different family, an ironic account of the husband's cooking skills:

*[My] husband could not cook anything before we met. And it was so weird for me, how is it possible, a grown-up person. And so we teach him, have him watch all these culinary shows, and then he tries to cook something.*  
(female, 24)

In some cases, the humour is based on unwillingness rather than inability to cook: "Sometimes I say: 'I have turned on the kettle, now you do everything else'" (laughs) (female, 30).

A larger part of the humorous family anecdotes concentrate on specific occasions rather than on inability/unwillingness to cook in general.

In some cases involving the older generation, the spouses share humorous narratives related to the early days of their marriage when the wife could not cook well:

*Sure, I always remind her about the time when we had just got married, I came home and saw a note: "The soup is on the stove, but it doesn't taste good, you may not want to eat it". So now I say: "How is it today, can I eat it?"* (male, 55)

Another interviewee mentioned specifically that it was his wife's first attempt to cook a specific dish that failed:

*I always remind her of the time when she baked her first cake and made blueberry jam. She probably didn't know how to do either. So you could buy a ready-made cake for like three roubles, but we spent fifteen on making one and nobody could eat it. And the blueberry jam, she asked me how long to boil it for. I say: "I don't know, probably a long time". Long story short, the jam appeared to be... Well, it was jam, how can you spoil it... But when my sisters came – I have two twin sisters – they called our mother and said: "Mom, our sister-in-law has made this jam, it's like stick jaw toffee". She boiled it too long, after all.* (male, 58)

Plenty of humorous memories are derived from making (or rather, trying to make) some unusual dish:

*I was making this dish called rasstegai: they are small dough pies, but the point is that the upper part is not entirely covered, there is a large hole in the centre, so you can see the filling, and in this hole you pour a bit of broth. So you have this pie with minced meat or fish, there is a hole in upper part and this broth is boiling there, and this pie is so juicy, you can*

*hear the broth bubble. That's the ideal scenario. But if you make it for the first time, and on an unfamiliar stove at that, everything opens up, falls apart, the water hisses, doesn't look good at all. The smell is good, though. You take this mess out of the oven and realise you are ashamed to show it to anybody. These rasstegai were supposed to be a surprise for everybody... Well, you never get it right the first time. (female, 50)*

Funny situations that become a part of family folklore can also occur when making some regular dish if some incident happens during the cooking:

*I was making a barbecue, it's on the barbecue grill, the others said something [about my cooking], and I say: "When you do the cooking, then you do the speaking". And then I turn the meat and accidentally drop it in the coals. They say: "A real chef!" [ironic tone]. And I go: "Indeed I am". It was okay, I took it out, shook off the ash, no big deal, and they ate it and were glad that the chef had made it for them. I said, at least your stool will be solid. (male, 61)<sup>14</sup>*

In some cases, humour also derives from a specific habit related to cooking. This could be something like making the porridge too thick or oversalting every dish. In order for such a habit to become a source of humour, there has to be a difference in preferences between family members:

*Interviewee: "I like my food extra salty, he likes his undersalted. So he salts the food first, and then each of us additionally salts the contents of our own plates. Otherwise, he knows what to expect if I cook."*

*Me: "Does he make jokes of you adding too much salt?"*

*Interviewee: "That I am in love<sup>15</sup>, yes. Or that I am a moose." (female, 27)*

*Interviewee: "I cook most of the time. Oleg makes pizza and fried meat, but generally I do the cooking."*

*Me: "Do you make jokes about his cooking when he fries meat or makes pizza?"*

*Interviewee: "When he makes pizza, it ends up having too much filling, so I say: 'Why do you even need dough there, you could just mix sausage with cheese and with mayo, no dough needed.'" (female, 25)*

Sometimes funny situations occur because of some specific ingredient that is added to the otherwise tasty dish. A typical story involves one of the spouses adding an ingredient that the other one never eats. The humour stems from the fact that this ingredient is discovered only after the spouse has already eaten and enjoyed the meal:

*Generally, we haven't had any incidents, just this one time when I added mushrooms to something, I didn't know that he doesn't like them, and I added mushrooms to a dish that he really likes. Maybe it was pasta sauce. And so he is eating without seeming to realise there are mushrooms there. "Mmm, that's delicious." He seems to like it, then after two minutes he goes: "What's in it, something's wrong there. Everything seems tasty, but something is wrong." And he starts analysing: "Maybe you have added this? Maybe that?" I am sitting there, silent. It should be all right; I didn't add anything special. Then he goes: "Okay, so what don't I like?" (laughs) "So, I don't like mushrooms. Wait, have you added mushrooms?" (laughs). He's already finished it, and then in five minutes he asks: "Wait, have you added mushrooms?" (female, 25)*

These examples demonstrate that family cooking humour targets both husbands and wives. The stereotype of cooking as an exclusively female business, despite being so pervasive in internet jokes, is seldom reproduced here. In my interviews I encountered only one narrative in which humour about cooking explicitly referred to gender stereotypes. It was related not specifically to cooking but to household chores in general:

*When I have to do the cleaning, or wash the dishes, or something else that, well, it's incorrect to call it a 'female chore', but they are usually considered female chores in our Slavic mindset – when I have to do something like that, I remember my granddad said he had a friend who made fun of his wife and put on a shawl when his wife made him do some of these chores. So when she makes me do it, I always make fun of her: "Bring me a shawl, put it on me, so I won't be ashamed if the neighbours see." (male, 31)*

Another trope of humorous family anecdotes, which is related to gender stereotypes, is that the husband only cooks occasionally. Even though a dish may be basic, the husband is always proud of it and the wife is expected to react with awe (but instead often responds with irony):

*He cooked meringues recently, these sugar cakes. They are very easy to make, it's quick, but oh how much happiness there was! I come home and he goes: "I have a surprise for you! I've cooked something." I'm all anticipation: "What could it be?" And there are these meringues. He is so proud, stars in his eyes: "I'm your confectioner now!" (laughs) (female, 25)*

As we see, humorous family anecdotes about cooking differ significantly from canned jokes found online. As I discussed in the previous section, internet jokes primarily use cooking as a window on gender relations and their changes in

contemporary Belarusian society, often reproducing traditional gender stereotypes. Humorous family anecdotes, as represented in my interviews, appear to be less focused on gender relations, because for many of the couples cooking has lost its strong gender markedness.

On the other hand, some general humorous plots found in internet jokes can also be identified in humorous family anecdotes about cooking. For example, the notion of the husband cooking only occasionally but taking great pride in his cooking was a recurring motive in family narratives that also exists in canned jokes. My interviewees also occasionally use canned jokes or cite parts of them to comment on their cooking traditions.

While in some cases families make humorous comments on cooking in general (usually by appropriating folk jokes or other folklore genres), the bulk of humorous family anecdotes on the subject revolves around specific experiences and shared memories. Family foodlore draws primarily on the shared experience of the family and only occasionally involves retelling canned jokes. The funniness of this humour is thus predicated on the vividness and personal significance of the experiences that gave birth to it. These personal stories may share some commonalities across different families, but what makes them important is their uniqueness.

## REFLECTIONS ON FAMILY COOKING TRADITIONS AND ON (THE ABSENCE OF) HUMOUR

When conducting interviews about family cooking traditions and family humour, I heard not only my interviewees' accounts of their family folklore, but also their own reflections on it. These reflections can be conceptualised as a form of meta-commentary, in the Geertzian sense, on "the story they [people] tell about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 448). In fact, some of these reflections were humorous themselves.

For example, in one of my interviews, after I asked who cooked in the family, my interviewee, a woman of 56, replied:

*My husband makes potatoes, minced meat, stuff that does not require any particular skill; and when it comes to salads and fancier dishes, that's my territory. Stuff he thinks that he can't cook – or prefers to think (laughs). I don't think it takes that much to be honest, beyond willingness to try.*

Here the woman points to the incongruity between her husband's 'official' reason not to cook any complicated dishes (he does not know how to do it) and his real reason for it (he does not want to). This incongruity provokes a typical reac-

tion – laughter. However, the final statement shows that the woman herself does not regard the situation as incongruous: her conclusion gives no room for any alternative interpretation of the previous remark. Laughter is therefore not an indication of a humorous attitude of the woman towards the situation that she describes but rather a marker of irony and incongruity.

Another female of a similar age (54) used a different way to express her ironic attitude to the labour distribution in her family:

*Well... it is my prerogative to be in the kitchen all the time. And Andrei's contributions, so to speak, they are so rare. We see them not as humour, but as these precious moments of our family life, this stuffed pike of his, or sometimes he makes ukha [fish soup], these are such exclusive occasions that we tremblingly, tremblingly, so to say, remember them. You cannot joke about these things, they're holy (laughs). A dish from Andrei is like once in three years, how can we joke!*

When replying to the question about any funny situations concerning the cooking within their family, she was talking in an overly serious manner. Even though she explicitly stressed the seriousness and even holiness of the situation of her husband cooking, towards the end of the reply she gave way to laughter. This indicates that she was saying the opposite to what she meant, which is a common definition of irony.

Sometimes my interviewees would add a humorous flavour to their family lore spontaneously when discussing it during the interview:

*Wife: Generally, I cook the dinner. My husband cooks at weekends. In the morning, throughout the twenty years [of our marriage] my husband has cooked pancakes, omelette ...*

*Husband: It is not a tradition; it is just the inability of some of us to respond adequately to mornings (both interviewees laugh).*

Such humour may not be a part of family lore due to its spontaneity, but it demonstrates how the couple's shared knowledge can act as a trigger for humour: in this case, the fact that the wife is not an early riser becomes such a trigger. The humorous tone of the reflection on this fact indicates that the situation is accepted by both spouses.

Such comments provide an insight into the interviewees' emic perception of their families' cooking traditions. Moreover, the humorous and ironic form of these comments gives us an extra layer of meaning. The use of irony helps the speakers to "emphasize specific aspects of the situation" (Barbe 1995: 77), specifically, the unwillingness of their husbands to do regular or complicated cooking. Humour also shows that a certain incongruity exists between the

women's perceptions of how the cooking could be shared and the way it is actually done. Such an analysis of humour and irony in people's reflections gives the researcher the possibility not only to investigate family folklore but also outline how families reflect on it.

These reflections can also take another direction. It has long been noted that family humour plays an important role in lightening husband-wife relations, and has a therapeutic effect (Arnold 1972: ix). On the other hand, in certain cases family humour may also be destructive (Walsh 2015: 90). In my interviews, there were cases when respondents stressed that they did make jokes about each other's cooking. They cited one or two of the following reasons for this:

Firstly, the spouse who does most of the cooking does it really well.

*Me: "Perhaps you had some funny incidents related to cooking?"*

*Interviewee (male, 36): "No, my wife cooks very, very well, false modesty aside, she knows how and likes to cook, and therefore there are few incidents."*

Secondly, making a joke involves the risk of hurting the spouse's feelings and the joke-teller ending up cooking themselves:

*Me: "And does he ever joke about your cooking?"*

*Interviewee (female, 54): "You know, he doesn't risk it."*

*Me: "Because otherwise he may end up without dinner?"*

*Interviewee: "Yes, I give him the opportunity: do it better. It's already, you know, this territory where you might simply stay hungry."*

Another interviewee, a man of 38, puts it even more explicitly:

*My wife cooks well. I constantly praise her, because otherwise next time I'll have to cook myself. I do not joke: it's dangerous (laughs).*

In both cases, it is clear that the potential joke-tellers (usually husbands) do not make jokes because they anticipate or fear anger, 'unlaughter' as their spouse's response. "Unlaughter" is defined by Michael Billig (2005: 192) as "a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded". Therefore, humorous family anecdotes are dependent not only on cooking habits and traditions but also on the potential reaction from the audience, which typically coincides with the joke butt (in contrast to canned jokes with their generic, impersonal joke butts). Moira Smith (2009: 159) argues that in such cases the audience and not the joke-teller plays the primary role in group boundary making and enhancing (or ruining) solidarity. These examples illustrate that in family humour it is important to take into account the whole

process of husband-wife communication, including its context and the spouses' personalities, and not just focus on the humorous text itself.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cooking is one of the most important domestic chores and as such is widely reflected in various humorous folklore genres. Mass-circulation jokes shared on the internet use cooking mainly as a lens through which to view gender roles, often reflecting the tension between patriarchal gender roles and the changing values in Belarusian society. In these jokes the act of cooking can be (and in some examples is) substituted by any other domestic chore while retaining the same meaning.

Humorous family anecdotes about cooking differ from such jokes in terms of the form, content, and function. Humour items here can take on hybrid forms (for example, appropriating a canned joke and adding some personal element to it). The content of humorous family anecdotes is diverse and encompasses both general attitudes towards cooking and particular situations that involve preparing food (the latter kind, however, is both more diverse and numerous). Some of the humorous narratives have been recalled for years and even decades while others are built on some recent situation and are soon forgotten. The humorous family anecdotes of every family I interviewed were tightly connected to their traditions of cooking and indicative of the way they reflect upon these traditions. The same distribution of labour may provoke jokes in one family and yet not be found humorous by another.

Sharing humour within a family is much more intimate than sharing a joke on the internet. It also plays a different communicative role. When posting jokes on a dedicated internet forum, people seldom address somebody personally but rather share what they find funny and appropriate with the purpose of entertaining themselves and their large, but invisible, audience. Humorous family anecdotes are much more personal and are not used solely for amusement but also to enhance family ties. Therefore, it puts certain limitations on family folklore traditions. Apart from the fact that they should be rooted in family's experience, they should also take into consideration the reception of the joke by its audience (which is also often the butt of the joke). Failing to do so may in some cases lead to harming the relationship.

Moreover, the study of family humour calls for the study of people's reflections on their folklore. It can provide an emic commentary both on family traditions and on humorous family anecdotes. While it can be humorous itself, the

humour plays a different role: it helps the interviewees to present their point of view in a more playful, as well as a more articulate, manner.

The study of internet jokes and humorous family anecdotes about cooking is not just the macro- and micro-level of the research of the same phenomenon. While it is possible to identify some topics that resonate in both forms of humour, the difference of context makes it impossible to mechanically extrapolate any conclusions made as regards studying internet jokes to the dimension of humorous family anecdotes, and vice versa. While it seems that humorous family anecdotes are a fairly immediate reflection of the relationships and values adopted in a specific family, the extent to which widely circulating folklore represents current societal values and norms is less obvious, much as the very idea of a collective value system shared by the entire society is problematic. If anything, jokes found on the internet display considerable continuity with jokes from previous eras and appear to be on the conservative side in terms of values. Even though my primary goal was to compare canned jokes and humorous narratives found in family lore, I realised during the research that a comparison between internet jokes about cooking and humorous family anecdotes on the same subject is bound to be a comparison of two totally different systems of reference, each of which functions according to its own rules and principles. It is important to take this into consideration in cases that involve comparison between such diverse folklore forms.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This joke is cited from Alyaksandr Serzhputouski's *Collection of Belarusian Proverbs (Sobranie belorusskikh poslovits i pogovorok)*, which was compiled by 1908 but was never published and is only available as a manuscript in the Archive of the Institute of Art Studies, Ethnography and Folklore of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> This is a typical dog's name in Russian-speaking countries.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=89>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.

- <sup>4</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=133>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=154>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=49&>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=169>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=67&>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=77&>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>10</sup> Available at <https://talks.by/showthread.php?t=2532253&page=190>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>11</sup> Available at <https://forum.onliner.by/viewtopic.php?t=1020293&start=2180>, last accessed on 26 January 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> “*Pilite, Ira, pilite*” – a modified quote from the film adaptation of the famous satirical novel *Golden Calf* by Ilf and Petrov, many phrases from which have entered common use.
- <sup>13</sup> *The Twelve Chairs* is another famous novel by Ilf and Petrov.
- <sup>14</sup> The interviewee likens the ashes on the barbecue to activated charcoal, which is commonly used in Belarus to treat digestion problems.
- <sup>15</sup> There is a belief among Belarusians that those who are in love oversalt the dishes they cook.

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## THE MEANING OF FOOD IN THE NOVEL *PEONY IN LOVE*

**Dorota Brzozowska**

*Associate Professor*

*University of Opole, Poland*

*e-mail: dbrzozowska@uni.opole.pl*

**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to show universal and culture-specific meanings of food, taking into consideration different roles nutrition plays in human life. The complicated nature of relations between people and their meals is illustrated with examples from literature, based on the book *Peony in Love* by Asian American contemporary author Lisa See. The book makes a good example of the subject of food and culture as the main plot is connected with traditional Chinese opera that influenced young women to die of starvation because of love sickness. *The Peony Pavilion* (Chinese: 牡丹亭; pinyin: *Mūdān tíng*) is a play written by Tang Xianzu in the Ming Dynasty and first performed in 1598, but its message is still valid today.

**Keywords:** anorexia, Chinese, food, ghosts, illness, Lisa See, novel

### INTRODUCTION

Food together with air and water are metabolic requirements for human survival and as such they are considered to be the most important physiological needs that should be met first. If these requirements are not met, the human body cannot function properly and will ultimately fail. Apart from the biological function of food, there are several others. One of them is psychological (connected with such needs as love and security), another is worldview (showing such attitudes as vegetarianism or religion, e.g., being kosher), the third one is social (initiation and maintaining interpersonal relations), the next one is cultural (winning the food as *spiritus movens* of civilization, cuisine, aesthetics of eating), and the last one is economic (product destined to be sold, advertised, consumed) (Niewiadomska & Kulik & Hajduk 2005: 43). The role of nourishment differs and changes in cultures, but it seems that in rich countries nowadays a food cult may be observed. The shops are full of exotic products, the media promote and advertise different types of food, master chef programs are popular, cookbooks are printed, and websites with recipes are blossoming

together with new diets and eating trends; also food studies are prospering well at universities. Increasingly often, people discuss what they have eaten or plan to prepare; they travel in pursuit of new tastes and take photographs of their dishes, and choose their food more consciously, counting calories or looking for taste, health, being nature friendly, etc. Eating is more and more often connected with philosophical attitudes and lifestyle – it fulfils needs on higher levels of Maslow’s hierarchy (Maslow 1954).

Attitudes towards food are also linked with the ways people try to conquer hunger and restrain themselves from eating. Aristotle introduced to philosophy the ideal of moderation in moral virtue. The idea was followed by Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Christian thought. Latin *medium virtutis* is the means of keeping proportion in every virtue with respect to all the different desires that are constitutive of the human appetite (Zwoliński 2006: 426). Every virtue “begins in the reason and ends in the appetite”, claimed Aquinas. To make sure humans rule over body desires, they should not cross the borders in their attitudes towards themselves and others (ibid.: 444). Thus, temperance plays an important role in shaping their characters. It consists in not eating and drinking more than necessary, and not being either too greedy or too dainty in regard to the nourishment one takes. Fasting periods are known in many religions and are popular in various types of diets due to their purifying effect. In the Eastern thought, restraint is also valued. The ideal virtue of moderation was preached by Confucius, inter alia, who claimed that no one was harmed by modesty of eating. Meat and strong spices should be eaten with care, and wine should be drunk according to *savoir vivre* (cf. ibid.: 426).

In many literary works, one can find examples of food treated as a vital nutritious element or as poison, as a source of pleasure or suffering, as a way of showing passions or feelings, as a subject of art in paintings or poems – and as means of control, just to name a few of the very complex ways in which food has functioned in societies – both the traditional and the modern one. Not only abundance of food but also its deprivation makes vital subjects in the history of language and culture. The aim of the paper is to highlight different customs, rituals, and beliefs about food as seen from intercultural perspective and present in the *Peony in Love* novel.

Although the novel pictures historic times and is a work of fiction, it is connected with the reality on many levels. Lisa See claims that *The Three Wives’ Commentary* had a special influence on her as she researched a great amount of writing done by Chinese women in the seventeenth century, most of it largely unknown today. She came across *The Three Wives’ Commentary* – the first book to have been written by the three wives and to have been published anywhere in the world – Chen Tong (Peony), Tan Ze, and Qian Yi – the wives of Wu Ren

in the novel. *Peony in Love* could also be seen as a book about anorexia – an eating disorder illness.

### **THE PLOTS OF *THE PEONY PAVILION* AND *PEONY IN LOVE***

Lisa See's novel *Peony in Love* (2007) was inspired by *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Three Wives' Commentary on The Peony Pavilion*. *The Peony Pavilion* is a Chinese opera which can run for more than 22 hours and it is compared to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* because of the impact of the love story line, and to Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as it started the fashion for suicides among young women. In her dream, the main character Du Liniang encounters a young scholar, later in the play identified as Liu Mengmei, whom she has never met in real life. Liu's advances start off a flaming romance between the two. Du Liniang becomes preoccupied with her dream affair and her lovesickness quickly consumes her, as unable to recover from her fixation she wastes away and dies. *The Three Wives' Commentary on The Peony Pavilion* involves the three wives' "spiritual communication" through their follow-up commentaries on the play. They were married to the same scholar, one after another, when the previous wife died at a young age. "As soon as they were introduced to the play and to the previous wife's commentary, they were all moved by the affective power radiating from the play and by a tacit understanding that bound them together." (Chiu 1997: 10)

The protagonist of See's story, Peony, falls in love with a young stranger, and her life parallels loosely that of Liniang's. Peony is deeply moved by the text and performance of *The Peony Pavilion*, having extensively written about her feelings and reactions to love in her copy of the text. On the evening of the opera performance, Peony accidentally meets a handsome young man. After three nighttime meetings, Peony falls in love, but she also falls into deep despair, feeling doomed because she is trapped in an arranged marriage. Following the example of Du Liniang, she starves herself to death, only to learn right before her death that the man her father has picked for her is Wu Ren, the man she loves.

Most of the novel *Peony in Love* takes place after Peony's death. Because her funeral rituals are not concluded properly, she becomes a 'hungry ghost', who wanders far beyond the inner world of women. She receives the freedom she was deprived of by the customs ordering the closure which constrained her in her youth. In the process, she encounters a number of women writers who lament the difficulty of having their voices heard in a male-dominated world. From her dead grandmother she learns many painful details about her family's past, the details later amplified by Peony's mother. Peony comes to learn

about the courage and extreme suffering of both older women and she realizes that the sternness her mother treated her with as a girl was only her attempt to protect the daughter from the evils of the outside world.

Peony shows her enduring love for Ren by exerting her influence on his second wife, although she later realizes that she may have gone too far so that she actually harmed the girl. Feeling guilty, she puts herself in self-exile, wandering around Hangzhou, until her mother convinces her to go back and compensate it to Ren and his second wife. Peony chooses a young and neglected girl to 'guide' and she slowly molds her into a lovely lady. Ren, a lonely widower, marries the girl as his third wife. Some time later, the third wife starts reading Peony's and the second wife's writings, and after adding onto them her story she convinces her husband to help her publish them. Not long after Ren realizes that Peony has never been given the appropriate funeral rites and finally completes them for her. Peony is no longer a hungry ghost, but a spirit who with great joy looks forward to meeting her husband again in the afterworld.<sup>1</sup>

## **FUNCTIONS OF FOOD IN THE NOVEL**

Mentioned in many parts of the story, food plays different roles and functions in the life of the protagonist. The analysis aims to show the scope of the possibilities of its occurrence and to discuss the meanings embedded in the specific described culture.

### **Food as currency**

Food is pictured as a method of payment in many situations in the novel. Particularly, women and their fates are connected with product exchange. Their value is compared with and depends on the value of food someone is going to give to have power over female lives. Peony mentions food as an element of her dowry:

*My father had provided a sizable dowry for me that included fields, silk weaving enterprises, stock animals, and more than the usual amount of cash, silk, and food<sup>2</sup>, but a marriage where the wife had too much money was never happy. (See 2008 [2007]: 22)*

This context shows the value of food and its role in the premarital contracts. Sometimes – as in the case of the servants and the poor – the worth of animals that may be eaten is compared to the price of human life.

*“Today I go to my third owner,” she said matter-of-factly. “Your father has sold me for pork and cash. It’s a good deal, and he’s happy.” Sold for pork? I was to be married in exchange for bride-price gifts, which included*

pigs. *Perhaps Willow and I were not so different after all. Neither of us had any say in our futures.* (See 2008 [2007]: 70)

The strongly patriarchal society treated women as objects, whatever their status was. Their fate was similarly difficult. In the case of the poor, that simple product exchange used to reveal and expose the actual nature of the deals, whereas in the case of the rich the business transactions were hidden in the form of the highly elaborated rituals.

### **Magical and symbolic meaning of food**

Certain meals have a special meaning, particularly during ceremonies and the rites of passage. The way and the time they are eaten or should not be eaten are strictly connected with customs and rules that should be precisely obeyed to bring luck and fertility. The same products can be used to denote different meanings, as it is in the case of pork in the following fragment.

*I wouldn't be allowed to eat during the course of my wedding ceremonies, but I needed to taste a bit of the special foods my family had prepared for my wedding-day breakfast. I wasn't hungry, but I would do my best to obey, because every bite would be an omen of a long life in harmony with my husband. But no one offered me pork spareribs, which I was supposed to eat to give me the strength to have sons, while refraining from gnawing the bones to protect the vitalization of my husband's fertility.*

*They would want me to eat the seeds of the water lily, pumpkin, and sunflower to bring many sons.* (See 2008 [2007]: 93)

The symbolic power of flesh, flowers, and vegetable seeds is worth noticing, as are also the attitudes of the patriarchal society where girls could be sold for pigs and the main reason of getting married was having sons. The future mothers should do everything possible to make their children healthy and virile, which included a special diet.

*"Mistress Ze, rest, avoid gossip, and eat the proper foods. Stay away from water chestnuts, musk deer, lamb, and rabbit meat." "And make sure you wear a daylily pinned to your waist," the diviner added. "It will help relieve the pains of childbirth and ensure the birth of a healthy son."* (See 2008 [2007]: 190)

Naming a fruit typical of specific geographical areas, for example taro – one of the popular edible root vegetables in large parts of Asia – enriches the descriptions with exotic tastes. Not only fruit but also other parts of plants are used for ritual purposes:

*The men left, and my aunts and cousins washed my limbs, only they forgot to add pomelo leaves to the water. [...] Whole taro roots were placed around me as symbols of fertility. I looked like an offering to the gods. (See 2008 [2007]: 94)*

The magical way of thinking about the connection between body and food depends not only on the ways people consume the produce, but also on the way their skins get into contact with it. The primary purpose and duty of a woman – being fertile – is strongly underlined together with the relation between the real world and the world beyond. Female body becomes an offering to gods. The human flesh lying alongside fruit and vegetables was supposed to have a purifying and symbolic meaning.

### **Ceremonial function**

In Chinese culture, the traditional, ceremonial meal prepared to celebrate the living and deceased ancestors is of great importance. Worshiping the ancestors was a culmination of the highest moral virtue – filial piety (Chinese: 孝, xiào).

*I was not the first in my family to go to the ancestral hall this morning. We all wish for wealth, good harvests, and offspring, and already offerings of food had been made to encourage reciprocal gifts of fecundity from our ancestors. I saw whole taro roots – a symbol of fertility – and knew that my aunts and the concubines had been here to ask my ancestors to bring sons to our line. My grandfather's concubines had left little piles of fresh loquats and lychee. [...] My uncles had brought rice to ensure peace and plenty, while my father had offered a warm platter of meats to encourage more wealth and a good crop of silkworms. Chopsticks and bowls had been provided for my ancestors as well, so they might dine with elegant ease. (See 2008 [2007]: 41, 42)*

Meat and alcoholic beverages played a significant role in the feeding of ancestors. These liquid refreshments were heated up over fires, so that the raising smoke, fumes, and odors accompanied by music summoned the ghosts of ancestors. “During feasts the same dishes, or whatever was left of them by the ancestors after saturating themselves with their essence until being full, were ‘once again’ eaten by their descendants on their behalf” (Trauffer 2009: 153). A bond between the living and the ancestors is formed by eating from the same bowl. In return, the latter bless their successors (feast attendees or a representative of the ancestors acknowledges receiving the sacrifice and wishes the host all the best from the ancestor). Hence, communication is bidirectional – between the living and the dead.

If the deceased did not have any offspring to feed them, they became 'hungry souls' – they wandered around with the living and did them harm. To stay safe, hungry souls were also fed – in case they wandered the streets, tables with offerings were left outside houses on set dates (Trauffer 2009: 157). The fate of being the hungry ghost was known to Peony:

*I was reduced to an open mouth and an empty stomach. Gods and ancestors are worshipped and cared for as social superiors. They give protection and grant wishes; the celestial aspect of their souls is associated with growth, procreation, and life. Their offerings are carefully cooked and presented on beautiful platters with plenty of serving and eating implements. But ghosts are despised. [...] Instead of trays of ripe peaches, fragrant steamed rice, and whole soy-sauce chickens, we receive uncooked rice, vegetables that should have been fed to the pigs, chunks of turned meat with hair still on it, and no bowls or chopsticks. We're expected to shove our faces into this food like dogs, rip it apart with our teeth, and carry it away to dark nether corners.*

*[...] I fought off others more timid than myself for the peel of a mildewed orange or a piece of bone that hadn't already been sucked of its marrow. (See 2008 [2007]: 162–164)*

The food Peony was fighting for as a ghost is contrasted with the quality meals prepared by her family to be offered to the ancestors. Not only did the deceased benefit from the offerings, but also the poor were fed on such holidays.

*I remembered how the servants had worked for days, chattering among themselves about the wealth of food that they'd placed, tied, or strapped to the altar before our gate: chickens and ducks, dead and alive; slices of pork and pigs' heads; fish, rice cakes, and whole ripe pineapples, melons, and bananas. When the festival was over and the ghosts had eaten their share of the spiritual meal, beggars and the destitute would come to partake of the carnal leavings in the form of an ample banquet courtesy of the Chen family. (See 2008 [2007]: 162–164)*

Apart from life, health and illness, also the rituals concerning death are strongly related to different usages of particular nutritious products. Their real power is bound with the symbolic one ascribed to certain edible items, which is described in the passage below.

*On the third day after my death, my body was placed in my coffin, along with ashes, copper coins, and lime. [...] My aunts put cakes in my hands, and my uncles laid sticks on either side of my body. They gathered together clothes, binding cloth for my feet, money, and food – all made from paper –*

*and burned them so they would accompany me to the afterworld.* (See 2008 [2007]: 101)

The custom of feeding the dead was present in the Slavic pagan tradition too, when real food was brought to the graveyards to be shared with the deceased, and the belief that in the afterworld people would need basic things they used in their lives on Earth was also common. The rituals relating to the forefathers – the *Dziady* – took place in accordance with the principal that spirits may do favors for the living and the living can do favors for the dead. In some regions of Poland, the custom of feeding ancestral souls by offering food and drinks was practiced until the early twentieth century (Warnke 2015).

### **Social functions**

Festivals and birthdays were good occasions to prepare special meals. Different emotions, both good and bad, can influence appetite, which is presented in the following excerpt:

*I couldn't eat, however, not even the special dumplings that Mama had Cook prepare for my birthday. How could I put food in my mouth and swallow it when my stomach was still so unsettled – from the binding, from my secret happiness, and from my worries about being caught tonight?* (See 2008 [2007]: 47)

The cultural role of food may also be seen in various combinations of dishes – even if it is described in a very general way, for example, one can expect tea and biscuits or coffee and cake in one region and dumplings in another geographical area:

*When my aunts or cousins came to invite me to take a walk in the garden or join them for tea and dumplings in the Spring Pavilion, I graciously thanked them but said no.* (See 2008 [2007]: 79)

The meals eaten with family members had educative, social, and intellectual functions, which is reflected in the brief passage from the analyzed novel:

*Come to the Spring Pavilion. Have breakfast and listen to your aunts. Come for lunch and learn how to treat your husband's concubines. Join us at dinner and perfect your conversation.* (See 2008 [2007]: 79)

The quality of food and the ritual way it was served were connected with showing love and respect. It was also a good way of building relationships and maintaining proper social positions:

*I insisted Ze follow these rituals to appease her husband's anxiety and earn her mother-in-law's respect. When Ze cooked, she made sure that all the flavors were compatible and that the food was fragrant. She brought to the dinner table fish from West Lake and watched quietly to make sure the others enjoyed the taste. She poured tea when her mother-in-law's or husband's cup was low. (See 2008 [2007]: 174)*

It is not enough to cook only a meal to build a social relation based on food. The meal needs to have certain qualities to taste, smell, and look appropriate to match the expectations of the ones it is prepared for. Being very empathic, observant, and sensitive to the signs shown by the others is a good description of the high-context culture relationships.

### **Food as a medicine**

Being a remedy for body and soul diseases is another function of food. In holistic medicine, what a person eats is believed to be strictly connected with who he or she is, because while eating bits of the world, one reconstructs it in oneself (Beinfeld & Korngold 1997 [1995]: 273). The substances produced in modern pharmacy have their roots in herbal knowledge: originally, aspirin was produced from willow bark, morphine – from poppy seeds, and penicillin – from fungi (ibid.: 231). The tradition of using food as medicine is especially strong in the Chinese culture. Different stages of life, connected with a particular role or situation, are related to the specific type of food that should be eaten to keep body and soul healthy. The female cycle was strongly influenced by that procedure, as women were supposed to be beautiful and breed children, so the special meals and herbs were used on many occasions to make their chances to fulfil that duty better. That was also true when people wanted to correct the nature and change their appearance. One of the intrusive methods to 'improve' the natural look was crushing foot bones to make feet as small as possible. The practice was accompanied by carefully prepared dishes, described in the novel. We can learn what was served before and after foot-binding to make the bones break and heal better, for example:

*I'll send congee for the child. Make sure she eats it, and then give her some herbs to ease the pain. (See 2008 [2007]: 47)*

Certain products were also carefully chosen for fertility reasons and as means of healing the weak body and soul:

*He brought her little gifts. He asked the servants to prepare special foods that would entice and stimulate her. (See 2008 [2007]: 159)*

*When Ren assured the doctor this wasn't possible, he prescribed a diet of pig's trotters to help restore Ze's qi. She was not about to eat something so lowly. Next the doctor ordered the cook to make a soup of pig's liver to help strengthen Ze's corresponding organ. Soon he was trying every organ of the pig to fortify his patient. None of them worked. "You were supposed to marry someone else," the doctor said diffidently to Ren. "Perhaps she's come back to claim her rightful place." Ren dismissed the idea. "I don't believe in ghosts." (See 2008 [2007]: 188)*

The observations to diagnose the relations between the type of nutrition used and the specific malfunctioning behavior is typical of Chinese medicine responsible not only for the welfare of the body, but also for the influence of the sick person on the environment. The harmony with nature and with others is the main purpose of seeking balance in the diet.<sup>3</sup> There are some cases described in the novel, where feelings and moods are treated with food and where the state of mind is strongly connected with an appetite or lack thereof.

*"Your wife has a different kind of lovesickness from what I originally thought. She has a bad case of that most common of all feminine disorders: too much vinegar." This word sounded exactly the same as jealousy in our dialect [...] Many wives go on hunger strikes because they're jealous and ill-tempered," the doctor suggested, trying a different approach. "They try to push their anger onto others by making them suffer with guilt and remorse."*

*The doctor prescribed a bowl of jealousy-curing soup made from oriole broth. (See 2008 [2007]: 188)*

In fact, in Mandarin Chinese 醋 – cù means 'vinegar' and 'feeling of jealousy', 醋意 – cù yì includes the character of 'vinegar' and 意 – yì 'idea, meaning, wish, desire', so the concepts are linguistically related. Sometimes the food used as medicine had its negative effect, which was to be calculated into the curing process:

*This remedy had been used on the jealous wife. It had reduced the wife's emotional disease by half but left her pockmarked. "You would ruin me?" Ze pushed away the soup. "What about my skin?" (See 2008 [2007]: 188)*

Not always, the therapy was fully successful – sometimes it had side effects, when cleaning the soul made the body ugly. Then the value system of the treated was crucial in making a decision about priorities in healing.

### **Deprivation of food: Self-control**

The anorectic behavior and its consequences are described in a detailed way: the body changes and so does the attitude towards it, as presented in the following passages:

*For the next seven weeks, Shao brought my meals, but my stomach had become an abyss of anguish and I ignored the food or stubbornly pushed it away. As time passed, my body changed. My skirts started to hang on my hips instead of my waist, and my tunics swung loose and free. (See 2008 [2007]: 70)*

*She refused to light the lamps. She didn't speak. She turned down food even when it was brought to her. She stopped dressing and pinning her hair. (See 2008 [2007]: 187)*

The reasons for gaining power over the body by starving it are also clearly highlighted:

*"You didn't crush me. You didn't steal my breath. I stopped eating, and for once I had total control over my destiny. I wanted to starve that thing you put in my belly." (See 2008 [2007]: 267)*

This case was complicated as the mother-to-be did not want to be pregnant, because she felt the baby was forced into her. Therefore, she was not willing to make it grow and by controlling her life she also took the decision about the future of her child.

The influence of the reality on *The Peony Pavilion* is also worth mentioning. The suicide rate of women was very high at the time of Tang Xianzu because of the external conflict between the parents' practical considerations and the couple's affective passion. It is said that in the author's home town of Lin-Chuan, one out of every eight women was a "virtuous widow" or "martyr virgin" (Chiu 1997: 13). The popularity of the opera encouraged the followers of Liniang to die of starvation.

*In China, young educated women from wealthy families – typically between the ages of thirteen and sixteen and with their marriages already arranged – were particularly susceptible to the story. Believing that life imitates art, they copied Liniang: They gave up food, wasted away, and died, all in hopes that somehow in death they might be able to choose their destinies, just as the ghost of Liniang had. (Author's note; See 2008 [2007]: 277)*

These acts of copycat suicides were repeated in history. In Europe, they are connected with the Werther effect, i.e., the suicides inspired in the eighteenth

century by *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Young men mimic the main character by dressing like him in yellow pants and blue jackets and some of them, especially those who were rejected by women they loved, like their hero, used to shoot themselves with a pistol in an act of hopelessness. This resulted in the book being banned in several places. To this day, the book belongs to the canon of literature.

The copycat suicides still happen nowadays, but they follow the examples of the ones presented in mass media. The kind of quick and violent death chosen by men is significantly different from the female self-starvation. This type of death chosen by women may be strictly connected with the assumption that while in almost every culture there is a profound linkage, or sacred balance, between the two primal activities, eating and reproduction, it is a woman who “contains and, to some degree, assimilates the mate that enters her body, just as she does the food she eats” (Allen 2000: 30). When the possibility of consuming the feelings is not there, the appetite for life also disappears.

While anorexia became more commonly diagnosed during the twentieth century, and the term *anorexia nervosa* was first used by William Gull in 1873 to describe this condition, it is still unclear if that late appearance was due to an increase in its frequency or simply in consequence of its better diagnosing.<sup>4</sup> It is observed to occur mostly among women and is up to ten times less (5 to 10 percent of the cases) likely among men (Niewiadomska & Kulik & Hajduk 2005: 224).<sup>5</sup> Often it begins during the teen years or young adulthood. Lisa See writes about the contemporary problem of anorexia, but claims that it has also been present in different times and cultures:

*No one knows for sure what killed the lovesick maidens, but it may have been self-starvation. We tend to think of anorexia as a modern problem, but it isn't. Whether it was female saints in the Middle Ages, lovesick maidens in seventeenth-century China, or adolescent girls today, women have had a need for some small measure of autonomy. (Author's note; See 2008 [2007]: 277)*

## FOOD-RELATED WORDS

There are multiple instances of using food-related terms in the book. They occur in various forms and on different levels – from the very general to the more specific ones – including hyperonyms, hyponyms, and co-hyponyms. The following groups can be distinguished: keywords describing food as such – *food, meal, dish*; those naming more specific kinds of it – *meat, fruit, vegetable, seeds*;

the detailed ones such as *melon, pork*. More vocabulary related to food comprises verbs – *eat, cook, prepare, taste, serve, gnaw*; nouns – *flavors, taste, smell, fragrance, aroma*; and adjectives – *fragrant, stinky, sweet, sour, salty, bitter*. Meals are associated with the time of the day when they are served – *breakfast, lunch, dinner*; special occasions – *parties, banquets, weddings*; and utensils used during the meals – *bowls, spoons, plates, chopsticks, trays, cups*. Sometimes the symbolic name, the whole recipe and the explanation of the expected results are given, making the description very informative and highly culture-bound, for example, “dragon hoof send child” – ‘pig leg with ten kinds of patrimonial seasonings braised over a slow fire – which was reputed to bring sons’.

Among the vocabulary mentioned in the novel, there are names of various kinds of food: fruit (*pineapples, melons, bananas, peaches, cherries, oranges, lychees, pomelos, water chestnuts, taro roots*), vegetables (*red beans, mushrooms*), rice (*steamed rice, sticky, uncooked rice*), seeds (*of the water lily, pumpkin, sunflower*). Meat plays a special role in the described cuisine, especially pork (*pig’s trotters, liver, slices of pork and pigs’ heads, pork spareribs*). Other meat names comprise the following terms: *hen, chicken (soy-sauce chickens), duck, a warm platter of meats, sweetmeats, musk deer, lamb, rabbit meat*. Some other alimentary products include such lexical items as *the bones, fresh loquats, scallions, salted fish, eggs, dessert, (rice, malt) cake, soup, herbs, tea, riverbank grass, spices, vinegar, walnuts*.

The xenisms naming the meals or products used to prepare them in the original language forms have strong foreignizing effects, which is exploited in many literary works. In this particular novel, the food vocabulary typical of the described culture is rather general and given without the Chinese original names. Some specific and popular types of food include *sweet-bean paste dumplings, cock’s blood, taro roots, ginger, rice wine, carambolas, rice cakes, riverbank grass, pomelo, water chestnuts, lychees, dragon eyes* (longan fruit – traditional Chinese: 龍眼, pinyin: *lóngyǎn* – it resembles an eyeball when its fruit is shelled).

The author uses developed descriptions in quotes (“dragon hoof send child”) or italicization (e.g. *congee*) to mark the foreign character of a given element. Nevertheless, it plays the role of an ornamentalized display of the insider’s knowledge, “linguistic exhibitionism at its finest” (Pandey 2016: 98). The culture-specific character of the described cuisine manifests itself not only in the presence of product names, but also in the absence of the others. China is associated with tea – there are as many as 54 instances of it being mentioned in the novel (e.g. *jasmine, green tea*), but the term *coffee* does not appear in the analyzed text. *Rice* is mentioned frequently (20 times), but *potatoes* or *pasta*<sup>6</sup> are not referred to at all. The word *wine* occurs 27 times, but there is no mention of *vodka* or *beer*; similarly, the lexical item *chopsticks* is used (5 occurrences), but not *forks*.

This type of presenting the cultural background reinforces the stereotypical views on the Chinese cuisine, which is believed to consist of carefully prepared portions of steamed vegetables, small bites of meat, and bowls of noodles or rice eaten with chopsticks. Such meals are accompanied by green or jasmine tea (cf. Zhu 2010). This view is a simplification as diverse regions of China are famous for their various types of meals and preferences for different tastes, spices, and ingredients rarely used in the Western world or entirely unknown to it.

## CONCLUSIONS

The nourishment-related scenes described in the novel *Peony in Love* show many possibilities and functions of food and the meanings that could be attached to it in symbolic, culture-specific, and universal ways. We can find a very broad spectrum of examples and ways in which food is used in the novel. Food plays the role of a currency, has magic powers, and is used in ceremonies connected with the whole ritual year. It is treated as a medicine and it has very distinctive social purposes. It is vital for people who are alive; its lack makes people die, but they still need it in their afterlives. The descendants of the deceased should realize the importance of food and provide it to their living and dead relatives regularly in the highest possible quality. Finally, food is a means of control – both enforced by the society and more individual one – giving the feeling of power over one's own body and the ability to decide if one wants to feed it or rather make it disappear.

The idea of ruling over one's body by means of food shows once again how strictly body and soul, physical and psychical sides are related. Not only do the circumstances, rituals, availability of products, customs, and hunger determine the choices of what, when, and with whom one eats, but also the quantity and quality of meals conditioned by one's welfare and staying alive. Culture influences to a high degree not only the culinary habits, but also beliefs and feelings crucial in making the decision about what one wants to do with one's body and whether one wants to eat at all.

*Chinese food is not unique in its cultural weight. However, unlike in most Western cultures, the various cuisines of China have retained a strong emphasis on the non-material meanings of food as explicit, widely acknowledged and discussed. Food preparation and ingestion are central to most social, religious and medicinal activities. Chinese people do not eat simply for nourishment of the body or for enjoyment. They have an intricate network of meanings, prescriptions and proscriptions which are explicitly wielded in the daily construction of foodways. (Davis 2002: 77)*

This abundance of meanings is present in the described novel on different levels – showing the importance of food for human life and death alike, and proving the view on food itself stated by the food studies icons, who claim that food is “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour” (Barthes 2013: 24). “Food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy, marking social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions – an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships” (Counihan & Van Esterik 2013: 3).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For the details of the plot and contemporary performances, see, e.g., Lunden 2012, Lam 2006, Zemke 2011, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Peony\\_Pavilion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Peony_Pavilion); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peony\\_in\\_Love](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peony_in_Love), both last accessed on 6 February 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Hereinafter emphases added.
- <sup>3</sup> “Chinese food is divided into two things; it’s cold or hot. The varied religious traditions of China can illuminate the Chinese extra-material investment in food. Whether Taoist, Buddhist or Confucianist, the human body is seen as a microcosm of the universe. ... Balancing concepts of yin and yang are reflected in the compositions of most dishes and menus.” (Davis 2002: 77)
- <sup>4</sup> Categorizing anorexia as an eating disorder is problematic: many cases might more readily be called exercise disorders, and every case is an ascetic disorder (O’Connor & Van Esterik 2008: 6).
- <sup>5</sup> Others claim that while most sociocultural explanations treat anorexia as a women’s disease, men make up from one-fifth (full syndrome) to one-third (full or partial syndrome) of sufferers (O’Connor & Van Esterik 2008: 6).
- <sup>6</sup> About Chinese noodles and viticulture cf. Höllmann 2013: 150.

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# EMOTION MEETS TASTE: TASTE-MOTIVATED EMOTION TERMS IN ESTONIAN

**Ene Vainik**

*Senior Research Fellow*

*Institute of the Estonian Language, Estonia*

*e-mail: ene.vainik@eki.ee*

**Abstract:** The paper provides a systematic overview of the possibilities where the lexicons of emotion and taste meet in Estonian. Different levels of such “meeting points” are distinguished and the possible motivating factors discussed. The levels include both the figurative and literal usage of language, both the synchronic and diachronic perspective. The results demonstrate that there is figurative and systematic taste-to-emotion mapping both on the generic and specific level and in regard to both “good” and “bad” taste (and emotions, respectively). In addition, the literal terms of taste and emotions are used interchangeably on both sides of the evaluative distinction and have obsolete meanings as names of some specific substances as the prototypical carriers of the taste. The etymologies of the literal terms reveal an initial congenial conceptualisation of taste, emotion, and substance on both ends of the evaluative scale. In conclusion, today’s systematic taste-to-emotion metaphoric mappings are found to be not only body-based and experientially grounded but to have deep historical and cultural roots.

**Keywords:** cultural linguistics, embodiment, emotion, Estonian language, metaphoric mapping, taste

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We all have experienced that food can taste either *pleasant* or *disgusting*. While making decisions and expressing our subjective preferences for food we often exploit some emotion terms (*to please, disgust*). Such evaluations seem very intuitive and natural. The object of the present paper is, however, not the emotional evaluation of taste but the other way around: the language of taste that is used to describe or characterise emotions. This “reverse” relation might seem less intuitive and natural in the beginning but the impression fades quickly if you think about expressions such as *sweet love* or *bitter anger*.

The situation of using some taste terms (e.g. the adjectives *sweet* and *bitter*) as the descriptors of emotions is not rare. In addition to the *sweet love* and *bitter*

*anger*, one could find also other combinations such as *sweet sadness* (Apresjan 1997). Besides the descriptive pattern one can also notice the tendency to use *sweet* as a synonym of 'kind' and 'nice' in affective contexts (e.g.: How sweet of you to make that offer). The link between sweetness, subjective pleasantness, and affection is unconsciously further exploited in the very commonplace English endearments, such as *Honey*, *Sugar* or *Candy*.

The tendency to talk about some emotions in terms of taste has been noticed in many languages, among them both Indo-European and non-Indo-European. Quite lately, the topic has been brought up in respect of Seediq, an Austronesian language (Lee 2016). The data from Estonian (a Finno-Ugric language) also contribute to the overall picture of a possibly universal tendency.

The present paper was triggered by the observations of the author in the course of writing a monograph about the usage and semantics of Estonian emotion terms (Vainik 2016). Nineteen emotion terms (and respective concepts) were portrayed by integrating linguistic data from ten different levels of linguistic description and/or the type of source material (both standard Estonian and historical usage of the terms were tackled using dictionaries, corpora, databases of phraseology, dialects, runic songs, etc.). The author's attention was caught by the fact that emotions were described in terms of taste in quite a few occasions. It seems that the conceptualisations of emotions in terms of taste might have deeper historical roots in Estonian than in the Indo-European languages, where such expressions have been claimed to rely on purely metaphoric mapping (Sweetser 1990).

The aim of the present paper is to offer a systematic overview of the possibilities where the emotion and taste lexicons can meet, and of how these possibilities are used in Estonian. Such a structure can serve as a template for the further studies of other languages and/or cultural comparisons of different languages. In what follows, you will first find a brief section of the theoretical background, and then a structured layout of the different levels of conceptualisations. The findings will be summarised and discussed in every section and the final conclusions drawn at the end.

It must be mentioned that only qualitative distinctions are made and illustrated in the paper. The author has no ambition to rely on the usage of taste terms in the corpora or to detect experimentally what goes on in people's minds. What is explored here is the patterns of thought as crystallised in the linguistic expressions and, thus, revealing the underlying cognitive or other kind of motivation, if any. The examples illustrate the common sense knowledge of Estonian and have no references to the sources, unless they represent archaic usage or some specific context or meaning. In the latter case the references are given in the endnotes.

## **2. SOME NOTES ON THE BACKGROUND**

The question of a semantic motivation of emotion vocabulary has arisen in the paradigm of cognitively and culturally oriented linguistics (e.g. Kövecses 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008). Within this line of research, it is accepted that although linguistic signs may be arbitrary symbols in principle, practically, there is often a semantic or other kind of motivation detectable between a linguistic form and its meaning. This holds particularly for the complex units, such as constructions that are compositional in nature, but not only (Langacker 1987). The topic of semantic motivation of metaphoric language makes full sense and is relevant in the cognitively and culturally oriented linguistics (see Kövecses 2015; Dobrovolskij & Piirainen 2005; Sharifian 2011; Vainik 2017).

While the motivation of emotion language is discussed, the notion of embodiment seems attractive. The embodiment hypothesis says that our bodily experience largely influences our understanding of the world and plays a crucial role in conceptualising other fields of experience (Sweetser 1990; Gibbs 2006). The abstract and experientially not so clearly delineated phenomena are claimed to be thought and talked about in terms of experience-related (and often bodily) terms (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

The mind-as-body metaphor proposed by E. Sweetser (1990) is a good example of this kind of theoretical approach. According to her suggestion, there is a tendency in the Indo-European languages (which might easily turn out to be a linguistic universal, in fact) that the body-related terminology is a source domain for conceptualising psychological states like emotions or for the language of logic, causation, and conversational structure. In regard to sense perception, she brings numerous examples of the etymologies originating in the physical realm. For example: the terms for vision might have referred originally to physical phenomena like the eyes, facial movements or light; the metaphors for vision originate in touching and manipulating as a more physical faculty. Vision, in turn, is more body-related than some other kinds of mental activities and can be used to refer metaphorically to knowledge and intellection (the UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING metaphor; see Lakoff & Johnson 1999). It appears that there has existed a unidirectional flow of “borrowing” the terms for more abstract concepts from the more body-related faculties and not the other way around (Sweetser 1990: 35).

### **2.1 Emotion-as-taste?**

It is not quite sure, however, whether the taste-to-emotion mappings would classify as a clear case of the mind-as-body metaphor. We can easily admit that

emotions form part of our mental functioning and are, thus, a faculty of mind. Assigning taste to be a faculty of body is not as easily admissible. We are used to talk and think about taste as being one of the five classical senses and belonging, thus, to the faculty of sense perception, which is also part of our mind.

The tradition of distinguishing five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) has lasted for more than two thousand years, originating in the Aristotelian doctrine (see Sutrop 2002: 11). Whether the distinguished senses and the process of sense perception are to be labelled bodily or mental in nature is a matter of dispute. Perception is a highly complex kind of in-brain processing in itself. On the other hand, it includes “taking in” raw data: the environmental stimuli, which are further processed (identified, organised, and interpreted) in the brain. What makes the perception more “bodily” in our common sense knowledge (as compared to reasoning, memory or imagination, for example) is, perhaps, that the very initial part of it takes place in the specific body parts designed for that purpose (the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin).

Ever since the Aristotelian times there has existed the hierarchy of senses. It means that sight and hearing, for example, were considered to be “higher” or more important than the senses of touch, smell or taste. The differently attributed importance is reflected in the development of lexical description. In a fully developed hierarchy the sequence of lexicalization goes as follows: sight > hearing > touch > smell/taste (Viberg 1983). The implication of such a hierarchy is that if you lack a term for a modality, you can always “borrow” a term from the left (i.e. use a term of a higher order modality) and never from the right. Such a sequence predicts that the terms of taste can hardly be used for description of the other senses.

From the viewpoint of the present study, it means that if taste terms are used to describe emotions (and/or emotion related phenomena) it would automatically mean that emotions are treated as a different mental faculty where the “hierarchy of senses” does not apply. In the framework of cognitive linguistics this assumption is held, exactly: emotion and taste are treated as separate cognitive domains, one of those more concrete, familiar, and body-related (taste), and the other more abstract, less familiar, and not as easily tangible (emotion).

## 2.2 Analogy in experience and beyond

Sweetser (1990) explained the motivation of using *sweet* and *bitter* (the categories of taste) in order to describe emotions by the mechanism of analogy. She claimed that love pleases us in a way that is similar to the way sweet taste

pleases our taste buds. In the same line of thought it is the unpleasantness of anger that makes its connection to the bitter taste.

One thing that might have been left unnoticed is the polarity of evaluations entailed by such a scenario: the emotion of love is opposed to the emotion of anger because of the oppositeness of their inherent evaluative values (pleasant vs unpleasant) and so is the sweet taste opposed to the bitter taste on the same kind of evaluative basis.

It seems that connecting sweetness to love and bitterness to anger is a quite abstract kind of decision and not truly related to any bodily sensation or imagination of respective tasting experience. The evaluative dichotomy *pleasant* vs *unpleasant* functions as a grounding in our knowledge, which reinforces if not causes us to see emotions and taste similar or analogous to each other.

The evaluative opposition goes far beyond the domains of taste and emotion – it is one of the so-called universal dimensions of the semantic space as established by Charles Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum (1975 [1957]). Their experiments proved that three dimensions – *evaluation*, *activation*, and *potency* – are the ultimate measures of human experience and occur pervasively in conceptualisation. Everything that can be thought about – and named – would be unconsciously measured on these dimensions.

Why to choose the taste of bitter rather than salty or sour to be the opposite of sweet in the domain of emotions seems to rely on the inherent negativity or displeasing quality of how the bitter taste was culturally conceptualised. In a traditional rural economy both salty and sour taste accompanied the processes of food conservation and made sense as the by-products of the survival techniques. The taste of bitter, however, had no such excuse and could be evaluated not only as displeasing but also as “useless” from the viewpoint of survival. On the contrary – the poisonous plants and substances were often recognised by their bitter taste.

### **2.3 Conclusion of the background ideas**

As regards the present study, the starting point is an assumption that emotions and taste are different mental faculties which are represented in our knowledge as separate cognitive domains. The emotion conceptualisations are rooted in the bodily experience of taste due to inherent evaluations of pleasantness vs unpleasantness in both of the fields of experience.

In addition to the purely cognitive and embodied approach, we would consider also finding motivations for the taste-to-emotion mappings from cultural theories, religious ideas, and folk medicine.

### 3. CONCEPTUALISING EMOTIONS IN TERMS OF TASTE IN ESTONIAN

A layout of the different levels of conceptualising some emotions and emotion-related phenomena (such as general evaluations of like and dislike), using the domain of taste, is given in Table 1. The “meeting points” of taste and emotion occur both in the figurative and literal use of language, both in the present day and in the distant past as revealed by the etymologies. In the following section the “meeting points” are extended upon, illustrated with the Estonian examples, and the possible motivations of the conceptualisations are discussed.

*Table 1. The “meeting points” of taste and emotion in Estonian.*

|   |               | Evaluation  |   |
|---|---------------|---|---|
|   |               | “bad”   | “good”  |
| Figurative speech & metaphoric mapping  | Generic       | UNPLEASANTNESS IS BAD<br>TASTE  | PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD<br>TASTE<br><br>PLEASANTNESS IS AS GOOD AS HONEY   |
|   | Specific      | SUPPRESSED ANGER IS BITTER<br>TASTE<br><br>ANGER IS BILE                                  | THE FEELING OF PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE<br><br>LOVE IS HONEY   |
| Literal meaning of the polysemous terms | Noun          | <i>viha</i> 1 ‘anger’<br><i>viha</i> 3 ‘bitterness; might’<br><i>viha</i> 4 ‘fester, pus’ | <i>magus</i> 2 ‘honey’  |
|   | Adjective     | <i>viha</i> 2 ‘bitter’  | <i>magus</i> 1 ‘sweet’<br><i>magus</i> 3 ‘delicious’<br><i>magus</i> 4 ‘pleasant’<br><i>magus</i> 5 ‘lovable’<br><i>magus</i> 6 ‘beloved’ |
| Etymologies                             | Finno-Ugric   |   | <i>meel</i> < Finno-Permic * <i>mil</i> ‘mind’  |
|   | Indo-European | Proto-Indo-European * <i>viša</i> ‘poison’  | <i>magus</i> < Proto-Germanic * <i>smakjan</i> ‘taste’<br><i>meel</i> < ?Proto-Baltic * <i>mel</i> ‘uvula, tongue’                        |

### **3.1 Figurative speech and metaphoric mapping**

Figurative use of language can be defined as a situation where “what is said is not truly meant”. The situation does not equal lying, however. There is no truth value to the figurative expressions, only the value of presenting some easily imaginable situation instead of something more subtle, complex or complicated. Such a substitute of the actual situation enables to highlight some of its characteristic aspects and to make stronger impact on the recipient.

In the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory the more easily comprehensible domain is called the source domain and the more abstract phenomenon is called the target domain. The very mechanism of systematic mapping from the source to the target is called the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). In the present case, the mapping from the domain of taste to the domain of emotion classifies as a conceptual metaphor, if systematic.

#### **3.1.1 Conceptual mapping from taste to emotion on the generic level**

Conceptual taste-to-emotion mapping on the generic level means that the domain of taste is used to talk about person’s general like and dislike but reference is made neither to any specific emotion nor to any specific quality of taste, except its subjective pleasantness vs unpleasantness. The quality of taste (“good” or “bad”) is mapped onto the general and non-specific emotional evaluation of the situation (pleasant vs unpleasant). A conceptual metaphor responsible for such mappings can be expressed as follows: PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD TASTE / UNPLEASANTNESS IS BAD TASTE.

The well-known instances of this conceptual metaphor are expressions like *not my cup of tea* or *not my piece of cake*, in which personal dislike of something not belonging to the domain of food is expressed as excluding the thing from one’s menu. Subjective dislike of bad taste as the reason for refusing an otherwise appealing object (a piece of cake, a cup of tea) is inferential in nature and not expressed explicitly. Therefore, expressions like this would fit well in the case when politeness is the strategy of conversation.

This may easily be the case also in Estonian, because there is the well-known proverb *Maitse üle ei vaielda* ‘There is no accounting for taste (lit. One should not argue about taste)’ meaning that one should not argue about one’s subjective likes and dislikes. The existence of such a directive proverb reveals also a strive for “good behaviour”, i.e. politeness.

### **3.1.1.1 Expressing subjective dislike by using some taste-related terms in Estonian**

Example 1 is the clearest instantiation of the conceptual metaphor UNPLEASANTNESS IS BAD TASTE. In example 2 taste as a source domain is combined with smell. The gesture of wrinkling one's nose refers to a situation of rejecting something as if tasting and smelling it concomitantly. Example 3 describes the situation of subjective dislike as a grimace, typical of a situation when one has taken a bit of something that he or she actually cannot ingest. In example 4 the reaction of rejecting something is hyperbolised into an even stronger image of vomiting. The latter is a typical expression of not only dislike but disgust, too.

- (1) *Pole päris minu maitse.*  
I do not like it, lit. not quite my taste.
- (2) *nina kirtsutama millegi peale*  
to dislike something, lit. to wrinkle one's nose at something
- (3) *haput nägu tegema*  
to spurn, lit. to make a sour face
- (4) *Poliitikute jutt ajab mind oksele.*  
The politicians' talk is disgusting, lit. makes me vomit.

The examples of figurative speech give us an image of a complex situation of being about to ingest a portion of rotten food: bad taste combines with disgusting smell and potential damage because of the bad quality of the food. What a clear image for expressing subjective dislike!

### **3.1.1.2 Expressing subjective liking by using taste-related terms in Estonian**

The conceptual metaphor PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD TASTE is instantiated in quite a few expressions, among them the ones similar to examples 5 and 6. The situation of intense liking is hyperbolized into an image of strongly wanting something by describing the situation as the state of physiological desire for food with all the concomitant sensations (examples 7 and 8).

- (5) *See on just minu maitse!*  
I like it! lit. It fits my taste.
- (6) *mokka mööda olema*  
to like something, lit. fit one's lips

- (7) *neelud käivad millegi järele*  
to want something, lit. to dry-swallow (for something)
- (8) *Tal ila jookseb.*  
He strongly desires something, lit. he has slobber dripping.

To describe very pleasant things, an Estonian would use a simile *magus nagu mesi* ‘sweet as honey’. For the situation of hearing good, pleasant news there is an expression (example 9) in which the image of ingesting a mouthful of honey is blended with the image of pleasant audition. Most probably, the understanding of pleasantness in terms of good taste is blended with the fixed expression *nagu muusika minu kõrvadele* ‘like music to my ears’:

- (9) *See on mesi minu kõrvadele.*  
I like to hear it very much, lit. it is honey to my ears.

In the expression above, the generic metaphor PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD TASTE is slightly modified to be more specific: PLEASANTNESS IS TASTE AS GOOD AS HONEY.

The evaluation of subjective pleasantness is relevant also in human relations. In fact, the positive evaluation towards us is something that we all aspire for. Flattering behaviour, however, is figuratively downplayed by hyperbolic descriptions in which the flattering person is described as if offering tasty food (example 10) or even being such a food (example 11).

- (10) *mett moka peale määrima*  
to flatter by making compliments, lit. spread honey on someone’s lips
- (11) *Ta oli minuga nagu sulavõi.*  
He tried to please me, lit. he was like liquid (melted) butter with me.

Behind the expressions in the examples 10 and 11 there is the image of bargaining and the folk psychological understanding that sympathy or privileges can be granted in exchange for tasty food. Estonian has coined also a special verb for the verbal flattering behaviour – *moosima* ‘to flatter, lit. to be jam-like’.

### **3.1.1.3 Conclusion and discussion**

To conclude the section of the generic level mappings from taste to emotion, one must admit that the mappings are systematic in Estonian, and can, thus, be considered to qualify as the conceptual metaphor PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD TASTE / UNPLEASANTNESS IS BAD TASTE.

The two submetaphors of the general pattern comprise an antonymic pair of the kind, which is similar to the orientation metaphors (e.g. GOOD IS UP / BAD IS DOWN) (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), except that the opposite evaluations are connected to one's subjective taste (good taste vs bad taste) instead of observable (and, thus, more objective) orientation in space.

Using the labels “good taste” and “bad taste” for the judgements of subjective pleasantness vs unpleasantness of something more abstract is a tradition that originates in the British eighteenth century sentimentalist tradition of philosophy. The “judgment of taste” as the essence of the aesthetic judgement was also central to Kant's account<sup>1</sup>. It is also said that the concept of the aesthetics in itself descends from the concept of taste<sup>2</sup>. The etymology of the term *aesthetics* (Greek *aisthetikos* ‘sensitive, perceptive’<sup>3</sup>), however, refers to perception in general and not only the modality of taste. It is said that this is because of all the five senses ‘taste’ is the one most closely associated with fine discrimination, hence the familiar secondary uses of words for ‘taste, good taste’ with reference to aesthetic appreciation.<sup>4</sup>

Having tackled the Estonian examples, one would hardly say that the taste-related evaluations belong to the politeness register or have to do with aesthetic judgement, except maybe the expression in example 5. Instead, one can find strong descriptive images full of physical details. The aesthetic categories first developed in the eighteenth century Europe have made their way into the Estonian folk psychology, apparently, because of being reinforced by the close-to-the-body (and close to the everyday experience) conceptual grounding.

### **3.1.2 Conceptual mapping from taste to emotion on the specific level**

Conceptual mapping on the specific level means that a specific emotion (with its own literal label, such as *love*) is conceptualised in terms of some specific taste which also has its own literal label, such as *sweet*, for example. As a result, love is conceptualised as sweet taste (not just as good taste). In regard to the specific taste-to-emotion mappings there occur two conceptual metaphors that are similar to those in English: ANGER IS BITTER TASTE and LOVE IS SWEET TASTE.

#### **3.1.2.1 A specific bad emotion is described in terms of a specific bad taste**

The genuine taste term that is mostly used in the specific level mapping to describe a negative emotion is the simple adjective *kibe* ‘bitter’. In most expressions, however, there occur derived words (the noun *kibedus* ‘bitterness’

and adverbs *kibedalt*, *kibedasti* ‘bitterly’). A synonymous adjectival root *mõru* ‘bitter’ is also sometimes used.

The emotion metaphorically referred to by the Estonian noun *kibedus* ‘lit. bitterness’ is not the overt expression of anger but a kind of non-expressed and suppressed feeling, which is often related to giving up one’s own will and aspirations. The feelings of disappointment and being hurt are also similar to *kibedus* ‘bitterness’. Paradoxically, it is difficult to define or to describe the feeling in literal terms while the figurative term *kibedus* ‘bitterness’ seems to be kind of self-explanatory in respect of how the feeling affects the sensing self. The feeling *kibedus* ‘bitterness’ is as painful to the soul as the taste of bitter is to one’s taste buds: one would survive the experience but definitely not enjoy the sensation.

It is not rare to find the feeling of *kibedus* ‘bitterness’ to be mentioned as accompanying one’s thoughts (example 12) or verbal expression (examples 13–15).

- (12) *Ta mõtles kibedusega oma lastele, kes temast ei hoolinud.*  
She thought with bitterness about her children who did not care about her.
- (13) *Ta rääkis juhtunust äärmise kibedusega.*  
She talked with an extreme bitterness about what had happened.
- (14) *Ta ütles seda mõrult.*  
He said it bitterly.
- (15) *Tema hääles kõlas kibedus.*  
Bitterness sounded in his voice.

Bitterness as the non-expressed anger can be described as causing inner tension in the self, very much in the way similar to the case of the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS HOT/PRESSURIZED LIQUID IN A CONTAINER (Kövecses 2000). The human “container” can be instantiated either by *süda* ‘heart’, *hing* ‘soul’ or *meel* ‘mind’ (example 16, 19). Expressions such as in example 17 reveal the liquid-like nature of emotion. The description of the pressurising effect can be attained also by making reference to fermentation typical for brewing alcohol (example 18), and by describing someone as erupting (example 19).

- (16) *Ta hinge täitis kibedus.*  
His soul was filled with bitterness.
- (17) *Ta valas kogu oma kibeduse välja.*  
He expressed his bitterness, lit. poured all his bitterness out.

- (18) *Kibe viha kääris temas.*  
He was getting more and more angry, lit. bitter anger bubbled in him.
- (19) *Ta südamesse kogunenud kibedus purskus välja.*  
The bitterness stored in his heart spouted out.

According to folk psychology, on the other hand, the suppressed anger that remains unexpressed (called metaphorically *kibedus* 'bitterness') would turn into a personality trait. The Estonian language has coined a special verb to describe such a process: *kibestuma* ('to sour, embitter, lit. to become bitter').

The specific-level mappings from taste to emotions can be even more specific: there are expressions that reveal what kind of substance is meant as the typical carrier of bitterness. Examples 20–23 demonstrate that the substance in question is bile. One can recognise the same typical contexts as in the case of bitterness: verbal expression (20), containment of the substance in one's soul (21) and pouring the liquid out while expressing the long-suppressed emotion. The latter aspect is described hyperbolically in example 23, as if bile has been kept under pressure in one's soul.

- (20) *sapine märkus*  
a mean remark, lit. bilious remark
- (21) *hinge sappi koguma*  
to accumulate anger, lit. to gather bile in one's soul
- (22) *Ta valas oma sapi lõpuks välja.*  
He expressed his angry feelings eventually, lit. poured his bile out.
- (23) *sappi pritsima*  
to talk angrily, lit. to sprinkle bile

The examples above show that the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS BITTER TASTE has a more specific variation in Estonian, namely SUPRESSED ANGER IS BITTER TASTE. It seems to have entailments such as: being related to one's thoughts, hiddenness and containment in the human *locus of emotion* (the heart, soul or mind), accumulation and hence the effects of pressure, and the liquid-like nature while expressing it. In quite a few expressions an overt reference was made to bile as the most prototypical bitter substance familiar from one's bodily experience.

### **3.1.2.2 A specific good emotion is described in terms of specific good taste**

The specific good taste that figuratively represents the pleasantness of positive emotions is instantiated by the adjective *magus* ‘sweet’ in Estonian. In fact, it is not only love that can be described by that term but a whole family of positive emotions. One can easily say *magus armastus* ‘sweet love’ as well as *magus õnnetunne* ‘sweet feeling of happiness’ *magus rõõm* ‘sweet joy’, *magus rahulolu* ‘sweet content’. Besides positive emotions also somewhat ambivalent states such as *igatsus* ‘longing’, *ootus* ‘anticipation’ and even *valu* ‘pain’ can be described as *magus* ‘sweet’ (EED 2009).

The specific taste term *magus* ‘sweet’ accompanies a somewhat open set of emotion names. This is so because the adjective *magus* is used as the modifier of an emotion term and is, thus, figuratively characterising the sensation accompanying the feeling rather than directly and solely referring to that particular feeling. The common denominator of the emotional states seems to be the feeling of pleasure that the emotional states evoke in the experiencing self. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor in Estonian would be: PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE. The term for pleasure – *mõnu* – also belongs to the set of specific level emotion terms in Estonian (Vainik 2004, 2016).

The derived noun *magusus* ‘sweetness’ is not used to name an emotion in the same way as the derived term *kibedus* ‘bitterness’ is. However, *magusus* as a noun can refer to verbal expression of love and meretricious friendliness (24) or be a characteristic of one’s voice (25) while expressing those feelings.

- (24) *Teda häiris värsside nõretav magusus.* (EED 2009)  
He was bothered by the cloying verses, lit. he was bothered by the dripping sweetness of the verses.
- (25) *Ta hääles on lipitsevat magusust.* (EED 2009)  
There is flattering sweetness in his voice.
- (26) *Oh armastus, sina kallis magus mesi!*<sup>5</sup>  
Oh love, you dear sweet honey!
- (27) *Oh, mis magus on peigmees olla!* (Jannsen 1854)  
Oh, how sweet it is to be a groom!

However, one can find also examples (like in 26) where *magus* ‘sweet’ is attributed directly to love. The image is more specific, while a reference is made to the most typical sweet substance that one is familiar with – *mesi* ‘honey’. The particular phrase in example 26 originates in a title of a show where

the Estonian folk songs and folk-like songs from the nineteenth century were performed. This kind of expressions were characteristic of the genre of sentimentalist poetry (see also example 27, a typical sentimentalist phrase from the nineteenth century literature).

However, one can find a description of *arm* 'love' as *magus* 'sweet' also in the Estonian runic songs that are much more archaic (Kama 2017 and his references). Example 28 presents a raw naturalistic image of the erotic kind of love. The emotion is referred to by the plural form *magusad armud* 'sweet loves'.

- (28) *Pidin Pillele minema  
jään aga Mallele magama  
Malle armud magusamad  
kui need Pille piima toobid.*<sup>6</sup>

I was about to marry Pille  
But I found myself sleeping on Malle  
[Because] Malle's loves are sweeter  
Than Pille's buckets of milk [the breasts].

The term *magus* 'sweet', while used about feelings, catches not only the immediate pleasurableness of the state but contains also the semantic component of its desirability. Examples 29–30 originate in Old Literary Estonian (Lauluraamat 1727 [1721]). The meaning of the word *arm* 'love' cannot be identified with *eros* here but with the religious concept known as *agape* (Soosaar 2016).

- (29) *Oo sina magus arm, anna minul sinu armu.  
Oh, thou sweet love, give me your love.*
- (30) *Sa magus arm [...] et armastame teine teist nüüd südamest [...]  
Thou, sweet love [...] let us love each other from the heart [...]*

In conclusion, the conceptual metaphor PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE has entailments such as being related to verbal expression and being experienced by both one's mind and body. Besides the actual enjoyment of the state also the desirability of such an experience belongs to the semantic complex of pleasure-as-sweetness. Conceptualising the feeling of love (both *agape* and *eros*) in terms of sweetness appears to be a special instantiation of the metaphor. Love is considered to be the ultimate pleasing experience to one's soul and body, and, thus, the sweetest. Honey as the specific substance instantiates the ultimate sweetness/pleasantness one can think of.

### **3.1.2.3 Conclusion and discussion**

To conclude the section of the specific level mappings from taste to emotion, one must admit that the mappings in Estonian are systematic and therefore there exist two conceptual metaphors: SUPRESSED (NON-EXPRESSED) ANGER IS BITTER TASTE and PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE. Whether these two taken together comprise a pair of antonyms similar to the orientation metaphors (GOOD IS UP / BAD IS DOWN; Lakoff & Johnson 1980) is problematic.

On the one hand, the oppositeness of love and being bitter as feelings as well as behavioural strategies has been cultivated by the Christian religion. Example 31 is an excerpt from the eighteenth century bible translation, where 'love' and 'being bitter' are considered as conceptual opposites, no matter that one of the antonyms refers literally to taste and the other to an emotion. The evaluative value is more important than being precise referentially.

- (31) *Teie mehed armastage omad naised ning olge mitte kibedad nende vastu.*

You, men, love your wives and be not bitter towards them.

On the other hand, it is possible that these two specific level metaphors are not similar to the orientation metaphors but are structural in nature and comparable, thus, to the metaphors like TIME IS MONEY and LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). These kinds of metaphors come each with its own motivation. They do not have to comprise a higher order system with the opposing extremes. In the following section some aspects of the possible motivations behind the specific level taste-to-emotion mappings will be discussed.

The examples given above (20–23) showed that besides being more specific in kind (suppressed anger instead of just anger), some expressions did actually make reference to the specific substance – bile, which might have functioned as a prototype. Everyone taking part in rural economy was supposed to know and recognise the bitter and unpleasant taste of bile.

On the other hand, it is also very likely that both bitter taste and the references to bile in the descriptions of hidden anger have to do with a cultural theory, namely, with the theory of the four bodily fluids (see, e.g., Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995; Geeraerts 2009). This theory, originating in antiquity, was revived in the Middle Ages as an explanation for the illnesses and for the individual differences in peoples' temperament. According to the theory, the excess of yellow bile in a person's body was the reason for proneness to anger and violent behaviour (hence the term *choleric* < *khole* Gr. 'yellow bile'). This theory, still popular in the period of Enlightenment, influenced and shaped, apparently, the folk understanding of the physiological effects of anger. Interestingly, there

is a written record in Estonian from the eighteenth century, an Estonian version of Peter Ernst Wilde's book, by a Baltic Germanic scholar August Wilhelm Hupel:

*See ema kes ennast vihastab, ei pea mitte kesk oma viha sees last imetama, sest kui laps seda piima mis viha läbi on palavaks ning sappi täis saanud, enese sisse imeb, siis ta jääb haigeks, tunneb valu, saab vigaseks, ehk sureb koguni armuta [...] Parem on et laps näljab ning nutab, kui et tema piimaga surmarohto ja kiwti ennese sisse nelab. (Wilde 1771)*

The mother who gets angry should not breastfeed her baby while being in the midst of her anger because when the baby sucks up the milk that has become hot and full of bile due to the anger, the baby will get sick, feel pain, become handicapped or even die in a merciless manner. [...] It is better for the baby to starve and cry than to ingest the deadly drug and poison with the milk.

Thus it was believed and taught that psycho(physio)logical conditions like being angry can cause changes in the consistence and quality of mother's milk, which, in turn, could have an effect on the wellbeing of the baby. In regard to the emotion of anger, there seemed to be a firm relation between 'angry behaviour', 'hotness', and 'bile', which is exactly what was taught by the theory of the four bodily fluids (see, e.g., Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995; Geeraerts 2009). The same excerpt reveals also that the Estonian *viha* 'anger' was identified with 'poison'.

The other of the two taste-to-emotion metaphors – PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE – is a bit less specific than its English counterpart LOVE IS SWEET TASTE. The feeling of love occurs as an instantiation of the sweet pleasure that one can enjoy and strive for. Again, there is a specific substance – honey – that serves as the prototypical carrier of the sweet taste.

There seems to be no such well-formed cultural theory available explaining the sweetness of pleasure as there is for the bitterness or anger. The motivation for thinking about pleasure in terms of sweet taste seems to have purely experiential basis. Actually, sweet taste can be attributed to a wider range of emotions and states than just pleasure or love (*sweet sadness* and *sweet pain* included). Sweetness as the characteristic of one's emotional state was in fashion in the sentimentalist literature and is somewhat less fashionable in today's business-like and rationalist usage of language.

In conclusion, the two specific taste-to-emotion mappings have each their own motivation and specific substances as the prototypical carriers of the bitter and sweet taste respectively. There is no need to consider the conceptual metaphors as a fixed pair of antonyms, nor do they inevitably belong to a broader folk psychological theory of "emotions-as-tastes". There is, however, still a kind

of similarity or symmetry between them. Namely, both tastes can be attributed to and recognised from the quality of one's voice and verbal expression (cf. examples 13–15 and 24–25). This observation brings us to notice degustation and speaking as the two main functions of the tongue as the purely physical organ.

### **3.2 Literal co-conceptualisation**

The general assumption about the literal meaning of a word or literal usage of language is that “what is said is truly meant”. Words are used in the most direct way referring to their denotations only. There should be no place for terms of emotion and terms of taste to meet, nor to get mixed in the case such a bijection of form and meaning would really exist. There are, however, the possibilities that are created by polysemy: a word that classifies as a genuine taste term by its first and main meaning can have an emotion reading its secondary or tertiary sense, and the other way around: a term originally coined for an emotion could have acquired a reading as a taste term. In the following section the “meeting points” that are caused by polysemy of the taste and emotion terms in Estonian will be presented and discussed.

#### **3.2.1 The same term for bad taste and bad emotion**

Interestingly enough, the root *viha* occurs as a noun and as an adjective in Estonian. In the descriptive dictionary (EED 2009) there are four senses listed: it has the meaning ‘bitter’ (as an adjective, *viha2*), and the senses of the noun diverge in three directions: *viha1* ‘anger, hatred’, *viha3* ‘bitterness; might’, *viha4* ‘fester, rot’. All the senses except *viha1* ‘anger, hatred’ are somewhat obsolete. The last sense ‘fester, rot’ has gone extinct as an independent word; the meaning can be detected only in some obsolete compounds designating the effects of unsanitary conditions like *küüneviha* (lit. fester of the nails) and *maaviha* (lit. fester of the soil). As such, the obsolete *viha* ‘fester, rot’ used to belong to the Estonian folk medicine and reflects the (mis)understandings of the Estonian peasants about the causes of diseases. The noun *viha3* ‘bitterness, might’ is also obsolete; the examples in the dictionary (EED 2009) come from the contexts of traditional alcohol brewing and from the descriptions of degustating alcohol and tobacco, only. In some way or another the obsolete meanings of the root *viha* (‘bitter’, ‘bitterness, might’ and ‘fester, rot’) seem to form an interconnected bunch of senses reflecting the archaic understanding that held in the traditional rural society. It is remarkable that the term for an emotion ‘anger, hatred’ is literally the same.

One can argue that *viha* ‘anger, hatred’ is the same as *viha* ‘bitter taste’ because anger is a ‘bitter feeling’: it affects our soul in the way that is analogous to the way bitter taste affects our taste buds. The rationale for the meaning extension from ‘bitter taste’ to ‘bitter feeling’ and then further to ‘anger’ can be seen as parallel to deriving the term *kibedus* ‘bitterness’ for the suppressed anger (see section 3.1.2.1 above). This scenario seems to hold an assumption that the adjective *viha* ‘bitter’ was the first and oldest of the senses. This might, however, not be the case: the adjectival meaning of the ‘bitter’ (taste) can be an extension in itself, originating in the taste of a certain substance of which bitterness was characteristic. The contexts reveal that alcohol and tobacco would be the candidates for such a substance. Based on the discussion in section 3.1.2.1, we can also assume that the substance was bile.

The sequence of meaning development of the word *viha* would be as follows: ‘a specific bitter substance’ > ‘bitter’ (adj.) > ‘bitterness’ > ‘anger’. This scenario, however, does not answer the question about what it all has to do with folk medicine and the ‘magic cause of diseases’ as one of the obsolete meanings of the term *viha*. Therefore, in a section below (3.3.1) I will tackle also the etymology of the term.

### 3.2.2 Same term for good taste and good emotion

The literal taste term *magus* ‘sweet’ is also a polysemous word – seven senses are listed in the dictionary (EED 2009). It occurs mostly as an adjective: *magus*1 ‘sweet’ (taste, smell), *magus*3 ‘delicious, appealing’, *magus*4 ‘pleasant, enjoyable’, *magus*5 ‘lovable, kind’ (about people, words), *magus*6 ‘dear, beloved’, *magus*7 ‘convenient’ (about time). One can follow the gradual change of meaning from taste to general pleasantness and then even further to the domain of interpersonal relationships (‘lovable’ and ‘beloved’).

One of its readings (*magus*2) is a noun with the meaning ‘honey’. This sense is marked as obsolete in the dictionary (EED 2009). It is not clear whether the substance – honey – has been named *magus* after its characteristic taste or the other way around, so that the adjectival senses are extensions of the original name of the sweetest substance.

### 3.2.3 Conclusion and discussion

On both the positive (pleasant) and negative (unpleasant) side of the evaluative scale we can notice that the taste terms and emotion terms occur somehow interchangeably. The emotion term *viha* ‘anger’ has obsolete meanings revealing its

connection to taste experience, and the taste term *magus* has developed meanings that extend to 'general pleasantness' and further to 'beloved' and 'lovable'.

One of the reasons of such confusion in regard to the reference may lay in the values cultivated by the Christian religion. Namely, it was strongly held that sweet and bitter taste are the opposites that must be kept apart in the same way as good and evil (see example 32 of Old Literary Estonian):

- (32) *Hädada neile, kes kurja heaks, ja head kurjaks hüüdwad;  
kes pannewad pimmedust walgusseks, ja walgust pimmedusseks;  
kes pannewad wihha maggusaks, ja maggusat wihhaks. (Js5:20)*  
Cursed are those who give the name of good to evil, and of evil to what is good: who make light dark, and dark light: who make bitter sweet, and sweet bitter!<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, the words for the phenomena on the good side (good taste, good behaviour, good emotions) can be used interchangeably and so can the words for the phenomena on the bad side (bad taste, bad behaviour, bad emotions), as long as the main distinction of good and evil is made. For example, sweet taste could be attributed to light (a phenomenon of vision, not tasting) because it was considered useful, and, thus, pleasurable and good (example 33).

- (33) *Ja walgus on magus, ja silmile on hea päikest nähha.*  
(PbIR Kg11:7)  
Truly the light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.<sup>8</sup>

Again, we can conclude that the evaluative value is more important as a characteristic than as being precise referentially.

### **3.3 The etymologies of the terms**

The sections above have shown that there is a figurative and systematic taste-to-emotion mapping in regard to both the good and bad taste (and emotions, respectively). Moreover, we have seen that in Estonian the literal terms for taste and emotions are used somehow interchangeably on both sides of the evaluative distinction. In addition to this, I have noticed references to some specific substances as typical carriers of the tastes, and that the substances appear also in the lists of senses of the polysemous terms in the dictionary (EED 2009). It is not always clear, however, in which direction the meaning has developed: did it all start from a specific taste or from a specific substance. The emotional meaning seems to be secondary and appear later, however. Therefore, it seems to make sense to look at the etymologies of the terms, hoping that the distant past will reveal where the taste-to-emotion mapping originated and which (if any) substance was involved in the original conceptualisations.

### 3.3.1 Etymology of the root *viha*

It appears that the root in which the Estonian term for bitter taste and emotion of anger originates dates back to the Stone Age (ca 2000–3000 BC; see Vainik 2014). The root *viha* has cognates in all of the Finnic languages (meaning ‘anger’, ‘hatred’, ‘meanness’, ‘irritation’, ‘festering’, ‘bitter’, ‘tar of a pipe’, ‘poison’), and in the Finno-Ugric branch (Udmurt *vož* ‘green’, Komi *vež* ‘green, raw, bright’). It has been concluded that the word originates in the Proto-Indo-Iranian root *\*viša-* ‘poison’ (EDE 2012).

Such an etymology clearly puts the sense as a certain substance – poison – to the very origin of the conceptualisation. It seems that the root *viha* (*viša*) congenially included the knowledge of certain qualities like having a bad, even fatal influence on one’s health (‘poison’→‘irritation, festering’), being subjectively unpleasant (‘poison’→‘bitter’), making evil to one’s enemies (‘poison’→‘meanness, hatred, anger’). The Finno-Ugric cognates reveal that the greenish-yellowish colour has also been part of that congenial conceptualisation.

Interestingly, bad influence and meanness to others (the emotional meaning) seem to have been co-conceptualised from the very beginning. The suspected taste-to-emotion mapping would rather be a part of general extension of the meaning ‘poison’ to many fields. Possibly, the meaning shift from poison to emotion happened as long as 5000 years ago. The etymologists assume that the Estonian verb *vihkama* ‘to hate’ also originates in Proto-Indo-Iranian root *\*dviš-* ‘to hate’ (EDE 2012).

What can be the archetype of such a poison? One candidate proposed in the literature (Masing 2004) and discussed above (section 3.1.2.1) is bile – its colour and taste would fit well, at least. One has to consider, however, that the congenial conceptualisation of *viha* (*viša*) took place long before the theory of the four bodily fluids was formed by Hippocrates (about 400 BC). Another candidate for such a greenish, poisonous, bitter and dangerous substance would be the sap of some plants – *aconitum ferox*, for example, which was known by the name *visha* in the Ayurvedic medicine (Khare 2004). But, again, it may be the other way around: the plant was named *visha* because it was discovered to be deadly poisonous.

### 3.3.2 The etymologies of the terms for good taste and good emotion

The Estonian word *magus* ‘sweet’, which has also other meanings, such as ‘honey’, ‘delicious’, ‘pleasant’, ‘lovable’, and ‘beloved’, is a derived word that

contains an adjectival suffix *-s* and the root *magu* with an obsolete meaning ‘taste’. The original meaning of *magus* seems to have been ‘tasty’. The root *magu* has its origins in Proto-Germanic *\*smaka-z*, *\*smakka-z* ‘taste’ (EDE 2012) and dates, thus, to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Vainik 2014). The homonymous word *magu* ‘tummy’ is claimed to originate in another Proto-Germanic root *\*magan-* ‘tummy’. The semantic relation between ‘taste’ and ‘tummy’ is not difficult to recognise.

The current etymology suggests that the original meaning of the root *magu* was neutral ‘taste’ rather than the specific and overtly pleasant sense ‘sweet’. Apparently, there was still a default positive value to the meaning – the food, which was categorised ‘tasty’ by degustation (tasting) was appropriate for eating and, thus, pleasant.

There is another root in the field of emotions with a relevant etymology. This is the root that occurs in the verb *meeldima* ‘to like’. Both of the Estonian terms for general subjective evaluation – the positive *meeldiv* ‘pleasant’ and negative *ebameeldiv* ‘unpleasant’ – are derivations from that verb. The latter is a complex form that contains denial (*eba* ‘non’ + *meeldiv* ‘pleasant’).

The verb *meeldima* ‘to like’ was invented by Johannes Aavik (1921) as a neologism. The word is derived from an Estonian root *meel*, which has many related meanings, among them ‘sense’, ‘mind’, and ‘mood’ (EED 2009). The derived term *meeldima* was intended as a replacement for the multiword expression *meele järele olema* ‘to like, lit. to be after one’s sense/mind/mood’. The old conceptualisation constructed the situation of subjective liking as a spatial image of following one’s “organ of decision” – *meel* ‘sense/mind/mood’. The spatial construal reveals the initial default positive value attributed to the concept *meel* ‘sense/mind/mood’. In the Estonian runic songs there existed an adjective derived directly from the same root – *meeleline* ‘pleasant, sweet’ (Vainik 2016). The original emotional appeal caught into the root *meel* is still preserved in the derived verb *meelitama* ‘to blandish’.

The official etymology of the word *meel* claims it to be of Finno-Permic origin with the very similar meaning as today – ‘sense/mind/mood’ (EDE 2012). Such an abstract conceptualisation of a complex “organ” of perception, cognition, and emotion is rather surprising, considering the lifestyle and physical conditions of the hunter-gatherers during the Bronze Age (approximately 1000 BC; see Vainik 2014). Therefore, one could consider also the possibility to date the root further back to the Proto-Baltic *\*mel-* ‘uvula, tongue’.<sup>9</sup> A word referring to a bodily organ of swallowing and tasting seems a more likely origin for a word that later developed into a concept that catches the complex “organ” of perception, cognition, and emotion, and further, being the derivational root for conceptualising subjective liking.

The default positive value attributed to the organ of swallowing might have to do with its even more ancient origin in the Proto-Indo-European root, the cognates of which were Old Greek *méli* ‘honey’ and Latin *mel* ‘honey’. Honey would fit well as an archetype of the sweetest substance known throughout the whole history. Such a speculation would drive us, again, to assume some kind of initial congenial conception of ‘fitting one’s tongue’, ‘good (sweet) taste’ and ‘appeal’ as positive emotional evaluation.

### 3.3.3 Conclusion and discussion

The perspective taken by tackling the etymologies of the two Estonian taste terms reveals that their roots date back to the prehistoric times: *magus* to the Pre-Roman Iron Age and *viha* to the Stone Age. The roots (and respective conceptualisations) go, thus, far beyond the Estonian language.

In respect of *viha* there appears to have taken place a congenial conceptualisation of ‘poison’ in the Proto-Indo-Iranian and, possibly, concomitantly, in the Finno-Ugric languages that were in contact at these times. The co-conceptualisation includes the poison’s bitter taste, its fatal effects on one’s health, the aversive emotional attitude, and its greenish colour. The features were attributed to the substance that was believed to be the carrier of those effects. It is not clear, however, whether the archetype of such a substance was bile or sap of some poisonous plant.

As regards the origins of *magus*, it is not comparable to *viha* in respect of such a congenial conceptualisation. The word originally meant ‘tasty’; its extensions to the more specific senses such as ‘sweet’ and to the emotional meanings (like ‘pleasant’, ‘lovable’, and ‘beloved’) have taken place later. However, there seems to have been a seed of positivity present in the very beginning of the conceptualisation – the approval of the edible things by one’s taste organs and digestion.

In addition to these two roots of the specific taste/emotion distinctions, also the etymology of the root *meel* ‘sense/mind/mood’ was considered relevant as a derivational source of both the terms of like (*meeldiv*) and dislike (*ebameeldiv*). It was found that, originating as deep in history as the Bronze Age, it might have had a more concrete and body-related origin in the Proto-Baltic root *\*mel-* ‘tongue, uvula’. Such an embodied original meaning fits better into the understanding that abstract concepts are bodily rooted (Sweetser 1990). An organ of taste/swallowing is a good analogy for conceptualising *meel* as an organ of fast decision making.

## A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Table 1 outlined the areas of the Estonian language where the words of taste and emotion meet. In the subsequent sections the “meeting points” were expanded upon and illustrated with some examples. The conclusions were also drawn and the possible motivations discussed. There seems to be no need for an extensive overall conclusion or discussion. In the following only the highlights of the study are briefly reported.

To put the main result very simply: the taste–emotion connection is more deeply rooted than the cognitive linguists have thought. Today’s systematic taste-to-emotion metaphoric mappings are not only body-based and experientially grounded but have deep historical and cultural roots.

Part of the history is the conscious and deliberate turn to “senses”, which occurred in the philosophical thought in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. Taste was considered to be the most delicate of the five senses and therefore fit for aesthetic judgement. The Estonian material shows that the taste-related imagery has lost its initial delicacy and relation to aesthetics, and given rise to an array of lush body-based extensions. The antonymic pair of conceptual orientation metaphors PLEASANTNESS IS GOOD TASTE / UNPLEASANTNESS IS BAD TASTE is a practical tool in everyday situations, which comprises the essence of the so-called “gut feeling”.

Another historical root that was identified was the influence of the theory of the four bodily fluids. The specific level metaphoric mapping SUPRESSED (NON-EXPRESSED) ANGER IS BITTER TASTE could be attributed to the understanding cultivated by the theory that anger was caused by the excess of yellow bile in one’s body. The misunderstanding has made its way to influence the Estonian folk psychology. The other specific level conceptual metaphor PLEASURE IS SWEET TASTE seems to lay on a more experiential bodily basis. The “sweet feelings” were boosted in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries via sentimental literature.

Yet another historical root of the practice to talk about emotions in terms of taste lies in the fact that the Estonian terms of taste and emotions have etymologies that reveal their initial congenial conceptualisation. Today’s polysemy contains many obsolete meanings that reveal a practice to use the same words interchangeably, referring to taste, emotions, and to the most prototypical substance carrying the taste.

Apparently for ages, until the psychological awakening in the nineteenth century and the rise of general knowledge that resulted in the birth of disciplines such as psychology, it was more important to keep apart the evaluative extremes of good and evil than to make clear distinctions between the psychological faculties (e.g. sensing the taste vs emotions). A major stress on distinguishing

between the polar opposites of “good” and “bad” can be attributed to the influence of the Christian religion – another historical cultural factor behind the emotion conceptualisations.

One must admit, however, that telling apart what is “good” and “bad” in terms of what is edible and what is not is an inescapable need that saves lives. Without these categories we, humans, could not have expanded in such numbers. In order to avoid mistakes costly for the survival, the categories of good and bad taste and emotional attitudes such as appeal and need for aversion must be communicated verbally. Human tongue might be the place where taste and emotion literally meet each other.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>, last accessed on 8 February 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/#ConTas>, last accessed on 8 February 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> See [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=aesthetic](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=aesthetic), last accessed on 8 February 2018.
- <sup>4</sup> See [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=taste](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=taste), last accessed on 8 February 2018, and Buck 1949.
- <sup>5</sup> See <http://erb.nlib.ee/?kid=21836206>, last accessed on 7 February 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> EÜS IX 1137/8 (93) < Rakvere Parish, Sõmeru municipality, Aluverre village < Pilstvere Parish, 1912. J. Elken & W. Rosenstrauch < Kai Sang, 83. Eesti regilaulude andmebaas. [Estonian Runic Songs Database.] Tartu: Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum. Available at <http://www.folklore.ee/regilaul/andmebaas>, last accessed on 27 February 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> Translation source available at <http://www.o-bible.com/cgi-bin/ob.cgi?version=bbe&book=isa&chapter=5>, last accessed on 7 February 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> Translation source available at <http://www.o-bible.com/cgi-bin/ob.cgi?version=bbe&book=ecc&chapter=11>, last accessed on 7 February 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Etymological databases on the web. Available at <http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/main.cgi?root=config>, last accessed on 27 February 2018.

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# TRANSLATION OF MENUS: LABOUR OF SISYPHOS, SQUARING THE CIRCLE OR MARRYING WATER AND FIRE?

*Władysław Chłopicki*

*Institute of English Studies*

*Jagiellonian University, Poland*

*e-mail: chlopicki@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** As a regular customer of restaurants both in my native Poland and in other countries (particularly in the United States), I have always wondered why restaurant menus are so difficult to comprehend for a cultural outsider. In fact, this tendency is systematic and has to do with what Venuti (1995) has described as a necessary foreignization of texts in translation and what other translation scholars have referred to as inherent untranslatability of certain cultural texts. Still, subjective factors, such as lack of skills or experience on the part of the translator, should not be underestimated either. The question mark in the title thus results from my initial inability to determine whether translating menus is bound to fail, at least to some degree, due to objective problems or whether an expert and experienced translator should always be able to overcome the cultural barrier and generate an acceptable translation. The article concludes by stressing the lack of appreciation of translation as a skill in Polish society as well as the international nature and diversity of Polish food tradition and its apparent class divide.

**Keywords:** equivalence, foreignization, menu translation, untranslatability

## EQUIVALENCE AND OTHER RELATED NOTIONS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

In order to put the issue against a suitable background, the notion of *equivalence* in translation studies should be briefly discussed. This is the central issue in translation studies, embedded in centuries of translation experience of writers from St Jerome to Umberto Eco. The central question is whether languages and texts written in these languages are compatible, i.e., it concerns both language systems and language use. Already medieval scholars wrote treatises on mental categories underlying the grammatical ones, and postulated the existence

of universal grammar, which in fact accounted for the universality of human thought. “Grammar is one and the same in all languages in its substance and surface differences between them are merely accidental variations”, famously claimed thirteenth-century scholar Roger Bacon (cf. Robins 2013 [1967]: 90). Furthermore, the focus of interest of medieval scholastic philosophers was the relations between words and things, i.e., they were interested in how words were arbitrarily attached to things in the world by different languages, but at the same time they perceived the commonality of human understanding despite the variety of languages. Most importantly, they argued that words stood for things they signified, since they could not signify them directly, and what follows – the study of words as well as sentences, which involved various grammatical categories, was a way to discover the nature of objective reality. Reality was out there for people to discover and languages reflected it, therefore the duty of scholars was to delve into the nature of reality via the study of language.

This “mentalist” approach to language reiterated later in the history of linguistics under various guises, including Noam Chomsky’s generative linguistics, and recently resurfaced in the school of cognitive linguistics. Its representatives claim that meaning is conceptualization (e.g. Langacker 2008), and so it has nothing to do with actual “things” out there in the world. In their view we create meanings, we construct them in our minds under the influence of our culture and language. By simply looking at an object, such as cheese, we will not be able to understand the meaning of the word *cheese* unless we have earlier worked out its meaning, either by personal experience with the object or by linguistic or cultural awareness of it. Equally well we can construct meanings of objects we have not seen before (such as *ambrosia* or *nectar*) but we have been told about (cf. Roman Jakobson’s (1959) classical article on translation).

In a classical work in Polish translation studies, written in the same time period as the one by Jakobson and in a similar spirit, Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (1996 [1957]) considered translation to be dependent on both language and culture. In this vein, he made a distinction between subjective and objective difficulties which prevented translation – that is, generating an equivalent text in the target language. Among the former were incapability or lack of experience of the translator or misunderstanding of the text. Among the latter, however, were difficulties which stem from objective differences between the respective language systems of the source and the target text, for instance, differences in the grammatical categories of definiteness, gender or aspect (*linguistic untranslatability*), as well as difficulties which stem from the lack of compatibility of cultural categories that he called technical terms (*cultural untranslatability*). These include local tools, measurements, kinship terms, dances, ritual institutions, architectural monuments, weapons, musical instruments, elements

of clothing, religious terms, biological terms as well as food terms. The solution for translators that Wojtasiewicz holds consists in defining equivalence in translation in terms of the same or similar associations being evoked by the target text as those of the original text (see Bałuk-Ulewicz (2016 [2002]) for the distinction between absolute and partial untranslatability).

With regard to specific decisions that a translator can make, Roman Lewicki (2000), in his study of the perception of translated texts by respondents, was inspired by the Czech translation scholar Jiří Levý (2011 [1963]) to accept the notion of a *translation norm*, understood as the awareness of the reader that they are not reading the original work, but a translation. The awareness brings openness on the part of the reader to accept the presence of elements which look or sound foreign in the target text, including proper names, forms of address, the so-called *realia* – i.e., foreign concepts referring to various aspects of life in a foreign country – as well as collocations, unusual dialogues and text genres unknown in the target culture. From a broader perspective, Piotr Kwieciński (2001) discusses two essential relations well known in translation studies. Firstly, it is that of the *source-target relation*, which essentially boils down to the comparison of the original text with that of a translation, although this comparison is not usually open to the reader of the translated text, but only to an analyst. Secondly, it is the *target text profile*, which, broadly speaking, assesses the quality of the target text, thus indicating how the translated text reads without any recourse to the original. Kwieciński has developed a five-point system of assessing whether the translated texts he examined met the expected standard on both counts, which was tantamount to issuing an overall assessment of the translation. Among the criteria was the cultural asymmetry, which involved the direction of the translation, i.e., whether the text was translated from or into a more culturally dominating language. For instance, when translating from English into Polish there was no need to render such cultural terms as *sitcom* or *hamburger* (they could be considered *recognized exoticisms*) or supply glosses on names such as John Kennedy, while in the reverse case references to *knedle* (form of dumplings) or Leszek Miller (the former Prime Minister of Poland) do require translations or glosses (they would be *exoticisms* which are not recognized). Other translation strategies include: borrowing, adding a gloss, using a calque (normalisation in his terms) or (naturally) omission.

An interesting voice in the discussion of the notion of equivalence in translation was offered by Umberto Eco (2001) in his published lectures, in which he discussed his own experiences with translators who rendered his books into numerous languages. He attempted to tackle the question of how one can decide about similarity of meaning between two languages. Since direct comparison is not possible and one requires *tertium comparationis*, which in turn is not

available, he claims that “similarity in meaning could only be established by interpretation and translation is a special case of interpretation” (Eco 2001: 13). He stresses that translation does not concern the process of comparing two languages, which is done in phrase books for tourists. There the tourists learn, for instance, that the Polish equivalent of *cheese* is *ser* – an explanation of limited applicability, since they can only use it in interpreting the texts where *ser* can be found to refer to cheese in general and not those where references are to *cottage cheese* (*twaróg* or *ser biały*) or hard cheese (*ser żółty*). In this vein Eco convincingly argues that translating involves “making a bet on the sense of the text” and thus a “textual abduction” of sorts (Eco 2001: 16) as well as a shift from one culture to another. To illustrate this further, he provides wonderful examples of what *coffee* implies in Italian and American cultures, connoting a very small quantity and a quick bar experience versus a considerably large quantity, including possibly refills, and long social experience, respectively:

*Ordinai un caffè, lo buttai giù in un secondo ed uscii dal bar* (lit. ‘I ordered a coffee, swilled it down in a second and went out of the bar’).

*He spent half an hour with the cup in his hands, sipping his coffee and thinking of Mary.* (Eco 2001: 18)

Eco also considers the age-old dilemma of translation scholars, dubbed *domestication* versus *foreignization* by Venuti (1995), which essentially implies either the need to bring the world of source culture closer to the reader or take the reader out on a trip to visit a foreign culture (the dichotomy is also known among translation scholars as the Schleiermacher dilemma). He advocates the middle-of-the-way strategy, avoiding excessive domestication, which would make the reader doubt the authenticity of the text (if all the realia and names were to be changed into those of the target culture), as well as excessive foreignization, which in turn would make the translation stilted, yielding excessively to the style of the original text and including all the peculiarities of the source culture without any adjustments or glosses.

From another perspective, Pascual (2012), in her case study of a Catalan restaurant menu, refers to the distinction between regional and international cuisine and argues, on the example of the local restaurant, which, in translating regional cuisine, should be favoured and considered as an indispensable point of reference. From the point of view of the present contribution it is an interesting perspective; still in the Polish context different criteria are preferred (see the section below).

## TRANSLATING MENUS

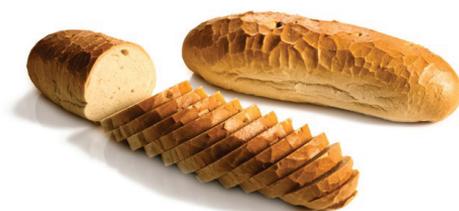
Even though some of the recurring problems which haunt menu translators would appear understandable and unsurprising in view of the above translation research trends, still the degree of unsuccessfulness of menu translations considerably exceeds what one could expect and as such requires analysis and explanation, especially as menu translators often go beyond the necessary foreignization of the translated texts. Firstly, the subjective translation problems seem to dominate over objective issues, which means broadly that not enough effort is exerted in order to render the complicated reality of the source language and culture. In other words, from the point of view of the analyst, the difficult decision whether *pierogi* should be rendered as *dumplings* or *pierogi* yields to the lower-level but still significant decisions whether *pierogi* should be “translated” as *pierogis*, *pirogs*, *piérógs* or *pirogi*. The restaurant managers, on the other hand, generally play down the significance of the efforts that need to be undertaken to ensure both the cultural appropriateness and linguistic accuracy of translated menus. This lack of determination finds its reflection in the lack of care to ensure the qualifications and professionalism of the translators that are asked to do the translations. To put it simply, the restaurant managers use two strategies: “my wife’s second cousin will do it, she has been to England once” strategy or “I know English myself – why waste money on a translator” strategy, both of which boil down to the imperative to save money and make do with *any* translation. The assumption that is often made is that customers do not care so much about the name of the dish as long as it tastes good. If any translator is commissioned to do the translation, then they are often paid little or given little time to do their task well. Furthermore, it is often expected that a translator will stick to the original text as much as possible, which follows from the assumption that translation is really all about finding the appropriate words in the target language, which no doubt are out there and just need to be found. In other words, the task of menu translation is generally underestimated.

Recently, a culinary dictionary (Bartnicki 2010) was published in Poland in the hope to help translators deal with the problem. The dictionary provides English translations for names of dishes, drinks, types of meals, edible substances, edible and inedible animals, types of restaurants, kitchen utensils, measurements, as well as verbs and adjectives used in the culinary discourse. Interestingly, it also includes food terms used in fantasy literature – the author’s favourite type of literature (notably, he is also the translator of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* into Polish). The self-proclaimed objectives of the author are identified in the introduction to the dictionary as not only providing practical aid for translators and a reference book for philologists and translation theorists,

but also promoting the neglected lexicographical work on science-fiction literature (Bartnicki 2010: 9). In the present article I discuss some of the examples of translations recommended by the dictionary – not always uncontroversial, but it is worth stressing that the author did not consider all of his choices to be final and expressed his readiness to accommodate if his readers suggested more apt equivalents (ibid.: 12). This did not meet with much reaction, which in a way proves the argument advanced in the present paper – the significance of translation as a skill is underestimated by society at large. By voicing his attitude, however, Bartnicki – himself an accomplished translator – showed awareness of the cultural nature of food terms and the often objective difficulties of finding single and precise equivalents for them in the target language. Be it as it may, all of the examples provided below are from my own collection.<sup>1</sup>

In my view, the criteria to be relied on when translating menus are the following four: **comprehensibility**, **completeness**, **economy**, and **carefulness**. Specifically, I argue that borrowings need to be restricted in order for the translation to be comprehensible and consistent, descriptive equivalents need to be used when single-word equivalents are not easy to understand, omissions are possible but need to be justified, and last but not least – it is indispensable to verify the accuracy of the translation to eliminate misspellings and other inconsistencies (this is surprisingly neglected in Polish menu translations) and avoid unintended humour.

To illustrate the first of my specific rules, **try to make sense and get across to the customer**, which follows from the criterion of comprehensibility, let me provide a few examples. The first example concerns a term referring to a type of light wheat bread known in Kraków as *weka* (Fig. 1).



*Figure 1. Weka (<http://www.piekarniapochopien.com/wyroby-piekarnicze.html>).*

The translation I have found simply consists in borrowing the term into English and adjusting the spelling to indicate the desired pronunciation of the borrowed term in English (*Vecka* or *Veka*, both capitalized). The possible descriptive equivalent of the word could be *Kraków-style white bread loaf*, which on the one hand ensures the presence of the generic term *white bread loaf*, while on the other adds the specifying term *Kraków-style*. An approximate British equivalent of the bread is referred to in the United Kingdom and some other countries as a *milk loaf* (see Fig. 2) or *milk bread*.

1. *weka* – *Vecka, Veka*, Kraków-style white bread loaf, ~ *milk loaf*<sup>2</sup>

In spite of a certain degree of similarity, both the traditional shape and taste of the typical *weka* and *milk loaf* differ to an extent, and milk loaf does not have egg among its ingredients, thus it seems legitimate not to consider them equivalents and use different names.



**Figure 2.** *Milk loaf* (<http://www.thelittleloaf.com/2012/11/08/sesame-milk-loaf/>).

Styles of drinking coffee have been mentioned above as typically cultural. Thus the Polish habit of drinking coffee, made by pouring hot water on the coffee powder placed at the bottom of a glass (see Fig. 3), practiced particularly at the time of Polish People's Republic (1948–1989), could be referred to in English as *coffee the PRL style*. The only difficulty is the lack of target reader orientation since the Polish abbreviation PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa) should be used in full form and translated as Polish People's Republic. An additional cultural aspect significant for the translation is that drinking coffee (or tea) from a glass, no doubt a habit adopted by Poles under the influence of Russians, is considered uncultured as opposed to drinking coffee (or tea) from a cup.



**Figure 3.** Kawa po turecku – coffee served the Polish People’s Republic style (<http://retro.pewex.pl/481985>).

The original term used to describe the type of coffee illustrated in Figure 3 is *kawa po turecku*, which back-translates into *Turkish coffee* (considered an approximate equivalent in Bartnicki 2010, side by side with *cowboy coffee*, which in turn refers to the kind of coffee boiled in a pot over a camp fire). It should be noticed that the difference between *Turkish coffee* (Fig. 4) and *the coffee PRL style* (Fig. 3) is much larger than that between *weka* and *milk loaf*, both in terms of the manner of brewing and the way of serving: Turkish coffee (see Fig. 4) is first boiled in a metal pot and then poured into an elegant small cup placed on the saucer. Still it is very sweet and very strong – the features it shares with the PRL-style coffee. Thus the frequent translation strategy which treats these two false friends as equivalent is completely unwarranted.

2. Kawa po turecku – *Turkish coffee*, cowboy coffee, coffee the PRL style

In fact, to increase the confusion for translators, *kawa po turecku* is sometimes used in Polish to refer to the Turkish type of coffee as illustrated in Figure 4, too.



**Figure 4.** Turkish coffee  
(<http://omnivorescookbook.com/adventure-in-istanbul-enjoy-turkish-coffee/>).

Comprehending a translation does not only involve objective difficulties and some degree of cultural untranslatability, but it brings subjective difficulties, too, as in the examples below, where translators offer seemingly sophisticated but rather incomprehensible versions of Polish terms, lacking in grammar (3) or making inappropriate vocabulary choices (4 and 5).

3. *pieczeń z sarny* – roasted of roe-deer's (= roasted roe-deer)
4. *pieczeń z jelenia* – *roti de stag* (= roasted deer)
5. *rolada cielęca* – *collar of veal* (= veal roulade; *roulade* is preferred by Bartnicki 2010)

The next rule concerns borrowings and is as follows: **Borrowings are acceptable, but must be used consistently and cannot interfere with comprehensibility.** Thus “rydze z patelni” have in fact been foreignized as 6 or 7 in my corpus.

6. “Rydz” mushrooms *Frying*
7. fried “Rydz” mushrooms

Although 6 is lacking in grammar, while 6 and 7 use an unclear capitalization pattern (there are no reasons why a type of mushroom, *rydz*, should be capitalized), two other, domesticated options are open to translators, a more generalized one (8) and a more specific one (9), both naming the mushroom species in English (*saffron milk cap* is the established equivalent – selected by Bartnicki 2010, although *pine mushroom* is a possibility too):

8. fried mushrooms
9. fried saffron milk cap mushrooms

The case of *kotlet de volaille* requires a special comment when borrowings are discussed.



**Figure 5.** *Kotlet de volaille* – breaded fried chicken with butter and dill filling (<http://tradycyjnakuchnia.blogspot.com/2013/11/tradycyjne-kotlety-de-volaille-devolay.html>).

Tradition has it that the recipe was brought over to Poland in the seventeenth century by Queen Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien (known in Poland as Queen Marysienka), the French wife of King Jan Sobieski, hence the French name of the dish. Apparently, however, it comes from Ukraine and is known there as *Котлета по-київськи*, or chicken Kiev in English translation. Its defining feature is the presence of liquid butter inside which must flow out when the ready dish is cut in two parts. Some green dill leaves are part of the original recipe and the chicken must also be breaded. Apart from the apparent equivalent, which includes the reference to Kiev – irrelevant when translating a Polish dish, translations involve descriptive equivalents of various degrees of development, from the most general one (10, preferred by Bartnicki 2010), since it applies to other chicken breast recipes too, to more specific ones, imprecisely defining the dish with regard to its shape (a roll; 11), or classifying it (more precisely) according to the way of preparing (a cutlet), and adding the borrowed French term to define it further (12) as well as a longer description of what the dish is (13):

10. chicken breast
11. chicken breast roll
12. De volaille chicken cutlet
13. breaded fried chicken fillet stuffed with butter

Searching for various ways of rendering the foreign-sounding dish in English, I have encountered a number of unrecommended versions, which indicate the translator's struggle with its Frenchness by using capitals, apostrophe or even French words:

14. Chicken De Volaille; cutlet de' volaille; Chop de Vollaile; Cotelette de volaille; filet a'la devolaille

The most curious translation I encountered wrongly classified the dish as a pork chop (it is neither a chop nor is it made of pork) and attempted to narrow it down by adding the coined, non-existent style of cooking and then further the descriptive definition which includes the misleading phrase "with butter" (butter could then be understood as coming on top, and it does not):

15. *pork chop* de volaille style: coated chicken breast with butter

The term *szaszłyk* is another interesting case of borrowing. In translation it can indicate a great cultural variety of Turkish type dishes and depending on the culture and language, it can indicate a skewered meat, such as shish-kebab or other type of kebab not necessarily served on a skit (kebab in British English, just as in Polish, indicates a döner kebab or other kebabs): the choice between

two possible equivalents – *kebab* or *shashlik* moves the reader towards Turkey or Russia, respectively. Probably this is why Bartnicki (2010) chooses *shashli(c)k* as the general equivalent, while for *szaszłyk turecki* he prefers *shish kebab*.



Figure 6. Szaszłyk (<http://tasty.blog.pl/tag/szaszlyk/>).

The translations I have encountered involved various attempts to develop the translated version by either specifying the kind of meat (16 – *polędwica* in Polish refers to pork or beef loin mainly) or adding the reference to the original Turkish dish name in brackets (17), which is naturally confusing, given that the dish is made of pork. Two other translated versions (18 and 19) build on the original in a much more awkward way, since, on the one hand, they both lack in grammar (a spit crumbs?) and involve misspellings (blef broiler?), while on the other, 18 talks about both broiling and frying, which does not make sense; in addition, both use the expression *broiling on spit crumbs*, which probably has something to do with bread crumbs as well as the fact that shashliks are served on spits.

16. szaszłyk z polędwicy – beef sirloin shashlik
17. szaszłyk wieprzowy – pork shashlik (shish-kebab)
18. szaszłyk drobiowy – slices of chicken broiled on a [sic] *spit crumbs* and fried
19. szaszłyk – slice of *blef broiler* on *spit crumbs*

A third rule of menu translation which obviously follows involves **consulting expert local knowledge on cooking**, including local cooking. The author of 18 apparently did so, as *drób* (literally translatable as *poultry*) has been rightly rendered as chicken, since most of the dishes referred to as *drobiowy* are actually

made of chicken. In 20, however, the translation has not gone into the heart of the matter as *jagody* are most probably blueberries, since the term is unlikely to apply to any berries, even though in part of Poland *jagody* are indeed any berries. Still, knowing Polish recipes, one would expect blueberries. The sweet cream is apparently and rightly added for the sake of a foreign customer, who might not know that the dish is served sweet. 21 makes other assumptions: on the one hand, wings (*skrzydełka*) are likely to be chicken wings, which is added for the sake of the foreign customer, but then it is also assumed that they are coated with cornflakes – this is not guaranteed given the general meaning of the Polish term *panierowane*; thus it would be safer to use an equally general term – *breaded* or *breadcrumbs* – that does not specify whether fine breadcrumbs or cornflakes have been used. In 22, the translator has assumed that the traditional Polish side dish is fried in butter, and in fact chopped cabbage is at least just as likely to be fried in oil or lard, thus a much more accurate translation would be simply: fried cabbage or more accurately stir-fried cabbage, the latter referring to the specific manner of frying the cabbage. 23 makes an interesting shift from mutton (sheep's meat, *baranina*) to sheep, perhaps dictated by the fact that the original term is *pieczeń barania* (lit. mutton roast) and not *pieczeń z baraniny* (lit. roast of mutton), the latter phrase actually using the mass noun *baranina* and not just the adjective *barania*. *Roast sheep* invariably brings to mind the whole sheep roasted over a campfire, rather than a part of its meat served to customers, and thus is less preferred to roast mutton (or: roasted mutton).

20. pierogi z jagodami – *berry pierogies with sweet cream*

21. skrzydełka panierowane – *chicken wings coated in cornflakes*

22. kapusta zasmażana – *cabbage fried in butter*

23. pieczeń barania – *roast sheep*

24 illustrates the local form of a rather international dish called *croquette* and known locally as *krokiet*. Since it is usually served with meat and international versions include other stuffings, a preferred translation would be meat croquette (Bartnicki 2010 prefers simply *croquette*). Still the translator preferred to explain the dish as cabbage-filled and added the gloss on breadcrumbs as part of a long description which identifies it as a type of pancake. Although breaded pancakes do exist, and also the shape of croquettes and pancakes can be similar given the variety of pancake recipes, still Polish customers make a clear distinction between *krokiet* and *naleśnik*, as illustrated by Figure 7 and 8, *krokiet* never being served with a sweet filling.



**Figure 7.** A typical *krokiet* – meat croquet  
(<http://sklep.zych.bartoszyce.info/index.php?cPath=2>).



**Figure 8.** A typical *naleśnik* – pancake often served with a sweet filling  
(<http://fashionelka.pl/nalesniki-razowe-na-slodko-i-na-slono/>).

24. *krokiet* – pancake stuffed with cabbage, coated in breadcrumbs

The next rule demands that **glosses be used for local terms** which are not known world-wide, the rule being clearly in agreement with the rule of comprehensibility. *Pierogi* is a case in point since this typically Polish dish would be a good candidate for a dish whose name could be borrowed by other languages. Still, getting across to the reader is crucial, so instead of a loan, which comes under various guises (25; *pirogs* or *pirogi* being the oddest, somewhat anglicized versions), a form of domestication is sometimes preferred (such as *dumplings*), often accompanied by a gloss. Regardless of the choice, *Russian pierogis* are not an intelligible version (especially that, in fact, they are not Russian in origin), thus other translations are encountered, such as 26, 27 or

28. While 26 is an acceptable version, even though it ignores the third essential ingredient of onion, 27 specifies the type of cheese ingredient, forming a calque of *white cheese*, where what is meant is cottage cheese. Moreover, the translator of 27 seems to consider *pierogi* as coming in *versions* (like their names), which seems to be an unnecessary addition. 28 in turn not only mentions cheese only as an ingredient, which brings the risk of confusing it with the type of *pierogi* that is served sweet, but also perhaps unnecessarily classifies the *pierogi* as flat, differentiating it perhaps this way from *knedle* (rounded dumplings made with thicker dough and served e.g. with plums; they are also *dumplings* in Bartnicki 2010). A borrowing can thus save the consumer from confusion (cf. Fig. 9 and 10). Versions 29 to 32 are highly descriptive, 31 being the most factually accurate, while 32 even attempts a fine definition of *pierogi* itself as “boiled dough pockets”.

25. pierogi, “pierogi”, “pierogi” (dumplings), pierogis, pierogies, *pirogs*, *pirogi*<sup>3</sup>
26. cheese and potato dumplings
27. *white* cheese and potato version of pierogi
28. *flat* dumplings stuffed with cheese
29. dumplings stuffed with cottage cheese and potatoes
30. “pierogi” (dumplings) stuffed with cottage cheese and potatoes
31. Russian style potato, cottage cheese and fried onion dumplings
32. boiled dough pockets filled with cottage cheese, potatoes, and onion



**Figure 9.** Pierogi ruskie (<http://www.przepis-kulinarny.pl/pierogi-ruskie-id1671.html>).



**Figure 10.** Knedle (<http://kuchnia.wp.pl/query,Knedle,przepisy.html?ticaid=118042>).

Interesting glosses can also be encountered in the following examples. In 33 the way of serving is added, possibly on the request of the restaurant owner, as it does not belong to the standard recipe and is not part of the standard meaning of the *pierogi* in question. In 34 the traditional *bigos* dish (Fig. 11) is referred to with stew as a gloss, while in fact the borrowing could be replaced here with a fairly well established functional equivalent: Polish hunters' stew<sup>4</sup>, especially when both terms occur side by side. The ingredients of *bigos* must include cabbage (fresh and/or pickled) and various meats, plus optionally onion, mushrooms or plums. It must also be cooked for a very long time to achieve the desired taste. The difficulty with translating the name of the dish as stew, beef stew or cabbage stew is that all these terms tend to be understood as referring to a type of thick, nourishing soup, which *bigos* is not. *Kotlet mielony* in 35 (see Fig. 12) is another simple but traditional meat dish, made of minced meat with egg and breadcrumbs.<sup>5</sup> In translation there is a double gloss – minced meat is added to the original name followed by the modifier “Polish style”. This is most likely because minced meat in English is associated either with a meatball (a small round piece of meat served in some quantity, known as *pulpety* in Polish) or a meatloaf (a larger piece of minced meat, sometimes served with an egg inside, visually resembling a pate; see Fig. 13). Translating *kotlet mielony* as *Polish style meatloaf* has thus some degree of accuracy (and completeness), and at the same time a suitable degree of comprehensibility.<sup>6</sup>

33. *pierogi z grzybami i kapustą* – cabbage-mushroom *pierogies* served *with salad w / bacon*



**Figure 11.** Bigos (Colin Cameron from Edinburgh, Scotland – Bigos, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4305457>).



**Figure 12.** Kotlet mielony – Polish style meatloaf (<http://niebonatalerzu.pl/2013/05/kotlety-mielone.html>).



**Figure 13.** Meatloaf (<http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/pork-beef-meatloaf-bacon-jam/b089f46a-7ab2-4312-af34-7249c4537218>).

34. bigos – Polish “bigos” stew

35. kotlet mielony – “Mielony” minced meat – Polish style

Still other cases of glosses include problems with rendering local proper names as in 36, where the dish name should rather be translated as *regional style sirloin steak*, or adding a proper name to refer to a dish better, as in 37 – the problem is that in fact *kołduny* is a Lithuanian dish, thus a more generic term should be in place, such as *bouillon with meat dumplings*.

36. stek podkarpacki – *Podkarpacki* steak

37. bulion z kołdunami – *broth with Polish dumplings*<sup>7</sup>

So far the focus has been on the criterion of comprehensibility, and before I conclude, let me briefly discuss examples of how the three other criteria can be followed. **Completeness** assumes that, unless there is a good reason, omissions are not recommended as in the following examples: in 38 capers are left out, in 39 and 40 the sauce (cranberry and béchamel, respectively) is not mentioned (*Roasted turkey with cranberry sauce*, and *Cheese and ham pancakes baked in bechamel sauce* are the recommended versions), whereas in 41 what is unnecessarily omitted is that the dish is *chef's special*.

38. makaron z tuńczykiem, oliwkami, sosem pomidorowym i kaparami –  
pasta with tuna fish, olives, tomato

39. indyk pieczony z żurawiną – turkey roast

40. naleśniki z serem i szynką zapiekane w sosie beszamelowym – pancakes  
with cheese and ham

41. stek wołowy na sposób szefa podany – sirloin steak with egg

Omission can be justified, however. *Oscypek* (see Fig. 14) is a highlander type of smoked sheep cheese which could also be translated in an expanded version: *sheep milk cheese*, or using a borrowing: *oscypek cheese* (Bartnicki (2010) chooses just the borrowing as a dictionary equivalent). The translation of 42 includes the true, although not indispensable, information that the cheese is *smoked highland* cheese, but at the same time it ignores the fact that it is *grilled* (see Fig. 15). The omission of the former is justified exactly because including it might lead to abandoning the latter – the *smoked grilled cheese* or *grilled smoked cheese* are stylistically awkward just as *smoked fried cheese* in 43.

42. oscypek grillowany z żurawiną – *smoked highland* sheep cheese with  
cranberry sauce

43. oscypek smażony z boczkiem – *smoked* fried sheep cheese with bacon



**Figure 14.** Oscypek – sheep cheese (<http://www.trzyznakismaku.pl/produkty/oscypek>).



**Figure 15.** Oscypek grillowany z żurawiną – grilled sheep cheese with cranberry sauce (<http://przekaskinaimpreze.pl/grillowane-oscypki-z-zurawina/>).

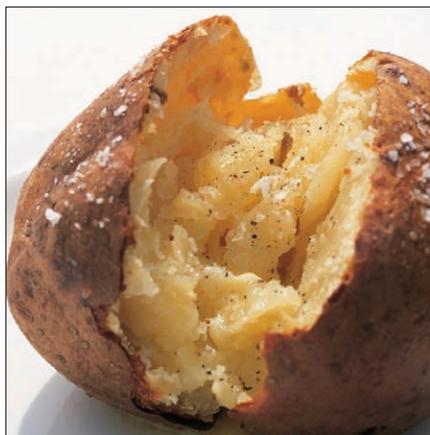
The criterion of **economy** demands, for instance, that parallel structures be used for the sake of brevity, especially the noun phrases with premodified nouns, typical of English syntax, but not necessarily typical of more flexible Polish one. The descriptive translation offered in 44 not only misunderstands the essence of the dish (the potatoes are not boiled with peelings, but they are simply boiled unpeeled, and no special sauce is added; see Fig. 16). The dish could be translated as jacket potatoes (Bartnicki's (2010) choice, the dictionary qualifying it also as an Irish dish), although the latter are made and served differently – they are baked in their skins (not boiled as the Polish dish) and then cut in half, with beans, salad or even fries put inside later (Fig. 17). In 45,

*ziemniaki w mundurkach* are mistranslated as fried potatoes, and the principle of economy is unnecessarily compromised by translating *kaczka* as *wild duck* (it is usually not wild).

44. *ziemniaki w mundurkach* – potatoes boiled *with peelings with sauce*
45. *kaczka pieczona z jabłkami, ziemniaki w mundurkach, warzywa gotowane* – roast *wild duck with apples, fried potatoes and boiled vegetables*



**Figure 16.** *Ziemniaki w mundurkach* – boiled jacket potatoes  
(<http://justmydelicious.com/2016/08/ziemniaki-z-ziolami.html>).



**Figure 17.** *Jacket potato*  
(<http://www.deliaonline.com/recipes/type-of-dish/vegetarian-food/jacket-potatoes>).

In order to meet the same criterion of economy, prepositions (*z*, *na*) should usually be dropped when translating into English for the sake of the above-mentioned noun phrases.

46. pierogi z kapustą – cabbage dumplings, **not:** dumplings *with* cabbage
47. barszcz z krokietem – borsch served with a meat croquette (or: cabbage croquette), **not:** borsch *with* pancake stuffed *with* cabbage
48. kotlet po góralsku – highlander style pork chop, **not:** chop *in* mountaineer's style
49. placki po węgiersku – Hungarian style potato pancakes with meat<sup>8</sup>, **not:** fried potato cake with meat *in* Hungarian style

The criterion of **carefulness** demands the translation to be verified, which in the translations below obviously did not happen. The unspotted mistranslations include simple misspellings – their number in menu translations is surprisingly high (cf. 50 and 51) and some of them are sloppy enough to mix up two different vegetables (52).

50. pieczeń wołowa faszerowana – *roastet* (= roasted) beef with vegetable *Stuffing* (= stuffing)
51. placki ziemniaczane polane śmietaną – potato cake *fillet* with sour-cream (= potato pancakes with sour cream)
52. krokiety ziemniaczane z mozzarellą i szynką – *tomato* (= potato!) croquettes with *mozzarella* (= mozzarella) and ham

Typical mistranslations also involve failing to adjust to English syntax by using a postmodified noun phrase (53 and 54), or simply using a term in its Polish spelling (55 and 56), or even borrowing a term which would be incomprehensible in English without any gloss and in fact is translatable (57).

53. szparagi pod beszamelem – asparagus in *souce beshamel* (= beshamel sauce)
54. kalafior gotowany – *cauliflower boiled* (= boiled cauliflower)
55. flaki z parmezanem – beef tripe with *parmezan* (= tripe soup with Parmesan cheese)
56. omlet francuski z rumem – *omlet* with rum (= rum omelette)
57. botwina z ziemniakami – borsch *botwina* (= young beetroot leaves soup) with potatoes

Unverified translations often produce an unintended humorous effect at the expense of the translator (or in fact the restaurant), which should naturally be avoided. Each of the following examples (58–66) brings its own amusing blunder.

58. kotlet ze schabu zawijany – pork chop *to roll up*
59. kotlet po pańsku – *Yours* cutlet
60. jajecznicza pańska – *master's* scrambled eggs
61. kotlet mielony – *mill* chop
62. pierogi ze szpinakiem – *dumping* with spinach
63. herbata specjalnie parzona – tea *infused especially*
64. deska serów – board *of* cheese
65. fantazja szefa – chef's *imagination*
66. puchar lodowy ekstra – *extra* bowl of ice cream

In 58 the translation suggests that the customer is to roll up the pork chop him- or herself (in a way that has not been disclosed), while what is intended is a rolled pork chop; in 59 a non-grammatical form is generated due to a misunderstanding of the expression *po pańsku*, which refers to a gentry-style (pork) chop (the amusement also stems from the totally inappropriate capitalization, typical of Polish polite addresses, and unused in English), while in 60 the abbreviated form *pańska*, in the same sense, brings an undesired ambiguity of what should be described as gentry-style scrambled eggs. The amusement in 61 stems from the odd selection of the word *mill* to render the minced meat (*mill* is strangely phonetically close to the Polish term *mielony*) as well as the odd choice of *chop* where none is meant (see the discussion of 35), while 62 evokes an incongruous image of dumping something with spinach, while what the dish should be called is spinach dumplings. 63 brings a gentle humorous effect when an unusual word order is employed to refer to a specially brewed tea, while in 64 *board of cheese* brings odd associations by analogy with the board of trustees, etc., and it should be replaced with the more conventional *cheese board*. In 65 customers are offered to be served the chef's imagination, which would be most unlikely to happen, while what is meant is chef's fantasy – a conventional phrase to refer to an unusual dish (the reason why the unobvious word has been chosen was probably because fantasy seemed a too easy and thus improbable choice). Finally, 66 seems to have resulted from a misunderstanding of *ekstra* in Polish, which does not mean an extra bowl of ice cream on top of the one ordered, but instead an *extra large* bowl of ice cream, which could also be rendered with one of its cultural American equivalents of Ice Cream Sundae or Ice Cream Super Bowl.

## CONCLUSION

Having discussed the variety of examples, let me briefly conclude by saying that menu translation is a difficult task and requires from the translator both extensive knowledge of source and target cuisines as well as translation experience, not to mention high ethical standards, which would include precision, carefulness, and professionalism in proofreading. While subjective difficulties are thus possible to overcome, objective ones require the thought-out choice of a translation strategy, taking into consideration the all-important criteria of comprehensibility, completeness, economy, and carefulness. While doing so, the translator should thus, first of all, try to understand what the dish actually is, be aware of the foreign perspective of the reader and their international point of reference (and think of appropriate glosses to use), and take the best interest of the restaurant into account, even though the restaurant owners themselves might not consider the shape of the translated menu to be particularly important. Additional complicating factors include the number of varieties of English which differ in their preferred equivalents and require discernment, although generally British English should be preferred in Polish restaurants due to the geographical proximity of the United Kingdom.

I am aware of the fact that this journal deals with folklore studies and thus its readers would be interested in Polish eating habits or customs rather than in the specific translation issues. Still, I believe that the objective difficulties encountered by the menu translators as well as complications experienced by scholars trying to define the notion of equivalence and by linguists trying to bring together meanings and things “out there” – all discussed in the present article – are all very well compatible with the interests of folklorists in what is universal and what is culture-specific. Polish food culture comes out from my examples as highly heterogeneous, with influences of Russian, Lithuanian, German, French, Turkish or Hungarian cultures, all very significant in Polish history. On top of that, the cuisine is regionally diverse (the Highlander and Subcarpathian culture come out among the examples) and affected by recent past and the communist period (that of the Polish People’s Republic). Still, the national tradition is not absent from the culture either, especially the hunting tradition and the related one of eating game, which points to the importance of gentry cuisine culture and places itself on the apparently opposite pole to the peasant food culture (berry and mushroom picking as well as potato eating culture). With regard to the type of food, soups and pasta go hand in hand with a variety of meats, Polish cuisine ranging across pork, beef, and mutton down to chicken and other poultry, while vegetables all start and end with potatoes,

but of course there are quite a few other vegetables which make it to the Polish table. The brief description of Polish food cannot fail to mention bread and its special varieties, which are the everyday staple for every Pole. The translation difficulties associated with all that variety concern objective problems in rendering food terms (both native and foreign) as well as specific and subjective issues, such as spelling of the names of French dishes (the knowledge of French has been steadily going down among Poles).

Addressing the tongue-in-cheek title of the present contribution, one might say that the process of menu translating indeed has some features of the mythical never-ending labour of Sisyphos, but when enough care is exercised and a sophisticated strategy is selected, Sisyphos can actually see the top of the mountain he so much desires to reach.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> No references are made to the sources of the examples, since I do not intend to criticise particular restaurants for the lack of carefulness, but my goal is to discuss typical translation issues. In fact, they are all actual translations that have been collected from three specific Polish restaurant menus in southern Poland as well as very numerous internet menus, where I attempted to find variants for the culture-specific Polish menu items that I selected for discussion in the study.
- <sup>2</sup> Most questionable choices in my examples are marked with italics.
- <sup>3</sup> Bartnicki (2010) accepts *pirog* as an equivalent of *pieróg*, side by side with dumpling, while for the plural he accepts the phonetically adjusted *pirogi* as well as *pierogi* and dumplings.
- <sup>4</sup> The term preferred by Bartnicki (2010) for *bigos myśliwski*, while he chooses the loan on other occasions.
- <sup>5</sup> Notably, *mincemeat*, spelled as one word, has a very clearly culture-specific reference in Britain as a sweet mixture of dried fruit, alcohol, and spices and should not be confused with minced meat.
- <sup>6</sup> Bartnicki (2010) chooses minced meat cutlet.
- <sup>7</sup> Bartnicki (2010) accepts the transliterated *kolduny*, probably due to its use in the Cyrillic too, side by side with meat dumplings.
- <sup>8</sup> Bartnicki (2010) selects Hungarian-style potato pancake.

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# THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *KOMBURONGO* IN THE FOLK BELIEFS OF THE DUSUNIC PEOPLES OF NORTH BORNEO

***Low Kok On***

*Borneo Heritage Research Unit*

*Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia*

*e-mail: lowkokon@ums.edu.my*

***Solehah Ishak***

*Faculty of Film, Theatre & Animation*

*MARA University of Technology, Malaysia*

*e-mail: solehahishak@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** Early Western ethnographers who conducted field research in North Borneo (Sabah, Malaysia) in the late nineteenth century were attracted to the *komburongo* (*Acorus calamus* or sweet flag) because of the spiritual role it played in the folk beliefs of the Dusunic speaking peoples. Although there have been brief discussions on the *komburongo*, in-depth studies are still lacking. This article is based on the data collected and conclusions made by interviewing informants as well as the material obtained from direct field observations. The primary aim is to focus on the various spiritual functions and roles played by the *komburongo* in the lives of the Dusunic peoples then and now. This study finds that the *komburongo* fulfils several important roles, both in their ritual ceremonies and spiritual healings. The *komburongo* is believed to be a form of a benevolent spirit which functions as the spiritual helper in various rituals. Its rhizomes are used as a ritual instrument, also called the *komburongo*, which serves as the medium connecting the ritual practitioner to the invisible spirits from the nether world. *Komburongo* leaves are also used as amulets to protect the users from evil spirits. These myriad beliefs in the *komburongo* have been rooted and embedded in the Dusuns' ancestral traditions and practices since time immemorial. Nevertheless, these beliefs have become less dominant ever since the Dusunic ethnic groups became Christians or Muslims.

**Keywords:** benevolent spirits, Dusunic peoples, evil spirits, folk beliefs, *komburongo*, ritual ceremonies, traditional and spiritual healings

*Komburongo* or *komboungo*<sup>1</sup> (commonly known as sweet flag in English) is a precious plant for the Dusunic<sup>2</sup> ethnic groups residing in Sabah, Malaysia. Evans

(1953: 60) reported in his study that the *komburongo* was in fact a cultivated and not a native plant found growing wildly in North Borneo (former name for Sabah, Malaysia). During our field research in several districts in Sabah from 2013 to 2015, we found that many Dusun villagers in places like Pitas, Membakut, Kuala Penyu, and Ranau (Fig. 1) still planted the *komburongo* around the swamplands near their houses.

In his book, *The Religion of the Tempasuk Dusuns of North Borneo* (1953), Evans described the *komburongo*'s role in the Dusuns' traditional religious ceremonies. His brief account formed an important source about the spiritual role of the *komburongo* in the lives of the Dusuns in the 1940s. In Sabah, the rhizomes of the *komburongo* plant have also been used by some members of Kadazan and Dusun ethnic groups as traditional medicine to cure stomach aches and fevers (Tongkul 2002: 32).<sup>3</sup>

In their belief system, the *komburongo* is a type of spiritual helper who has the power to aid the *bobolian*<sup>4</sup> (ritual specialist) to resolve spiritual problems or disturbances that occur in people's daily lives. Dusun ritual specialists, known variously as *bobolian*, *bobohizan*, *tantagas* or *bobolizan*, depending on the different Kadazan and Dusun subgroups, are almost always women, although there



**Figure 1.** *Komburongo* (next to the keladi – *Colocasia esculenta*) planted by the villagers around their houses in the District of Ranau. Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.

are also male ritual specialists. The roles of male and female ritual specialists differ (Low & Marshall 2013: 20). As reported by Evans (1953: 42), and based on our own research, nearly all the major Dusun religious rites are performed by the female priestesses, known as *bobolians*. Among the Kimaragang Dusun, for example, both women and men can be *bobolians* although the spiritual powers and knowledge of the *rinait* (ritual poem) of the former are better and stronger than those of the latter (Low & Pugh-Kitingan 2015: 407). Women *bobolians* perform complex ritual ceremonies related to paddy-planting, healing, and the banishment of evil spirits. Rituals performed not by female but by male *bobolians* include performing rites when opening a new piece of land for rice-planting or pacifying the spirits when cases of incest have occurred. Male *bobolians* would also assist in other smaller unspecified ceremonies (Low & Pugh-Kitingan 2015: 407).

The spiritual roles of *Acorus calamus* are also found rooted in many cultures both in the West and in the East. One of the earliest records of the sweet flag is the calamus in the Bible. It was first mentioned when God told Moses to make holy oil to anoint the tabernacle, the ark of testimony, and other ritual paraphernalia (Exodus 30:23, 24, 34). Calamus was also one of the plants said to have grown in the gardens of Solomon (Solomon 4:14) (quoted by Hashmat et al. 2013: 289). Among the North American indigenous peoples, the calamus served as a powerful shamanic libation, a panacea, health tonic and detoxifier, and a talisman against evil. Indeed, this plant is saturated with spiritual magic and universal connectivity (Ratsch 1998: 41). Many cultures throughout the world believe that rhizomes of the sweet flag contain potent powers that ward off evil. According to Morgan (1980), countless North American tribes hung calamus rhizomes in their homes and sewed it into children's clothing; the belief was that the plant would ward off nightmares and cause evil to pass by homes and families. In ancient China, the calamus was evidently used in shamanism, and is one of the country's oldest, most revered plants. Bundles of calamus rhizomes tied together with *Artemisia vulgaris* (mugwort) are still hung over doorways to protect against evil spirits, and used as talismans during the dragon boat festival (Motley 1994). All this serves to highlight the various important functions universally played by the *Acorus calamus*.

Amongst the Dusunic peoples, although *Acorus calamus* known as the *komburongo* continues to play an important role in traditional and spiritual functions, specific research has yet to be conducted. Evans' (1953) early ethnographic research mentioned the spiritual functions of the *komburongo* in the lives of the Dusun ethnic people of Tempasuk in the District of Kota Belud; Hurlbut (1986) was interested in *komburongo*'s role as a *divato*, the assistant spirit, helping the Kadazan ethnic ritual expert in Labuk, eastern Sabah. Tongkul (2002) only

referred to the rhizomes of the *komburongo*, which were used to cure sicknesses like stomach aches and fevers, without delving into the spiritual functions associated with this plant. Hanafi (2003) only mentioned the role of the *komburongo* as a ritual instrument of the Kadazan ethnic group in Penampang. His study focuses on the roles of the *bobolian* (ritual specialist) of that area. All the above proves that, until our current research and fieldwork, a specific study on the spiritual aspects of the *komburongo* was very much lacking.

Field research to gather information regarding the spiritual significance of the *komburongo* was conducted from October 2013 until August 2015 in the districts of Kota Marudu, Ranau, Tuaran, Kota Belud, Kudat, and Kuala Penyu, where a majority of the people are from the Dusunic group. This research hopes to fill in the gaps of the earlier studies carried out by Evans (1953), Hurlbut (1986), Tongkul (2002), and Hanafi (2003). Data gathered from these Dusunic informants are closely tied to beliefs in spiritual beings and the use of the *komburongo* in spiritual healings. This ethnographic research on the *komburongo*, in all its myriad functions and roles, is done within the trajectory of the worldview of these Dusunic peoples.

## **KOMBURONGO AND THE WORLDVIEWS OF THE DUSUNIC PEOPLES**

According to Hanafi (2003: 28), the Kadazan ethnic group in the Penampang District of Sabah believed that the *komburongo* came into being because the Kinoringan, their Creator, wanted to make sure that their ritual specialists would always succeed in conducting their ritual ceremonies. Based on this orally transmitted myth, the *komburongo* is believed to be sacred and has invisible powers to help ensure that mankind would not be threatened by evil spirits, the *rogon*.

This has a close affinity with the Dusunic ethnic people who believed that the etheric self of the empirical world of human beings would be the invisible, spiritual world of the good and bad spirits. Evans (1953), Williams (1965), Hurlbut (1986), Porodong (2001), Mat Zin (2003), Phelan (2005), Hanafi (2007), and other researchers have reported that the Dusunic group comprised of the Rungus, Kimaragang, Dusun, Kadazan, and many others, all believed in the existence of evil and good spirits of the nether realm.<sup>5</sup>

According to Mat Zin (2003: 23), before the natives of Sabah embraced Christianity and Islam, belief in supernatural beings as well as in good and evil spirits had played a very important role in all aspects of their lives. In the belief system of the Dusunic peoples, there existed a number of spirit categories: among the

Kadazan in the Labuk area (east of Sabah), spirits are classified as: *rogon* (malevolent spirits that harm people), *divato* (helping spirits), *tombiruwo* (souls of the dead), *bambarayon* (rice spirits), and *binorit* (race of small people) (Hurlbut 1986: 114). Hurlbut (*ibid.*: 125) reported that the *divatos* (helping spirits) are called by ritual specialists to help heal sickness. There are many *divatos*, and the *komburongo* is the strongest among them. The Kadazan believe that when a person is sick, his or her soul has been captured by a malevolent spirit. If the *divato* is successful in getting back the sick person's soul, the person will recover.

Beliefs in spirits and ritual taboos have greatly influenced the lives of the Dusunic people (Evans 1978 [1922]: 152). Evans' (*ibid.*) statement was further supported by Williams' (1965: 17) findings that personal crises associated with births, sicknesses, deaths, fortunes, misfortunes, hunting, and crop yields were marked by the Dusuns as occasions where it was necessary to deal with these forces by engaging in specific ritual behaviours.

Thus it is crucial to have a harmonious balance between the real world of human beings and the nether world of the spiritual beings, which must never be jeopardized. The Dusunic people believed that improper behaviours like committing incest would disrupt this harmonious balance and incur the wrath of the spiritual beings besides having misfortune befalling on the individual, his or her family members, and even the whole community. This harmonious balancing and co-existence between the spiritual and physical worlds are closely related to the concepts of *ahasu* (hot) and *osogit* (cold). To disrupt this balance would cause a heated (*ahasu*) situation, yielding even more problems as more people would fall ill or they would have a bad harvest (Lasimbang 2002: 2; Hanafi 2008: 176; Pugh-Kitingan & Baptist 2009: 251).

To prevent this, the Dusunic people undertook various rituals so that both the physical and spiritual realms would continue to co-exist harmoniously. Should a situation become *ahasu* (bad), steps must be undertaken to cool it down, namely to make it *osogit* so that it could become good again. Only a *bobolian* who possesses the knowledge to connect these two different physical-spiritual, seen-unseen dimensions would be able to do this. The *bobolian* would be aided by the *divato*. This research analyses the forms and spiritual functions of the *komburongo* in its role as the *divato* (helper) of the *bobolian*, and is concerned with these ancestral beliefs seen within the context of the worldview of the Dusunic groups until the present day. This is best exemplified by a recent newspaper report (dated 5 June 2015) about an earthquake in Sabah. It was believed that the mountain spirits among the indigenous Kadazan and Dusun were unhappy and became angry. To show their anger, they caused the earthquake to happen. But even before the real happening, the *Daily Express* (2015: 2) reported that a highly respected *bobohizan* from Penampang, Sabah, had

predicted that something bad would happen because of the behaviour of the ten tourists who decided to strip naked at the summit of Mount Kinabalu, which the indigenous peoples of Sabah, especially the Dusunic peoples, deemed to be sacred. As reported in the newspaper, the *bobohizan* stressed that the actions of the ten tourists had awakened and offended the *komburongo* spirit (the subject of this study) of Kinabalu. “The Mountain is getting ‘hot’ and to cool it down, sacrifices must be made. It would take a huge *sogit* (ritual fine), in fact, a bloody sacrifice to appease the angry spirit,” said the *bobohizan* (ibid.). This incident exemplifies how the Dusunic indigenous people express their concerns and disapprovals of untoward and unbecoming behaviours from outsiders who seem oblivious of their traditional values. Making public their predictions, by using the newspaper media, serves to prove the need to state their innate, traditional values and beliefs whilst publicly chastising unbecoming modern behaviours.

On 21 June 2015, it was again reported on the main page of the same newspaper that traditional Dusun ritual specialists, the *bobolians*, had conducted the biggest ever animal sacrifice to appease the spirits of Mount Kinabalu. The report stated:

*The ritual began at 8.30 am. It saw Pangkau (the ritual specialist) lead six other bobolians to the location where they were going to conduct the monogit ritual. In the monogit ritual, they requested permission from the spirits that dwell in the area to conduct the mogondi (communicating with the guardians of the mountain). It took only a few minutes of chanting before one of the bobolians started to go into trance. At around 10.00 am, Pangkau, carrying a white chicken and her machete, approached the stone [which was] about a few metres away from where she had been sitting. After reciting her rinait (ritual poem), the chicken was slaughtered and its blood sprinkled onto the sacred stone. She then began communicating with the guardians of the mountain.*

*The ritual ended with the offerings of what looked like several types of leaves and the slaughtered chicken, which was left there for the spirits of the mountain to enjoy. Thereafter, seven buffaloes which the guardians had earlier demanded were sacrificed in quick succession, both as an appeasement and to ultimately strengthen the weakened mountain. (Patrick & George Dol 2015: 1)*

These two recent newspaper reports proved that the Dusunic peoples of Sabah continue to believe in the importance of maintaining a harmonious balance between the physical and spiritual realms, and that the *komburongo* still plays a very important role in their lives.

## **KOMBURONGO'S MYRIAD FUNCTIONS**

According to our Dusunic informants, there were two types of *komburongo* plants based on the colour of their rhizomes: the green and the red *komburongo*. The Dusunic people regarded the green *komburongo* to be female and the red to be male. Some believed that the power of the red *komburongo*, which was also more difficult to find, was stronger than that of the green *komburongo*. In our fieldwork conducted in the districts of Pitas, Kota Marudu, Ranau, and Membakut Kecil, we only found the green *komburongo* (Fig. 2).

The *komburongo* plant is used both in traditional medicine for its medicinal properties and in the spiritual healing of the Dusunic ethnic group. The *komburongo's* functions are varied for it has many roles: (1) as a type of a spiritual helper because it is believed to have the power and expertise to help the *bobolian* solve spiritual problems; (2) it is the scared object/instrument which the *bobolian*



**Figure 2.** Green komburongo found in the District of Ranau.  
Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.

uses as she conducts her ritual healings; (3) it is a familiar plant used by the Dusunic ethnic groups in their spiritual healings; (4) it functions as a spiritual consultant for the Dusunic group who would ask about their health issues or seek advice about their daily lives; (5) the leaves and roots of the *komburongo* (Fig. 2) are used to heal stomach aches, skin problems, and headaches. This research paper focuses only on the spiritual functions of the *komburongo*.

### **KOMBURONGO AS SPIRITUAL HELPER**

The Dusunic ethnic group accepted the conception that the *komburongo* was created by Kinoringan (Creator) to help the *bobolian* to successfully communicate with the spiritual beings during ritual ceremonies. This would enable the *bobolians* to identify and solve the problems affecting members of their community. We also found that *komburongo* refers to three different things: *komburongo* the plant, *komburongo* the helping spirit, and *komburongo* as the ritual instrument. Our Dusun informant from the District of Tuaran told us that before the *komburongo* could be planted, *rinaits*, which are ritual verses, must be recited by the *bobolian* entrusted with the task. Failure to do so would not activate the spiritual powers of the *komburongo*, which on its own, either as the plant or the spirit or the ritual helper, would actually be quite useless, would have no powers, and would remain inactive without the recitations of the sacred *rinaits*. It is the sacred *rinaits*, memorised and recited by the *bobolians*, which have the power to evoke and activate the spiritual powers of the *komburongo* and hence empower it to fulfil its task either as the spiritual helper or the invisible spirits, both malevolent and benevolent.

Found in the swampy areas of Sabah, the *komburongo* is a cultivated marsh plant which does not have any spiritual qualities or connections to other worldly dimensions. It is only after the *komburongo* has been dried and tied with a variety of dried and “magical” elements, over which the *bobolian* has ceremonially recited various *rinaits*, that the *komburongo* would acquire its spirit and special qualities.

Unfortunately, our informants could not provide us with the *rinaits* used to empower the *komburongo* with its spiritual powers. This is understandable because throughout our research, we found a distinct behavioural pattern: informants would just be confessing what they had heard or knew previously or that they simply believed and accepted what they were told. Former *bobolians* could not recite the *rinaits* because the recitation had to be done only under certain conditions, almost always only when they were performing the actual ritual ceremony. These *rinaits* cannot just be simply recited for certain rituals

must be adhered to. More importantly, for the *rinaitis* or the *komburongo* or the *bobolian* to be effective, all three must work together, in tandem with one another. The *bobolian* without the *komburongo* would be ineffective without the recitation of the *rinaitis*. Reciting the *rinaitis* alone without the *bobolian* or the *komburongo* would be equally ineffective. For the ritual to be successful, all three must function, support and empower one another.

Different informants told us different things about the spiritual powers of the *komburongo* leaves: under certain conditions, it was believed that the *komburongo* leaves actually did have spiritual powers, or that there were those who believed that they should always carry the *komburongo* leaves with them before going into the jungle, as the leaves would protect them from all sorts of danger. Yet others believed that planting the *komburongo* plant near their houses would prevent evil spirits from approaching their homes to disturb the inhabitants. This practice is still upheld until today, with some of our informants bringing along the *komburongo* leaves, in spite of their change in religion and modern practices. Yet others were just telling stories of what was once a normal practice and belief.

During our fieldwork, we also found that the *komburongo* plants were commonly cultivated by the Dusunic ethnic groups who lived in the districts of Ranau and Membakut Kecil. These people believed that the *komburongo* if planted around their houses would be capable of protecting the inhabitants from being disturbed or haunted by evil spirits. They believed that the *komburongo* plant would act as a fence preventing the onslaught of attacks by evil spiritual beings.

Talking to different informants made us realize that basically there were two opposing views vis-a-vis the *komburongo*: firstly, that it was just an ordinary plant which became empowered with spiritual powers only after the recitation of *rinaitis*, after which it was transformed into a potent agent in curing rituals; secondly, the *komburongo* was actually a sacred plant, embedded with strong spiritual powers, which just needed to be tapped and released. In both cases, it was clear that the Dusunic people were influenced by the fact that the *komburongo* was a type of spiritual helper or assistant. It did not really matter whether the *komburongo* got its powers after the recitations of the sacred *rinaitis*, or the power was already embedded within its natural plant form. Whatever the case, the final result was still the same: it was a plant with supernatural, spiritual powers, crucial in the performance of the *bobolian* rituals.

Testimonies of the significance of the *komburongo* as a spiritual helper were seen in many rituals conducted by the *bobolian* of the Dusunic ethnic group. Our interviews with the Dusun, Kadazan, Kimaragang, Rungus, and Tobilung ethnic groups revealed that in most of the rituals performed by the *bobolian*

for healing or harvesting, festivities, or for the purposes of protecting the environment and warding off evil spirits, the first thing they had to do was to invite the spirit of the *komburongo*. The central force of these rituals was the recitation of the *rinait* by the *bobolian* to first awaken and then to invite the *komburongo* and other spirits in the nether world to participate in the rituals.

Evans in his study (1953: 68) documented a *rinait* which he termed as “the invocation of the *Komburongo* spirits”. This invocation of inviting the *komburongo* spirits to help the ritual specialist preceded the central rites at many ceremonies of the Dusunic people. One of such *rinait*s was furnished by Kunsuwoi, one of the most skilled *bobolians* in the Kadamaian village where Evans carried out his fieldwork in the 1940s. According to Kunsuwoi (quoted by Evans 1953: 68), all rites were originally learnt from *Sagatapon* (the name of a fish). The *rinait* goes:

| <i>Rinait</i>                             | Translation   |
|---|---|
| <i>Supik ku Komburongo</i>                | I with the <i>Komburongo</i> spirits,                                       |
| <i>Buruk ku rinokian</i>                  | I scatter rice for the males.   |
| <i>Supik kandaiyong himboh</i>            | Standing together one above the other                                       |
| <i>Simbulditonduruh lasukanak-anakkoh</i> | Leaping away after my children came   |
| <i>Anak-anak rumikot</i>                  | My children arrived   |
| <i>Kajajai kotikid kointob</i>            | Each receiving by reckoning   |
| <i>Kotunong kolohau kapompon</i>          | Coming together when called   |
| <i>Momboh-homboh kasungkad kohunan</i>    | Going here and there, and together<br>planting a staff, charm[ed] with soot |
| <i>Pandai boros podolot</i>               | Clever at talking all sorts of things                                       |
| <i>Pononowali do walai</i>                | Occupying deserted houses   |
| <i>Pononolikud lambagan manganak</i>      | Putting behind them constantly –<br>used paths of the children              |
| <i>Lambagan do rumibut</i>                | Then constantly – used paths of the wind                                    |
| <i>Olonsih tanak minorun</i>              | The smell of the earth moulded  |
| <i>Oinduk tolotud podsupuan apandai</i>   | Going upwards to see the rolling<br>land of clever smiths’ work             |
| <i>Aling bulawan nosumpong poiradan</i>   | Where damaged gold is remade  |
| <i>Koposion do tinan</i>                  | A livelihood for the body   |

(Evans 1953: 64–65)

Shimomoto (1979) in his study on the myths of the Rungus ethnic group had also recorded and transcribed a *rinait* known as *Pangalapik*, which he obtained from a Rungus ethnic informant who lived in the District of Kudat. The Rungus ritual specialist, known as a *bobolizan*, would recite the *rinait* *Pangalapik* during the sacred ritual ceremonies; for instance, after the harvest seasons so as to send the rice spirits believed to live far away out at sea back to their

original abodes. This could be seen from the first part of the *rinait Pangalapik* as transcribed by Shimomoto (1979: 78):

| <b><i>Rinait Pangalapik</i></b> | <b>Translation according to the context</b> |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Posikai ku i Komburongo</i>  | I wake up the <i>Komburongo</i>             |
| <i>Rukahai ku i rinokizan</i>   | I wake up the male                          |
| <i>Amu ku dara om posikan</i>   | If I don't wake him up                      |
| <i>Tida ku dara om rukahan</i>  | If I have no intention to wake him up       |
| <i>Nokodop dati i sinundu</i>   | Maybe his power is in a sleeping stage      |
| <i>Nokoturu dati i linodu,</i>  | Maybe his wonders are in an inactive stage  |
| <i>Monimpaki Komburongo:</i>    | <i>Komburongo</i> (answers):                |
| <i>Mangampot ki rinokizan</i>   | Reacted as a male                           |
| <i>Nunu ngaran ka i tiposik</i> | Why did you wake me up?                     |
| ...                             | ...   |

The first part of the *rinait Pangalapik* shows how the *bobolizan* responsible for sending home the rice spirits must first awaken the spirit of the *komburongo*. According to the Rungus ethnic informants, spirits from the invisible nether worlds were in a sleeping state and had to be awakened before they could participate in the sacred *bobolian* rituals. The above *rinait* proves that the *komburongo* served as the *bobohizan*'s spirit helper to send the rice spirits to their original abode, far out at sea.

Former *bobolians* in the District of Ranau concurred that whatever rituals were performed, the following *rinait* was to be the first to be recited:

| <b><i>Rinait</i></b>             | <b>Approximate translation</b>                    |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Isu pikui Komburong</i>       | This is about the <i>Komburongo</i>               |
| <i>Hiburo kui rinokian</i>       | I mention about the male spirit                   |
| <i>Isu pikui posiridot</i>       | And this is about the different spirits within it |
|                                  | I mention the spirit so as to move                |
| <i>Hiburo kui palandako</i>      | Said with the tongue                              |
| <i>Do posiri nondo dila</i>      | Uttered with the lips                             |
| <i>Do palanda kodo munung</i>    | This is about <i>Rinsui</i> (spirit)              |
| <i>Isu pikui Rinsui</i>          | And this is about power                           |
| <i>Hiburo kui bintayang</i>      | The <i>Rinsui</i> who wants to come               |
| <i>Do Rinsui do rumikot</i>      | The power that appears                            |
| <i>Do bintayang do sumakoi</i>   | You will arrive at a house                        |
| <i>Korikot koh nondowalai</i>    | You will enter a room in the house                |
| <i>Kosaboi koh nondo tongkoh</i> | The house, the place where a ritual will begin    |
| <i>Do walai do susupian</i>      | The house with stilts where the ritual will       |
| <i>Do kongkod do dura anan</i>   | take place  |

(Informants Hasnah Yukin and Gangku Gombur, 30 June 2014)

The recitation of the above *rinait* proves that the *komburongo* was the first helping spirit to be invited to participate in the ritual and that without the presence of the *komburongo* spirit, all rituals would become ineffective.

The Dusun ethnic group in the District of Tuaran shared the same belief of the *komburongo*, which was regarded as the much sought-after spirit to help them solve their myriad spiritual problems. A former Dusun ethnic *bobolian* in Tuaran stressed that the following *rinait* has to be recited before the commencement of the *bobolian* ritual:

| <b><i>Rinait</i> Dusun Tuaran</b>         | <b>Approximate translation</b>         |
|---|--|
| <i>Ongoi ko siti Komburongo.</i>          | Come here, oh you, <i>Komburongo</i> . |
| <i>Mokitulung oku dot karamaian diti.</i> | I seek your help in this ritual.       |

The process of invoking the *komburongo* spirit was repeated during our Kadazan ethnic Mamanta<sup>6</sup> ritual fieldwork, conducted in the village of Limadang in the District of Membakut on 18 and 19 July 2014. In the opening Mamanta ritual called Manupih, three *bobolians* were seen carrying a bag filled with a piece of white cloth, yellow rice, and the *komburongo* leaves. Our informants told us that like other rituals, the *bobolian* had to invoke the spirit of the *komburongo* before calling on other spirits to participate in the ritual. The three *bobolians* used their fingers to twirl the *komburongo* leaves as they recited the *rinait*s (Fig. 3) in order to awaken the *komburongo* spirit and gather other surrounding spirits to participate in the Mamanta ritual.

Amongst the Dusun Ranau, Dusun Tuaran, Rungus, and Kadazan ethnic groups, the importance and effectiveness of the *komburongo* as a helping spirit has been generally acknowledged and accepted throughout generations.

## THE ROLE OF THE *KOMBURONGO* IN RITUAL CEREMONIES

Dusun ethnic groups used the dried *komburongo* root as a ritual instrument, which they also called *komburongo*. Various rare objects believed to have invisible, spiritual powers were hung onto the dried *komburongo* rhizome. According to several informants, the *bobolian*, responsible for creating this ritual implement, would know which items were suitable to be hung and attached to the dried *komburongo* rhizome so as to enhance its power and effectiveness. The *bobolian* would then conduct the ceremony of reciting the sacred *rinait*s to enable the spirits to come and inhabit in the ritual instrument which would be used to aid those who have sought their help.

Figure 4 shows the *komburongo* decorated with animal teeth, sea shells, a wooden comb, a small glass bottle, a small bell, and other paraphernalia, all



**Figure 3.** Three ritual specialists holding the komburongo leaves as they recite the rinait in a Mamanta ritual. Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.



**Figure 4.** The komburongo ritual instrument decorated with what the ritual specialist considers to be magical items. Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.



**Figure 5.** An informant showing an undecorated, knife-shaped *komburongo*.  
Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.

of which were believed to enhance the *komburongo*'s spiritual powers. Other informants believed that only the *komburongo* had spiritual powers, but the other paraphernalia were merely decorative items. A *komburongo* ritual instrument without decorative items was found in the District of Membakut Kecil (see Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> With or without decorations, the *komburongo* as a ritual instrument has to undergo the process of having the *bobolians* recite the sacred *rinaitis*. Without this ritual, the spirits would not come to empower the *komburongo*.

All the informants in this research (see the appendix) admitted that prior to converting to Christianity or Islam in the late nineteenth century, they depended on the help of the *komburongo* for many spiritual-related matters in their daily lives. They would consult the *bobolian* who had the help of the *komburongo* spirit to find out about health-related issues: when they got sick or were disturbed by evil spirits, or when they wanted to undertake a long journey and travel to faraway places or when they wanted to open new areas for planting rice. In these matters, the *bobolian* would consult the *komburongo* spirit to find cures, get advice or solutions to their numerous problems.



**Figure 6.** A Dusun informant in Ranau showing how the komburongo responded to the bobolian's questions, as seen from the movements of her index finger.  
Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.

According to a Dusun informant from Ranau, who had watched the negotiating process with the *komburongo*, the *bobolian* would place her index finger on her palm and would ask questions related to the causes of the sickness. As soon as a question had been asked, if the *bobolian's* index finger moved in a straight manner, it meant that the answer was yes. But if the *bobolian's* index finger got entangled halfway, or it moved to one side, the answer was no or meant that whatever it was, it could not be done or helped. The negotiating process with the *komburongo* was dependent on the *bobolian's* expertise and the way she would be asking the questions related to the sickness, the possible cures, and other health-related issues (Fig. 6).

The following discussion was based on the observations of a *komburongo* healing ritual conducted by Tialum binti Siwoi (practitioner and informant), which she had learnt from another *bobolian* many years ago. This fieldwork was done in Kampung Limadang, Membakut, on 18 July 2014. The *bobolian* used a wooden knife-shaped *komburongo* ritual instrument (Fig. 7). Tialum revealed



**Figure 7.** *The dried komburongo placed at the end of a piece of wood.  
Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.*



**Figure 8.** *The bobolian places the komburongo near her mouth as she recites some ritual words. Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.*

that there was no hidden symbolic meaning to the knife-shaped piece of wood. It was merely a receptacle for her to place her fingers at the edge of the wooden piece, during the questioning session with the *komburongo*, which had been sanctified with the *bobolian* reciting the *rinait*. Those who wanted to ask the *komburongo* regarding their health, sickness or other spiritual problems had to hang RM1<sup>8</sup> at the end of the *komburongo* as a token payment for the *bobolian*.

Tialum had to be told the name of the sick person and the type of sickness, be it physical or spiritual. After getting the information, Tialum recited some verses (Fig. 8), and then immediately placed her finger on the wooden board. A question and answer session with the *komburongo* followed so as to determine how to solve the problems. This was indicated through the movements of the index finger which was initially placed close to the thumb, but as the session progressed, it would slowly move closer towards the *komburongo* (Fig. 9). If her finger moved right up to the edge of the wood, the answer was yes. If the finger was unable to completely move upwards to the edge of the wood, the answer was negative.



**Figure 9.** The bobolian's finger moving to the edge of the wood means that the answer is positive. Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.

This ritual was a simplified version as the *bobolian* did not recite any *rinaitis* or conduct any long rituals over the *komburongo*. After a few sessions of questioning and answering from the participants and Tialum, we concluded that it was important that the *komburongo* practitioner, like Tialum herself, be an experienced person well versed in various physical sicknesses. The *bobolian's* effectiveness was greatly dependent on her ability to communicate and get the answers from her helping spirit, the *komburongo*, whose responses, in turn, depended on how the former worded the questions. We also concluded that it was a very interdependent symbiotic relationship for a wrongly worded question to result in an inaccurate response and a wrong or ineffective cure.

### **KOMBURONGO AS PROTECTOR**

In the belief system of the Kimaragang ethnic group in the northern part of Sabah, when someone was disturbed by the *barau*, an evil spirit, the most effective way of safeguarding the person was by burning the leaves of the dried *komburongo*. Smoke from the burning *komburongo* leaves would scare away the *barau*. The Kimaragang ethnic group believed that the *barau* could metamorphose into an animal or bird, as testified by several of our Kimaragang informants. If someone were to confront a *barau* in the shape of an owl, the apparition would emit a frightening sound. The weak-hearted might even faint. Should this happen, the *barau* would further attack and cause harm to the person. It was because of this that the Kimaragang ethnic hunters and jungle gatherers would always have matches and dried *komburongo* leaves with them whenever they entered the jungle.

The belief that the *barau* was afraid of the dried *komburongo* was related to the ancient belief of the Kimaragang ethnic people. According to an informant, Mojudin Gambus, a Kimaragang hunter, went to hunt in the jungle. As he was lying in wait to hunt the animals, he suddenly heard people conversing from afar. The hunter walked towards where he heard the conversation and when he came near to the place, he hid behind the trees and thick foliage. It was then that he discovered that the place was overgrown with *komburongo* plants and that a group of *baraus* were discussing about the *komburongo* from afar. An old *barau* was telling his friends not to go near the *komburongo* plant because it was forbidden by their ancestors. Likewise smoke from the dried *komburongo* leaves would endanger them. When all the *baraus* had left, the hunter approached the area that had an abundance of the *komburongo* plant. He quickly uprooted a *komburongo* plant to take home so that he could plant it near his house. When he arrived in his village, he told everybody about the

conversation he had heard amongst the group of *barau* spirits. From then on the villagers knew how to combat threats and dangers coming from the *baraus*. It would also prevent them from getting lost in the jungle.

Hurlbut (1986: 129) reported that when a Kadazan died in the Labuk area, the *komburongo* was used as an amulet to prevent a living person's soul from following the soul of the deceased. The amulet, made from a piece of cloth, had a dried *komburongo* root wrapped inside; it was then tied around the wrist of the person. The data collected during our field research proved that many other Dusunic peoples also used the *komburongo* as an amulet.

The Kimaragang ethnic group also believed that when children were crying non-stop, most probably they were disturbed by the evil spirit, the *barau*. The Kimaragang believed that children, but not the adults, could see the presence of the *barau*. To resolve this problem, a small piece of root from the *komburongo* plant was cut and then wrapped in a piece of cloth. It would then be tied to the child's wrist as an amulet. Several Dusunic informants from other areas also believed in this practice and they, too, used this method to stop children from crying incessantly.

The Kadazan ethnic group residing in the District of Membakut cut the dried *komburongo* root into small pieces, pierced them, and then strung together to form a necklace. They too believed that this *komburongo* necklace would prevent evil spirits from disturbing children. Their children would wear these necklaces as a preventive measure to safeguard them against the evil spirits.

Several Dusunic ethnic informants told us that the *komburongo* plants were planted around their homes to prevent evil spirits from coming and disturbing them. During our fieldwork in the village of Lamadang in Membakut, we found that several Kadazan ethnic villagers planted the *komburongo* at the back of their houses (Fig. 10) as a safety precaution. More importantly, they would always have easy access to the *komburongo*, whenever they needed it.

Other Kadazans from Membakut said that the *komburongo* leaves could be folded into small circles or crumpled into small balls (Fig. 11) and mixed with cold or warm bath water to be used when bathing. The same informant told us that bathing in the water with *komburongo* leaves in it would dispel winds from the body. This was further corroborated by a Dusun informant from Ranau, who said that bathing in the water with *komburongo* leaves in it would cure itchy skin problems, make the person healthy, and generally ensure the wellbeing of the person, including preventing the onslaught of spiritual problems.

Yet other informants told us that when they were very young, *komburongo* leaves were placed underneath their pillows to prevent evil spirits from coming to disturb them when they were asleep, as it was then that they were most susceptible to attacks and disturbances. Some Dusunic ethnic groups believed



**Figure 10.** Komburongo at the back of a Kadazan ethnic house in the District of Membakut.  
*Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.*



**Figure 11.** An informant showing how to fold the komburongo leaves before putting them in the bathwater. *Photograph by Low Kok On 2014.*

that before they attended any festivities or large gatherings, they always had to carry with them *komburongo* leaves or an amulet in their shirt or trouser pocket, so as to prevent people who were envious of them from doing them harm. They would also carry the *komburongo* leaves when they had to travel in the middle of the night, so as to prevent attacks from evil spirits.

During our second fieldwork session we were told that Dusunic ethnic primary and secondary school children would take the *komburongo* leaves with them when they went camping, for they believed that evil spirits would not disturb them in their camping grounds, a terrain which was unfamiliar to them.

### **THE SPIRITUAL FUNCTIONS OF THE *KOMBURONGO*: THEN AND NOW**

When Evans undertook his ethnographic study in North Borneo in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he found that the *komburongo* was greatly used in the religious affairs of the people. In fact, for ceremonial and religious purposes the rhizomes of the *komburongo* cannot be simply and casually gathered in just any ordinary way, or at any ordinary time. The rhizomes could only be taken during a religious ceremony of the first rank, involving the sacrifice of a pig (Evans 1953: 61). When this research was conducted in 2014, we found that our Dusun informants, in various villages, used these plants for various purposes and not only in ritual ceremonies. Dried *komburongo* rhizomes were made into bracelets to serve as amulets to protect them from being harmed and disturbed by evil spirits. When a baby cries non-stop at night, the *komburongo* is used to ward off the invisible spiritual beings disturbing the child. Young Dusunic students also believe in the efficacy of these leaves. As such they take the *komburongo* leaves with them to their camping sites so that they will not be harmed and disturbed by the evil spirits. It is obvious that even now belief in the spiritual qualities of the *komburongo* remains intact among some of the Dusuns although its primary importance and main function in religious ceremonies as earlier reported by Evans (1953) have changed.

Evans' (ibid.: 61–62) report of his fieldwork detailed the complicated process of collecting the *komburongo* plants from their growing sites to be used in various ritual ceremonies among the Dusuns of the Kadamaian area of North Borneo:

*I was lucky enough to see komburongo dug during a very complicated Magambawon ceremony at Bengkahak village, about four or five miles from Kadamaian. Subsequently, I saw a party of women at Piasau (another nearby village) on their way to take komburongo, while a Magambawo ceremony was in progress at that village.*

*At Bengkakak, there were three women, accompanied by a man carrying a sword and a round wooden shield went to the marshy streamlet where the komburongo grew. The man made some passes with his sword, before the women started grubbing up the rhizomes. This was done to drive away those unwanted spirits.*

*When the party with the komburongo was approaching the house on its return journey, a sortie was made by some of its male inhabitants, all armed with weapons, and a very brief sham fight took place, with the woman's defender participated. The fight developed into a sort of war dance, after which the attacking party escorted the komburongo to the house, where it was placed on the altar, before being shared among the women who required it. The 'fight' is supposed to energize the rhizomes.*

Such a complicated ritual process is no longer practised these days. During our field trip we observed how the Kadazan people living in Membakut simply dug up the *komburongos* which were planted near their houses. They did so directly and simply without any ritual or complicated process whatsoever. This happened in 2014 during the *Mamanta* ceremony held to please the various spirits along the river by making offerings to them.

In her research among the Dusun, Koepping (2006: 69) noted that there were Christians who retained a deep awareness of and respect for the traditional belief system but felt following it was wrong after they had converted to Christianity or Islam. Low and Pugh-Kitingan (2015: 418) report that many Kimaragang Dusun informants in the Pitas District said that *bobolians* had become extinct in their villages due to these conversions and modernizations which resulted in their not practicing these agriculture-related ritual ceremonies. Besides the Kimaragang Dusun, the numbers of *bobolians* for other Dusun subgroups in Sabah are also gradually declining. Our study of the *komburongo* in 2014 saw many changes, especially when the majority of our Dusun informants had converted to either Christianity or Islam, leaving behind their animistic and pagan beliefs.

At the time of our field research (2013–2015), about 80% of the Dusunic ethnic group had become Christians and another 10% had reverted to Islam. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that conversion to Christianity or Islam has not totally eradicated the traditional Dusuns' worldview, for belief in spirits still impacts their lives which continue to be sustained by tradition, ceremonies, and offerings.

The current situation seems to be a whirlpool of interdependent factors affecting the practitioner, practice, and the "believer". The gradual demise of the *bobolians* has consequently led to the gradual reduction of ritual ceremo-

nies, which in turn has also impacted the roles and functions played by the *komburongo*.

The dialectics of modernity, tradition, religion, and ritual practices will continue to be openly played amongst practitioners who still believe in their ritual practices but must circumvent religious beliefs, and amongst those who feel that they must cease to engage in these rituals completely. There are also those in the community who believe that whilst their religion forbids them to engage in these ritual or spiritual practices, they are somehow duty-bound to preserve these rituals as manifestations of their culture and tradition. Under these circumstances, even as the *bobolians*' very existence seems to be precarious, the *komburongo* will continue to exist in its various manifestations, albeit in different permutations.

## CONCLUSION

On the whole, this paper has highlighted that the *komburongo* played a very important spiritual role in the lives of the Dusunic ethnic people either as the helping spirit, ritual instrument or an amulet. The spiritual functions of the *komburongo* were closely linked to their ancestral beliefs and worldviews. These beliefs were stronger before the Dusunic people embraced Christianity or Islam, for they believed that the *komburongo* as a helping spirit was created by the Kinoringan (their Creator) to help them whenever they were in difficulty and were encountering problems. As a ritual instrument, the *komburongo* was used in paddy-planting activities, festivals, and spiritual healings. *Komburongo* rhizomes and leaves were often used as amulets by different Dusunic ethnic groups to safeguard them from dangers which they believed came from evil spirits.

When the majority of our Dusun informants have converted to either Christianity or Islam, leaving behind their traditional beliefs, changes in the spiritual functions of the *komburongo* are found inevitable. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that these animistic beliefs are still practised. Conversion to Christianity or Islam has not totally eradicated the traditional Dusuns' worldview, for believing in spirits continues to impact their lives sustained by tradition, ceremonies, and offerings. Changes in their religion have not resulted in a radical shift, nor have they altered their worldviews.

The dialectics of modernity, tradition, religion, and ritual practices will continue to be openly played amongst practitioners who still believe in their ritual practices but must circumvent religious beliefs, and amongst those who feel that they must cease to engage in these rituals completely. There are also

those amongst the community who believe that whilst their religion forbids them to engage in these ritual/spiritual practices, they are somehow duty-bound to preserve these rituals as manifestations of their culture and tradition. Under these circumstances the *komburongo* will continue to exist in its various manifestations even as the *bobolians'* very existence continues to be precarious.

## APPENDIX

### List of Informants

**Note:** The following informants were interviewed between October 2013 and August 2015. Several Rungus and Dusun informants did not want their names to be revealed, thus only their initials are used (see 6–10). All informants who were interviewed belonged to the Dusunic ethnic group except for Jasman Bandar. He is a Bajau, but since early years he had been brought up amongst the Kimaragang ethnic group in the District of Kota Marudu.

| No. | Informant           | Age | Ethnicity  | Gender | Place       | Occupation                         |
|-----|---------------------|-----|------------|--------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Mojudin bin Gambus  | 60  | Kimaragang | Male   | Kota Marudu | Farmer                             |
| 2.  | Jonan bin Gaul      | 52  | Kimaragang | Male   | Kota Marudu | Native chief                       |
| 3.  | Pangayan            | 82  | Kimaragang | Male   | Kota Marudu | Farmer                             |
| 4.  | Gangku binti Gombor | 74  | Dusun      | Female | Ranau       | Housewife / former <i>bobolian</i> |
| 5.  | Hasnah binti Yukin  | 62  | Dusun      | Female | Ranau       | Housewife / former <i>bobolian</i> |
| 6.  | MBK                 | 43  | Dusun      | Female | Ranau       | Maid                               |
| 7.  | BBK                 | 62  | Dusun      | Female | Ranau       | Former teacher                     |
| 8.  | BBA                 | 43  | Dusun      | Male   | Ranau       | Technician                         |
| 9.  | ITM                 | 56  | Dusun      | Female | Ranau       | Teacher                            |
| 10. | SK                  | 86  | Dusun      | Male   | Ranau       | Village head                       |

|     |                     |    |         |        |             |  |
|-----|---------------------|----|---------|--------|-------------|--|
| 11. | Munchi binti Dapit  | 81 | Dusun   | Female | Tuaran      | Farmer / former <i>bobolian</i>                      |
| 12. | Tialum binti Siwoi  | 80 | Kadazan | Female | Membakut    | <i>Komboungo</i> practitioner / spiritual consultant |
| 13. | Abraham bin Henry   | 36 | Kadazan | Male   | Membakut    | Teacher  |
| 14. | Adong binti Otim    | 69 | Kadazan | Female | Membakut    | Trader   |
| 15. | Olat bin Aluan      | 90 | Kadazan | Male   | Membakut    | Farmer   |
| 16. | Perim bin Junah     | 62 | Kadazan | Male   | Membakut    | Farmer   |
| 17. | Picony Pitin        | 36 | Kadazan | Female | Membakut    | Housewife  |
| 18. | Ungut binti Tawi    | 61 | Kadazan | Wanita | Membakut    | Housewife  |
| 19. | Raymond bin Majumah | 40 | Rungus  | Male   | Kudat       | Teacher  |
| 20. | Jasman bin Bandar   | 26 | Bajau   | Male   | Kota Marudu | Student  |

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Komburongo* is the term used by the Dusun, Kimaragang, and Rungus ethnic groups, whereas the Kadazans in Membakut refer to it as the *komboungo*.

<sup>2</sup> This term refers to the ethnic communities in Sabah, Malaysia, who speak the Dusunic languages. The 1970 Population Census of Sabah categorised them as Dusun, Costal Kadazan, Kimaragang, Eastern/Labuk Kadazan, Lotud, Kuijau, Tatana, Tanggara, Bisaya, Rungus, and Dumpas (Lasimbang 1996: 179). The Dusunic informants of this study are the Dusun, Kadazan, Kimaragang, and Rungus.

<sup>3</sup> *Acorus calamus* is popular not only amongst the Dusunic peoples but also among other races and ethnic groups in Malaysia who use them as medicinal plants. Muhammad and Mustafa (1994: 147) reported that traditionally, the Malays in Malaysia used *Acorus calamus*, locally known as *jerangau*, for treating rheumatism, fever, and lumbago. Zainon (2010: 8), on the other hand, states that *jerangau* cream is used externally for treating fever, skin disease, lumbago, sore eyes, and malaria. The plant is also consumed to heal coughing and sore throats. Besides the Malays, the Orang Asli (aboriginal people) of Malaysia have also used *Acorus calamus* to cure various

ailments for generations (Katalog Pameran 2010: 8). From our random conversations with several elderly Bajau (the third largest ethnic group in Sabah), we found that the dried pulverised *jerangau* leaves were used to treat itchy skin. The Bajau would apply the dried *jerangau* powder made from the roots of *Acorus calamus* to their foreheads when they feel dizzy. The above testifies to the fact that for generations *Acorus calamus* has been one of the many popular medicinal plants among the various races and ethnic groups in Malaysia. Since the emphasis has been completely on the medicinal aspects of *Acorus calamus*, little is known about its religious and spiritual functions among the Malay, the Orang Asli, the Bajau of Malaysia or the Dusunic peoples of Malaysia.

- <sup>4</sup> Different Dusunic groups have their own terms for their ritual specialists. The Dusun and Kimaragang informants interviewed within this study called their ritual specialists *bobolian*, the Kadazan informants called them *bobohizan*, and the Rungus ones called them *bobolizan*. In terms of the practices of spiritual or traditional healing, the roles of a *bobolian*, *bobohizan* or *bobolizan* are similar to that of a shaman (see Kharitonova 2015). Like a shaman, a *bobolian*, *bobohizan* or *bobolizan* is believed to have the knowledge to communicate and negotiate with good and bad spirits in the nether world, especially during the spiritual healing ceremonies of the Dusunic people.
- <sup>5</sup> Beliefs in good and bad spirits and the harmonious relationship between them are traditionally common among the various cultures across the world. For example, Oak (2010: 97), who studied shamanism in early modern Korea, stated that according to the Korean traditional shamanistic worldview, diseases and disasters were caused by a breakdown in the cosmological harmony between spirits, human beings, and nature. A female mediator, a *mudang*, would perform *kut* ceremonies to repel disasters and call for blessings. Tatiana Panina (2011: 147), who studied the healing charms among the Udmurts, stated that the latter thought illnesses and unhealthy conditions were caused by supernatural beings – representatives of “the other world”. The spirit of illness, considered to be one of these beings, breaks into this world, thereby shattering the order and stability of the objective reality. To re-establish the disturbed harmony, it is necessary to return the spirit to the beyond.
- <sup>6</sup> Based on the information gathered during our field trip in the District of Membakut Kecil on 18–19 July 2014, the *Mamanta* ritual was performed by the Kadazan ethnic people as an annual ritual to serve all sorts of spirits believed to be everywhere, in the rivers and seas, so that their homes would be safe and secure. When they were interviewed, several Kadazan informants in Membakut said that these rituals were effective in protecting what they had planted, for example, rice from being attacked by evil spirits and from being destroyed by natural disasters.
- <sup>7</sup> The fieldwork and direct observation was made in the house of Tialum binti Siwoi, a renowned and respected *komboungo* practitioner, on 18 July 2014. Tialum informed us that she had studied the different ways of using the *komboungo* in healing and spiritual rituals from a *bobolian* in Keningau. Also, Tialum’s husband told us that people from faraway places had come to their house to consult with his wife about their personal problems and diseases.
- <sup>8</sup> Banknote of the lowest value of Malaysian Ringgit; RM3.50=\$1.00 at the date of the interview.

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## DISCUSSION

# ‘WONDROUS DRESSING’ WITH CELESTIAL BODIES IN RUSSIAN CHARMS AND LYRICAL POETRY

*Andrei Toporkov*

*Gorky Institute of World Literature*

*Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow)*

*e-mail: atoporkov@mail.ru.*

**Abstract:** The motif of dressing with celestial bodies is known in Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian charms. The formula of ‘wondrous dressing’ is found in charms produced to influence the authority and judges as well as in military, pastoral, hunting, wedding charms, etc. The motif includes several main components: they are the wonderful clothing itself (by light, the sun, the moon, stars, dawn, clouds, sky, thunder, and lightning); the likening of a man to the sun and light, and his voice to thunder; the acquisition of wonderful properties (beauty, courage, the ability to cause fear) and even self-deification; a journey to the mythical world (to heaven, the clouds, the Sun, Mount Zion); and manipulation of celestial bodies. The folklore motifs of ‘miraculous dressing’ and ‘miraculous appearance’ were echoed variously in Russian literary works.

**Keywords:** Alexander Blok, Alexander Pushkin, Russian poetry, verbal charms, ‘wondrous dressing’

The motif of dressing with celestial bodies is found in Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian charms produced to influence the chiefs and lawyers as well as in military, pastoral, hunting, wedding charms, etc. The motif includes several main components: they are the wonderful dressing itself, the likening of a man to the sun and light, a journey to the mythical world, and manipulation of celestial bodies. In Russian charms there are descriptions of how a person washes with dew; wipes away the dawn, the sun, light, or the Virgin’s vestment; dresses with celestial bodies or the clouds; is covered with the sky; goes through the sun, the moon, the dawn, and the stars; snatches the clouds; enters the sun or a thundercloud; takes the moon in his hand or puts the sun into his eyes; and leaves the earth for heavenly spheres. At the same time, he becomes a person of giant proportions, so that the celestial bodies appear inside his body. He becomes sun-like or god-like, recalling the righteous sun of Christ and the

formidable Thunderer-Sabaoth. Accordingly, people rejoice in him like at the rising sun or risen Christ. They admire him and lose the gift of speech. In other texts, people become afraid of the thunderous voice and supernatural power of the person who is working the charm.

The motif of wondrous dressing is often combined with the motif of departure in the path. For example, the verbal charm against the sorcerers of the second quarter of the seventeenth century said:

Се яз, раб имрек, стану благословя(сь), пойду перекрестяс(ь), оболочу на себя красное солнце, опояшусь светлой зорей, поттычюс(ь) частыми звездами, возьму в руке млад светел месяц и пойду в чистое поле, и встречу своего аггела хранителя и Пречистую мать Богородицу; и молюс(ь) и плачюс(ь): “Покрой меня кровом своим и крылома своима и огради меня ризою своею от колдуна и от колдуниц(ы), от ведуна и от вещ(ицы), и от всякого злаго человека, и от всякой злой притчи на воды и на земли” (Toporkov 2010: 99, № 18).

Here I am, servant of God [the name of the person], I will get up with a blessing, I will go out with a sign of the cross, *I will put on the bright sun, I will girdle it with the light dawn, I will pin it with many stars, I will take the young light moon in my hand*, and I will go out to the open field, and I will meet my guardian angel and the Most Blessed Mother of God, and pray and weep: “Protect me with thy protection and with thy wings and shield me with thy robe from the wizard and the witch, from the sorcerer and the sorceress, and from any mischievous people, and from any mischief on water and on earth.” (Toporkov 2012a: 47)

Another charm, collected in 1727, describes how the protagonist climbs over the heavens, clutching the clouds and leaning on the young light Moon:

Иду я, раб Божии, на небеса, хватаюся за облака, младым светлым месяцом подпираюся, частым[и] звездами осыпаюся, нетленную ризою покрываюся, каменною стеною заставляюся. (Smilianskaia 2002: 112)

I, the servant of God, *am going to heaven, clutching the clouds, leaning on the young light Moon, dusting with many stars, covering with the imperishable habit, fencing by the stone wall.*

In the charm, originally from Arkhangelsk province, the man embeds the sun into his eyes; thus, it highlights his enormous size. He stands, his head touching the sky:

Земля мать, небо отец, зоря Мария, заря Маремьяния; *красное солнце в очи вставлю, млад светел месяц в тыл положу, частыми звездами подтычуся, ризою Господн[е]ю нетленною покроюся* (Efimenko 1878: 152–153, № 3).

Mother-Earth, Father-Heaven, Maria-the-Dawn, Maremiyaniya-the-Dawn: I will embed the red Sun in my eyes, will put the young light Moon on my neck, will dust myself with many stars, will cover myself with God's imperishable habit.

Of particular interest is the following episode of the power charm:

И я, раб Божий имярек, *воиду в красное солнце, оденусь и оболочусь красным солнцем, поашус утряной зарю и утычусь светлыми звездами. ... Куды я, Божий раб имярек, поиду, где я приду, в ту же възъстошную сторону сходит грозная туча, гром и маланьи и огненное молние, и я, раб Божий имярек, воиду в грозную тучу, покроюся громом, маланьей и огненным молнием. И сколь грозна грозная туча, гром и маланья и огненное молние, стол бы и я, раб Божий имярек, был грозен и страшен, боялис бы и трепетались меня, раба Божия имярек.* (Turilov 2002: 255)

Thus, I, the servant of God, *will enter into the red Sun, will dress in and will cover myself with the red Sun, will gird myself with the morning dawn and will rub myself with the light stars. ...* Everywhere I, the servant of God, go, where I come, the fierce cloud comes to that eastern side, the thunder and lightning and the fire lighting, and *I, the servant of God, enter into the fierce cloud, cover myself with the thunder, lightning and the fire lighting.* And however menacing the cloud is, that is how fierce and fearful will be I, the servant of God, thus, they will tremble and fear me, the servant of God.

In this episode the subject of the charm transforms twice: first, he dresses in dawn, the sun, and stars, afterwards – in thunder and lightning.

In some charms the Moon comes to be in a human body: “Аггел со мною есть, солнце одесную мене, и звезды по главе моей, и луна в теле моем...” (An angel is with me, the Sun is on the right of me, the stars are on my head, and the Moon is inside my body...) (Pigin 2002: 242); “Освечусь я светлым месяцем; осияюсь красным солнышком; препояшусь буйны ветры, отычусь часты звезды. *Солнце деснует, луна в теле ходит; по главе моей звезды ходят*” (I will light myself with the light young Moon; will shine myself with the red Sun; will dress myself with the blustering wind, will dust myself with

many stars. *The Sun is located to the right, the Moon moves into the body; the stars go down my head*) (Kalachov 1854: 53).

In Ukrainian fairy tales, where ‘young princess features’ are described (ATU 850; SUSVK 850), on her body there happen to be the marks of the Sun, the Moon, and stars; for instance: “*під правим плечем дівчини сонце, під лівим – місяць, на чолі – золота зізда, на голові – золоте волосся*” (*under the right arm of the maiden is the sun, under the left one is the moon, on her forehead is a Golden star, on her head is golden hair*) (Berezovsky 1984: 81; Zaikovskie 1999: 111–112).

In Russian fairy tales of ‘miraculous children’ (ATU 707; SUS 707) a young girl promises Ivan the Prince to give birth to “*сынов, что ни ясных соколов: во лбу солнце, а на затылке месяц, по бокам звезды*” (sons, falcons alike: on the forehead – the Sun, and *the young light Moon on the back of the head, the stars at the sides*) (Afanasiev 1985 [1855]: 296, № 283) or “*по колена ноги в золоте, по локти руки в серебре, по косицам часты мелки звездочки*” (knee-deep the legs are in gold, elbow-deep the arms are in silver, *in the braids are many little stars*) (ibid.: 298, № 284).

In the manner of a fairy tale Egoriy the Brave is described in a Russian clerical verse:

По локоть руки в красном золоте,  
По колена ноги в чистом серебре,  
*И во лбу солнце, во тылу месяц,*  
*По косицам звезды переходя.*  
(Selivanov 1991: 117)

Elbow-deep the arms are in red gold,  
knee-deep the legs are in pure silver,  
*and the Sun on the forehead is,*  
*on the back of the head the young light Moon is,*  
*in the braids the stars are moving.*

However, in general the motif of ‘miraculous dressing’ in charms differs significantly from the one used in the description of ‘miraculous children’ in fairy tales. In tales such a description is a third-person narrative, it is static; there are no motifs of ‘dressing’ and the heavenly bodies ‘fencing’; there is no mention of a journey to astral spheres or an increase in size; the main focus is on the Sun, the young Moon and stars, but not dawn and clouds. In charms, however, the ‘miraculous dressing’ description is a first-person narrative, and it is a dynamic rather than static image.

The folklore motifs of ‘miraculous dressing’ and ‘miraculous appearance’ were echoed variously in Russian literary works (Toporkov 2012b: 367–374).

In *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (Сказка о царе Салтане), written by Alexander Pushkin in 1831, cosmic attributes were given to the foreign young princess:

Вот идет молва правдива:  
За морем царевна есть,  
Что не можно глаз отвести:  
Днем свет божий затмевает,  
Ночью землю освещает,  
*Месяц под косою блестит,*  
*А во лбу звезда горит.*  
(Pushkin 1949: 441)

This report, though, is quite true:  
There's a young princess, they say,  
That she charms all hearts away.  
Brighter than the sun at noon,  
She outshines the midnight moon,  
*In her braids, crescent beams,*  
*On her brow, a bright star gleams.*  
(Pushkin & Zelikoff 1981)

The poet Yakov Polonsky (1819–1898) described the girl princess in the same way:

В дни ребячества я помню  
Чудный отроческий бред:  
Полюбил я царь-девицу,  
Что на свете краше нет.  
  
*На челе сияло солнце,*  
*Месяц прятался в косе,*  
*По косицам рдели звезды, –*  
Бог сиял в её красе...  
(Polonsky 1896: 201)

I remember the days of childhood  
A lovely boyhood delusion:  
I fell in love with the girl princess,  
The most beautiful on Earth.  
  
*The Sun was shining on her face,*  
*The young Moon was hiding in her braid,*  
*Along the braids the stars transmitted, –*  
God shone in her beauty...

In Alexander Blok's (1880–1921) lyrics some feminine characters are labelled with astral folklore attributes, such as:

... Вдруг примчалась на север угрюмый,  
В небывалой предстала красе,  
Назвала себя смертною думой,  
*Солнце, месяц и звезды в косе.*  
(Blok 1997a: 109)

... She appeared in spectacular beauty,  
Suddenly rushing to the gloomy north,  
Named herself the deathly reflection,  
*The Sun, the young Moon and the stars were in her braid.*

И откроет белой рукою  
Потайную дверь предо мною  
Молодая, с золотой косою,  
С ясной, открытой душою.

*Месяц и звезды в косах...*  
“Входи, мой царевич приветный...”  
И бедный дубовый посох  
Заблестит слезой самоцветной...  
(Blok 1997a: 151)

The youth with the golden braid,  
With the pure, open soul  
Opens with her white hand  
The secret door in front of me.

*The young Moon and stars in braids,*  
‘Come, my affable prince...’  
And poor oak crook,  
Glitters with a jewel tear...

Blok was familiar with Russian charms, which became the subject of his article titled “The Poetry of Charms and Spells” (1906). In this article Blok dedicated a special passage to the motif of ‘miraculous dressing’:

Для того чтобы вызвать силу, заставить природу действовать и двигаться, это действие и движение изображают символически. “Встану”, “пойду”, “умоюсь” – так часто начинаются заговоры, и, очевидно, так делалось когда-то; с такими словами заклинатель входит в настроение, вспоминает первоначальную обстановку, при которой соткался

заговор; но, очевидно, ему нет нужды воспроизводить эти действия, довольно простого слова; притом же это слово и не всегда выполнимо: “Оболокусь я оболочком, обычусь частыми звездами”, – говорит заклинатель; и вот он – уже маг, плывущий в облаке, опоясанный Млечным Путем, наводящий чары и насылающий страхи. (Blok 2002: 93)

To summon power, to make nature act and move, this action and movement are made in a symbolic way. “Rising”, “going”, “washing” – it is the common beginning of charms, and, obviously, it has been acted in such a way before; with such words a charmer achieves his mood and recalls the original atmosphere that was present when the charm was created; but, obviously, there is no need to recover those actions, just one word is enough; with that, that word is not always able to become an action: “I will cover myself with the clouds, will rub myself with many stars”, – the charmer says; and so, he is a magician now, floating on a cloud, casting spells and terrifying, the Milky Way around his waist.

It is interesting that at the end of this passage Blok cited his poem “The Night” (1904): “Маг, простерт над миром брений, В млечной ленте – голова” (The magician is flying above the world of dust, In the milky belt his head is) (Blok 1997b: 45).

In some of Blok’s other texts the action of the magician dressing is shown:

И я затянут  
Лентой млечной!  
Тобой обманут,  
О, Вечность!  
(Blok 1997b: 159).

I’m tightened  
By the milky belt,  
I’m fooled  
By you, eternity!

Blok’s lyrical character mentions the Milky Way as her belt:

Я – звезда мечтаний нежных,  
И в венце метелей снежных  
Я плыву, скользю...  
В серебре метелей кроюсь,  
Ты горишь, мой узкий пояс –  
Млечная стезя!  
(Blok 1997b: 176)

I am the star of tender dreams,  
In the crown of snow storms,  
I float, gliding...  
In the silver of blizzards hiding,  
You are burning, my thin belt –  
The Milky Way.

In another verse a magician claims that the belt of a character is the Milky Way, which is meant to be his own:

Серебряный твой узкий пояс –  
Сужденный магу млечный путь.  
(Blok 1997b: 122)

Your silver thin belt –  
The Milky Way promised to the magician.

In the period of symbolism, Russian poets used charms and other folklore types and genres with the intention of finding a new way of poetic self-expression. In particular, in the article “The Poetry of Charms and Spells” Blok writes:

*... заговоры, а с ними вся область народной магии и обрядности, оказались тою рудой, где блещет золото неподдельной поэзии; тем золотом, которое обеспечивает и книжную “бумажную” поэзию – вплоть до наших дней. Вот почему заговоры приобрели психологический, исторический и эстетический интерес и тщательно собираются и исследуются. (Blok 2002: 85)*

... charms, either the whole sphere of folk magic and rituals, happen to be an ore, which contains the glittering gold of a true poetry. It is that gold that nourishes written ‘paper’ poetry, up to today. That’s why charms gained psychological, historical and aesthetic interest and are carefully collected and explored.

The motif of ‘miraculous dressing’ draws Blok’s attention by its mystic content and it is echoed in his poetic works (Evdokimova 2015).

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## INTERVIEW WITH MONIKA KROPEJ TELBAN AND KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET, EDITORS OF *STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA*, AFTER TWO DECADES OF THE JOURNAL

*Interviewer Mare Kõiva*

### **What motivated you to establish *Studia mythologica Slavica*?**

The initiative came from our colleague Prof. Dr. Nikolai Mikhailov, who was one of the most distinguished philologists and scholars in the field of historical and comparative linguistics, with an exceptional aptitude for languages. He was inspired by the Russian school of mythosemiotic studies promoted by Vladimir N. Toporov and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov. After finishing his studies in Moscow and research in Lithuania, he was employed by the University of Pisa. He contacted us and propounded to publish an anthology of articles on Slovene mythology and folklore in the book series under the heading *Studi Slavi*. At that time mythosemiotic studies were at their summit: philologists, folklorists, and archaeologists were making new discoveries which proved that Slavic mythopoetic traditions were rich and needed to be researched more thoroughly. It was time to overcome the scepticism of the scientific positivism and the enthusiasm of national revival. So after a long period of standstill in mythological research it became important again.

**Monika Kropej Telban:** At the time when we first met in Ljubljana in 1995, we already agreed that it was time to start publishing a journal which would be dedicated to Balto-Slavic mythology and would at the same time present also mythopoetic tradition and mythosemiotic studies of other nations and countries. We decided that the journal had to be interdisciplinary and plurilinguistic. An important fact is also that the Publishing House of the Scientific Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) was well disposed to the idea to support the establishment of this journal. So the first issue came out already in 1998, edited by N. Mikhailov and me, with the help of Vlado Nartnik and Andrej Pleterski, who were co-editors of the journal. It was published under the supervision of the ZRC SAZU and the University of Pisa. Later on we made a coediting contract with the University of Udine since Nikolai Mikhailov became professor of Slavic languages there.

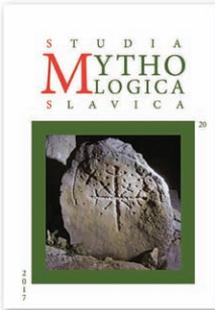
**STUDIA MYTHOLOGICA SLAVICA**

In the course of the last two decades since the journal *Studia mythologica Slavica* was first published, there have been many changes in the fields of methodology and research focus of the disciplines which deal with folk belief, mythology and intangible heritage, such as anthropology, ethnology, folklore, history, archaeology, linguistics, and literary studies. Scholarly publications that are a product of interdisciplinary approaches, which go beyond the insight and methodology of a single discipline, are rare, and greatly extend cognitive horizons.

Although the journal was created in the desire to establish rapport between the previously unconnected scholarly research on Slavic mythological traditions, which was in full momentum due to new

methodological discoveries, twenty years later its original ambitions and aims have not only been fulfilled but also exceeded. The term 'Slavica' originally marked the journal's provenience, nowadays we strive to bring closer to our readers the culture and traditions of nations, or peoples, from the entire European continent and beyond.

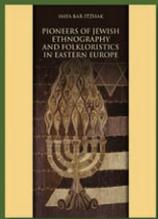
The present terminological incompleteness of the concept of mythology may, on one hand, encourage a sceptical view of these themes, but on the other it allows for a broader concept of this journal since studies of contemporary myths, beliefs, cultural phenomena, and life practices are becoming increasingly relevant. We wish to draw additional attention to them and encourage these studies even more than before.

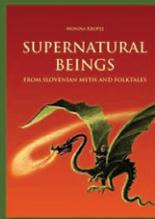


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*Editors in Chief:*  
Monika Knopčič Telbon and Katja Hrobat Virgolet;  
monika@zrc-sazu.si; katja.hrobat@zhs.upr.si

<http://sms.zrc-sazu.si>









The accompanying book series: *Studia mythologica Slavica – Supplementa* has been designed for monographic studies, with a focus on contemporary and past belief traditions, customs, linguistics, and cultural or historic phenomena.

### Can you give us a brief summary of this series?

During these twenty years of editing *Studia mythologica Slavica* we have undergone many changes that have occurred in this field of research. At first we were oriented more towards the reconstructions of Balto-Slavic mythology and towards semiotic interpretations of mythopoetic traditions. It was the time when two main streams of research into Balto-Slavic mythology were leading – one was the already mentioned mythosemiotic studies promoted by Vladimir N. Toporov and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov, who reconstructed the primary Balto-Slavic myth (Perun – Veles – Mokosh) that was at the time followed by many researchers – among them also Radoslav Katičič and Vitomir Belaj. The other was oriented towards archaeo-ethnological studies of cultural or mythical landscape with the reconstruction of locations of the cult sites of the three main gods (and also other types of mythical landscapes). At the same time studies of comparative and cognitive mythology as well as current folkloristic, ethnological, literary, and historical studies were regularly published in our journal.

Many famous researchers published their articles in *Studia mythologica Slavica*, among them Vladimir N. Toporov, Svetlana Tolstaia, Niko Kuret, Michał Łuczynski, Emily Lyle, Haya Bar-Itzhak, and others. The merit for this goes also to Nikolai Mikhailov and to the members of the editorial board, who had good connections not only in Moscow but also in other European countries. Later on the journal became well renowned so that even after the unexpected and too early death of Nikolai Mikhailov in 2010 many prominent authors published their articles in *Studia mythologica Slavica*. We are also indebted to Roberto Dapit who has since then represented the University of Udine, and to the later co-editor Andrej Pleterski.

### **Slavic mythology or also general mythology?**

*Studia mythologica Slavica* was already at its very start dedicated not only to Slavic mythology but also to the mythology of other peoples and regions – at first mostly from the comparative point of view, but later on also to explore other mythologies, both European and non-European. During the twenty years, since the first issue of *Studia mythologica Slavica* was published, a great number of authors from all parts of the world have contributed with their findings (see Bibliography *Studia mythologica Slavica*, Vol. 10 and 20).

Actually we are thinking about changing the name of our journal into *Studia mythologica*. In this way the title would clarify the aim of the journal to publish studies into different mythopoetic traditions. We have even thought of expanding the title to embrace folklore studies (*et folklorica*) to make it clear that also studies of traditional and contemporary folklore can be published in it, but for now we have decided to retain only the word *mythologica* as the journal is already well renowned under this title. Currently it is one of the rare journals dedicated to mythopoetic traditions, and not only to folklore.

### **Other areas?**

The study of myth is a very complex field and therefore we are determined that *Studia mythologica Slavica* is a multidisciplinary journal. Ethnolinguistics, archaeology, folkloristics, and anthropology are fundamental; other domains are included according to the topics of the articles.

Actually one of the great advantages of our journal is its interdisciplinary concept. Scholarly publications that are a product of interdisciplinary approaches going beyond the insight and methodology of a single discipline are rare, and significantly extend cognitive horizons.

### **Are you publishing also other forms of mythology?**

Yes, we include everything in the area of folklore, not only ancient mythic traditions, but also contemporary mythology, mythological elements of computer

games, and contemporary popular culture, internet folklore, and all other fields from folklore and religious studies, such as contemporary and ancient beliefs, life practices, and other cultural phenomena. In addition, the journal presents new interdisciplinary insights and interpretations from the fields of historical sources, material culture, current fieldwork research from different disciplines, etc. We also offer an opportunity to those who wish to publish scholarly findings that may deviate from the current research norms and trends, presenting new approaches and discoveries.

***Studia mythologica Slavica* also has *Supplementa*. What was the reason to start it?**

It was an idea that we had talked about already from the very beginning, since many thorough studies in mythology cannot be limited only to short articles but they need to include plenty of material and in-depth research. Therefore, in 2004 we launched the first book in the series *Studia mythologica Slavica – Supplementa*, dedicated to Mordvinian folklore. Until now we have published already 12 volumes.

**Why do you think mythology is important in contemporary society?**

The contemporary society is very materialistic and technocratic, and therefore people also need the spiritual part of understanding our culture and aspects of our life. This is also one of the reasons why mythological studies and interest in mythology have increased considerably in the last decades. In this globalized world people search for anchors of identity in their local and ancient roots.

**What is your background in mythology?**

When researching folk narrative and proceeding with folk belief studies, we have often come across mythological perceptions in these topics. It was crucial to understand more clearly the origins of our intangible cultural heritage, so this is what urged us to delve into this research. On the other hand – just like every historical period opens up some horizons and closes some others – at the turn of the century we have been witnesses to radical changes that followed the year 1989. The collapse of former political institutions and paradigms proposed new questions to scientists. Among novel topics there was also interest in the spiritual background of contemporary cultures. All countries of the so-called Eastern Block developed an interest in mythology and Slovenia was no exception. So it was small wonder that here in Slovenia, on the border of the Eastern and Western worlds, something had to be done to encourage research into mythology and intangible heritage. This position has encouraged us to cross the national borders, and at the same time also to surpass the intellectual ones by introducing interdisciplinary research across different territories.

## IN MEMORIAM

### ELISABETH PIIRAINEN

12.01.1943 – 29.12.2017

In the last week of 2017, renowned phraseologist Elisabeth Piirainen unexpectedly passed away.

Piirainen, who had a background of a German linguist and philologist, started her research in the field of Low German (*Westmünsterländisch* dialect and phraseology of Flemish), and within a couple of decades became one of the most significant developers of the modern theory of phraseology.

Today the books published together

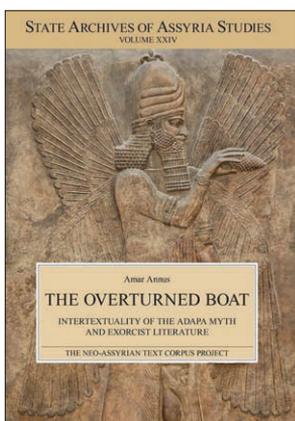
with Dmitrij Dobrovolskij, “Symbole in Sprache und Kultur. Studien zur Phraseologie aus kultursemiotischer Perspektive” (1996), “Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives” (2005), and “Zur Theorie der Phraseologie: Kognitive und kulturelle Aspekte” (2009) are among the most substantial researches on phraseology. These works vividly reveal Piirainen’s attempt to compare the phraseology of different languages and find their common features. As a natural continuation of this interest, she started a project in 2006, with an aim to establish common elements in the phraseology of different European languages. The first stage of the project under the name *Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond* brought together phraseology experts of approximately 90 languages. At the very beginning of the project, in 2008, due to personal contacts, the Estonian language together with Finnish and Hungarian became a test language, on the basis of which Piirainen wished to find potential candidates for widely-spread phraseologisms. The following years saw close cooperation with phraseologists from different countries, who reacted to the lists sent to them and also complemented them with their own material. In 2012 this voluminous work resulted in a publication “Widespread Idioms in Europe and Beyond: Toward a Lexicon of Common Figurative Units”. Four years later it was followed by the second part, “Lexicon of Common Figurative Units”. In total these publications included 470 phraseologisms which could be regarded as widespread in European languages. For the first time in history, this concrete cooperation pointed to the fact that phraseology, generally considered as unique and language-specific, is actually more universal. Apart from compiling these two publications, Piirainen completed numerous articles in different languages and presented papers at conferences and seminars, including regular EUROPHRAS meetings. Within the latter, workshops were organised for those involved in the project, which enabled them face-to-face meetings with the project leader and other colleagues, to discuss their work and make further plans. After the publication of the two voluminous works, Piirainen decided to continue with the same objectives, on the basis of 30 so-called European standard languages, focusing on the main grammatical constructions central to phraseologisms. Unfortunately, this work remained unfinished.



Anneli Baran

# BOOK REVIEW

## ADAPA – MYTHICAL SAGE FROM ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA



**Amar Annus. *The Overturned Boat: Intertextuality of the Adapa Myth and Exorcist Literature*. State Archives of Assyria Studies, Volume XXIV. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016. 148 pp.**

The book titled *The Overturned Boat: Intertextuality of the Adapa Myth and Exorcist Literature* by Amar Annus belongs to the field of Assyriological studies and has 148 pages containing an introduction, three parts (each part has several chapters), a conclusion, three appendices (including analyses and translation of the Adapa myth from the Sumerian language and a critical essay on the comparative method used in the study, etc.), a bibliography, and indices.

The book begins with an in-depth introduction in which Amar Annus explains the methodological bases and aims of his study. Amar Annus writes about the purpose of his study as follows (p. 5):

*In this book I intend to investigate not only the forms of intertextuality in cuneiform sources, but also how people felt about these texts. Therefore my approach is much affiliated to the cognitive science of religion, especially to its brand new subdivision of cognitive historiography. The comparisons that my intertextual research will develop are considered as interrelated visual patterns, having a complex pictorial and metaphoric imagery. In order to find out which elements symbolic meaning was connected in the ancient texts, I will compare the motifs in a wide range of texts to discern interconnections and recurring patterns.*

The introductory part of this book is very well elaborated and the methodology is also well explained and successfully justified.

The first part of the book called “Beginning of the Cosmos” (pp. 9–38), which consists of seven chapters (1. Adapa – the Sage Before or After the Flood?; 2. The Adapa Myth in Sumerian; 3. The Adapa Myth as Exorcistic Flood Story; 4. The Seasonal Placement of the Adapa Myth; 5. The First Creatures: Adapa, Kulla and Alulu; 6. Adapa and Enmerkar; 7. Inanna and the Heavenly Boat), focuses on the Sumerian Adapa myth and the Akkadian version thereof. It also deals with the seasonal placement of the Adapa myth and discusses the issues of Adapa and Enmerkar (legendary King of the 1st dynasty of Uruk) as well as the important text *Inanna and the Heavenly Boat*, and many other important Mesopotamian mythological and literary issues.

In the chapter “The Adapa Myth in Sumerian” Annus makes some very interesting observations about Sumerian kingship (p. 14), writing about the royal ideology of Ur III kings and their strong connection with Gilgamesh of the 1st Uruk dynasty, concluding:

“Ideologically, the Ur III kings effectively effaced any distinction between themselves and the kings of the first Uruk dynasty, rendering the two dynasties into a single line of kingship extending from the time when kingship descended to earth to the present ruler.” Here, however, I would prefer to see some reference to the very important work of Sebastian Fink about Gilgamesh and his genealogy, in which Fink also focuses on the role of Gilgamesh in Ur III period (Fink 2013: 81–107). We know that the most famous among the kings of the first Uruk Dynasty was, of course, the hero Gilgamesh (ca. 2750 BC), about whom we do not have firm evidence that he was even a real historical person, but who was given divine status posthumously. Undoubtedly, the figure of Gilgamesh played a very important role in Sumerian-Akkadian civilization during its history, especially in cults, in royal ideology, but also in the literary legacy of Mesopotamia. Sumerian epic songs about Gilgamesh, such as *Gilgamesh and Akka* and others, written ca 2100–2000 BC, were the most popular literary works in the Mesopotamian cultural space from the late 3rd to the 1st millennium BC. In the second millennium BC, based on several of these short Sumerian epic songs, the famous *Epic of Gilgamesh* was written in Akkadian (George 2003). According to the *Sumerian King List*, other heroic kings of the first Dynasty of Uruk (predecessors of Gilgamesh), similar to Gilgamesh, were also deified: Meskiagašer, Dumuzi, Lugalbanda (*Sumerian King List*, lines 95–98, ETCSL: transliteration c.2.1.1; see also Sazonov 2016: 36–37).

The second part of the book, “Descent and Ascent”, with its eight chapters, and the final third part of the book, “Adapa and Exorcism”, with its nine chapters, go more deeply into the topic of Mesopotamian exorcism (incantations, etc.) and witchcraft.

In the second part of the book, “Descent and Ascent”, Amar Annus (pp. 39–69) focuses on important issues related to the Mesopotamian netherworld and the idea of descent into *Apsû* and ‘kur’ (the Sumerian ‘netherworld’). He looks critically at descent myths and royal texts (e.g., Ur-Nammu A, ETCSL: transliteration c.2.4.1.1) as well as the idea of ascent into heaven (e.g., the concept of dead Mesopotamian kings “becoming a star”; mythological accounts of the deities like the story of how the Sumerian love-goddess Innana (Akkadian Ištar) travelled over the upper and lower skies in a Heavenly Boat, and other literary works). He also discusses the interesting topic of the netherworld river and analyses the Adapa myth as an ordeal text along with several other important issues related to the abovementioned topics.

The third and last part of the book, “Adapa and Exorcism” (pp. 71–99), concentrates on issues related to Mesopotamian exorcism and Adapa. Here, Amar Annus (p. 72) very correctly points out that the Sumerian Adapa myth “has a structure that is very similar to the Marduk-Ea type of exorcistic narrative”.

In conclusion, Amar Annus (p. 101) sums up his research and makes several important and crucial conclusions about Adapa, saying: “The narratives that have been examined in this study relate to the identity of the exorcist priest in ancient Mesopotamia. In these narratives one can find many interconnections that are specific to ancient Mesopotamian culture.” Annus also concludes (p. 101) that “almost all of these narratives follow the universal structure of religious experience” and the narratives that he has examined in his research about Adapa (p. 101) “do not form one coherent story, but rather several ones with a wide spectrum of variations, deletions and developments”. Amar Annus (pp. 101–102) successfully summarises how the narrative elements of the Adapa myth were related “to the activities and identity of the exorcist priest”.

The book is accompanied by an annotated translation of Sumerian versions of the Adapa myth (Appendix 1. The Adapa Myth Translated from Sumerian, pp. 105–110), which have been translated very well and do not contain any mistakes. The translation seems to be excellent, I would even say scrupulous.

However, in the book there are a few inaccuracies in the use of Sumerian and Akkadian transliterations, such as on page 62 and 74. For example, on page 62, footnote 97, Amar Annus uses the Sumerian word *hur-sag*, which should have been correctly written as *hur-sag*.

On page 86, where the author discusses Ur-šanabi and Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and their relationship (Gilgamesh epic, XI 207–230), Annus does not take into account a very interesting observation about Gilgamesh and Ur-šanabi made by Sebastian Fink (Fink 2014: 67–69), who proposes interesting readings and interpretations of the name Ur-šanabi and, more generally, about Ur-šanabi's role in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Luckily, Amar Annus (p. 86) does point out that Adapa and Gilgamesh both “experience rebirth instead of achieving of immortality”, and shows in his book several other important similarities and parallels between these two important mythological figures.

So, to conclude, it has to be said that it was extremely necessary, very important and useful to carry out a new critical analysis of the Adapa myth with this kind of interesting and innovative approach. I am therefore convinced that the book by Amar Annus, *The Overturned Boat: Intertextuality of the Adapa Myth and Exorcist Literature*, is a necessary, solid, and original contribution to the field of Ancient Near Eastern studies.

Vladimir Sazonov

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