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Songs as Folklore, Popular Culture, and Emotional Resources for Commerce

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Abstract: The subject of this chapter is songs that can be considered a contemporary hybrid cultural phenomenon. The key question addressed in the article is the role of folklore as a manifestation of tradition within this phenomenon. Folklore does not disappear due to technological and economic dynamics but rather constantly recreates itself around the process of cultural modernisation, creating fruitful relationships with the technological and global world, while remaining rooted in its local cultural homelands. People who practise singing also live simultaneously in the global world and in their familiar local worlds. Thus, the object of this study, examined through a case study of one Lithuanian song, can be considered living folklore and a continuation of local tradition, while also being part of the intersection between popular culture and economics (and consequently commerce). The aim of this article is to reveal the spectrum of functions the song has as a hybrid cultural phenomenon. The conclusion is that the song's role as a key element of local cultural practice is precisely what has ensured its long-term commercial success.

Keywords: song, global milieu, local culture, popular culture, folklore, community, commerce.

Introduction

The subject of this article is songs that can be considered a contemporary hybrid cultural phenomenon. My primary focus is on the role of folklore as an expression of tradition, which is why I emphasise it. Folklore does not disappear due to technological and economic dynamics, but rather constantly recreates itself around the process of cultural modernisation and creates fruitful relationships with the technological and global world, while remaining in its local cultural homelands

(Giancristofaro 2015: 173–174). People involved with songs (creating, listening to, singing, and using them, while considering songs their own, important, and meaningful) also live simultaneously in the global world and in their local worlds. However, this does not mean that folkloric elements are the most prominent or even dominant feature of the songs we are examining. Thus, the object of my study, which I examine through the example of one Lithuanian song, can be considered living folklore, a continuation of local tradition that also represents the intersection of popular culture and economics (and thus commerce). The aim of this article is to explore the range of functions that songs serve as a hybrid cultural phenomenon in this field.

The concepts and their theoretical context

Folklore is the central concept of my study. Here, I draw on insights from researchers who seek answers in their work to the challenges arising in a digitised, globalised world. For example, emphasising the importance of a living, ongoing, dynamic process, folklore is defined as "informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures, and our traditions that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviours, and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge with other people." (Sims, Stephens 2011: 8).

According to Simon Bronner, folklore is the material of tradition. Tradition manifests through folklore and its practice. The practice of folklore encompasses both folklore texts (such as songs) and their performance, as well as all related contextual connections: behaviour, customs, human bodily experiences with all their emotional expressions, material things, actions and reactions, effects and their social aspects, everyday routines and ritual circumstances (Bronner 2019: 13–36). Bronner defines folklore as "traditional knowledge drawn from or put into practice" (Bronner 2016: 21–22). As Bronner notes, it is precisely by observing and documenting recurring practices that folklorists can grasp the continuity and dynamics of tradition.

> "… folklore's significance in the study of repeatable practices – stylized, ritualized, and often organized — that people deem traditional, connotative, and meaningful is its evidence of the thinking that goes into the formation of culture on various levels from the individual to the nation. The manifestation of folk practice individually and socially indicates that humans have a psychological need for tradition and reshape traditions constantly in negotiation with various

> cultural forces (Bronner 1992; Bronner 2011, 1–62). The definition of "traditional knowledge drawn from or put into practice" not only serves to identify the cyclical link between thought and action in the organization of culture – folk, popular, and elite as well analog and digital – but also encompasses an array of materials with similar dynamic qualities." (Bronner 2016: 22)

Like Bronner, Lia Giancristofaro also observes practices and sees them as expressions of folklore, but she chooses an entirely different starting point: according to her, in a global environment where unique local worlds are being created simultaneously, folklore is also an integral means of establishing economic ties, and the informal economy coexists with the institutional economy (Giancristofaro 2015). Therefore, this researcher focuses on recurring domestic practices related to material expression, specifically the production of handmade goods for household needs. Such practices bring together a comprehensive cultural complex of customs, meanings, actions and techniques, in other words a whole body of knowledge or tradition. These practices, as Giancristofaro notes, are characterised by the principle of bricolage, where provisions, elements, and actions that have different origins are used and mixed at the same time; Giancristofaro considers the revelation of the expression of this principle to be the goal of her research (Giancristofaro 2015: 174). She concludes that "folklore is sustainable, popular, everyday creativity that uses material and immaterial goods" (Giancristofaro 2015: 173) and adds that "folklore, mistakenly considered abstract, reactionary, static, and taken out of context, is a cultural phenomenon that is expressive, local, programmatic, progressive, reactive, sustainable, and forward-looking" (Giancristofaro 2015: 178). The principle of bricolage identified by the author is indeed close to the principle of hybridity distinguished in my case when researching intangible expressions of folklore. I can also draw on another important insight from Giancristofaro as she considers popularity to be one of the features of her expanded concept of folklore, which allows the researcher to shift attention away from conventional categories of heritage, value, and authenticity, and encourages a broader view of the expression of folkloric creativity.

The concept of popular culture, as John Storey notes, "is in effect an empty conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (Storey 2024: 1). In our case, when discussing popular culture, we refer to public discourse that reflects the strategies and tactics of newly formed localities as cultural survival, which give rise to hybridity and blur the boundaries between ideologies.

Reflections on the relationships and connections between popular culture and folklore have given rise to another relevant derivative concept: folkloresque (Foster 2016).

> … the folkloresque is popular culture's own (emic) perception and performance of folklore. That is, it refers to creative, often commercial products or texts (e.g., films, graphic novels, video games) that give the impression to the consumer (viewer, reader, listener, player) that they derive directly from existing folkloric traditions. In fact, however, a *folkloresque* product is rarely based on any single vernacular item or tradition; usually it has been consciously cobbled together from a range of folkloric elements, often mixed with newly created elements, to appear as if it emerged organically from a specific source. In some cases the *form* rather than the *contents* provides this veneer of folklore; they can reference folklore in either *langue* or *parole* or both. In addition, the folkloresque concept includes products that, while clearly born through commercial processes, explicitly or self-consciously showcase their relationship with folklore by alluding to folk knowledge or jargon or including characters labeled as folklorists. In short, the folkloresque signals popular culture's recognition that folklore is a valuable brand. (Foster 2016: 5)

> The term *folkloresque* articulates three related meanings: (1) that an item (or element of an item) is in the "style" of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context; and (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and transmission." (Foster 2016: 5–6)

Folklorists generally agree that folklore is a crucial part of each person's identity, regardless of the era or social setting, while economic researchers argue that everyone inevitably and consistently engages in economic processes at different levels.

Assumptions on the interconnectedness of economics and folklore activities within a global context, where every individual engages in economic endeavours, have gained broader consideration. For instance, Willow G. Mullins and Puja Batra-Wells, authors of the 2019 book *The Folklorist in the Marketplace: Conversations at the Crossroads of Vernacular Culture and Economics*, mention in their introductory article that it was the culture and identity shaped by productive paths of folklore and economics that motivated their research (Mullins, Batra-Wells 2019: 3–4). They emphasise one research area, specifically the microeconomic processes occurring in local settings, which contribute to the distinctiveness of local culture. I also categorise the processes observed in my case study under this category, focusing more specifically on the concept of marketing.

As stated by the authors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on the subject, marketing is a tool used in commerce, a complex whole that promotes and facilitates the exchange process between producers and consumers (Grayson et al. 2025). According to them,

> Marketing is not confined to any particular type of economy, because goods must be exchanged and therefore marketed in all economies and societies except perhaps in the most primitive. Furthermore, marketing is not a function that is limited to profit-oriented business; even such public institutions as hospitals, schools, and museums engage in some forms of marketing. (Grayson et al. 2025)

This tool facilitates the exchange of goods and services in both profit-seeking and non-profit initiatives. I consider the authors' observation that marketing can be viewed not only as a management process but also as a management philosophy or even a social process to be highly significant (Grayson et al. 2025). This means that marketing also involves the creation, activation, and use of relationships, ideas, meanings, and significance to promote the exchange of goods, using cultural references that evoke emotional responses.

"Giminės" (Song of the Family): The song as a participant in the hybrid cultural field

Once songs from folklore enter the commercial sphere, they should become part of mass communication and must follow certain rules, acquiring renewed, universal, and reduced meanings. In popular culture, when folklore is used as a brand with potential value, a song can take on a new form, which Foster calls folkloresque. In these instances, such works tend to be brief, follow popular culture trends, are quickly forgotten, and are replaced. However, this is not always the case; the situation can be much more complex.

In 2015, a private party was held to celebrate one woman's 75th birthday. Most of the guests were her peers: friends, neighbours and colleagues. Speaking in dialect, the people at the celebration sang many different songs from their youth. They performed *a cappella*, usually with the traditional second voice. The event was recorded, and a homemade video, under an hour long, was made from the footage using simple tools and shared online (Tolišius 2015). One of the highlights of this story is the song I chose for analysis, while keeping in mind the entire cultural complex surrounding it. All the participants in the celebration sing while standing, attentive, in front of a table laden with food.



Fig. 1. The 75th birthday celebration in 2015. All the guests stand up and sing "Giminės" i (Tolišius 2015, timestamp 43:40, screenshot).

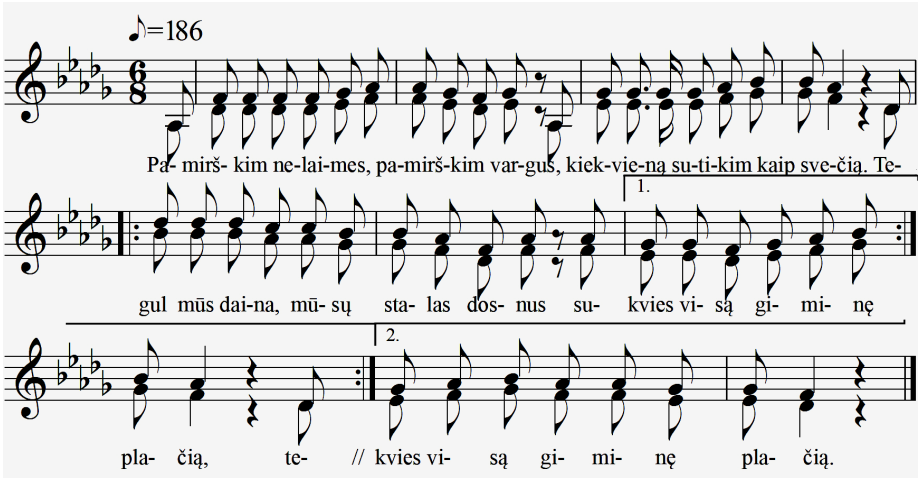


Fig. 2. The song "Giminės", performed at a private 75th birthday celebration in 2015 (Tolišius, 2015, timestamp 43:40).

The simple waltz-like melody resonates with folk-style intonations:

Pamirškim nelaimes, pamirškim vargus,
Kiekvieną sutikim kaip svečią,
Tegul mūs daina, mūsų stalas dosnus,
Sukvies visą giminę plačią. (2x2)

Te saulė tėvynės padangėj melsvoj
Išsklaido nesantaikos rūką.
Užtraukime dainą, kurią Lietuvoj
Dainuos mūs vaikai ir anūkai. (2x2)

Let us forget our misfortunes, let us forget our woes,
Let us welcome everyone as a guest.
Let our song, our table be generous
It shall bring the whole family together. (2x2)

Let the sun shine in the sky of our homeland
Dispel the mists of discord.
Let us sing the song that in Lithuania
Our children and grandchildren will sing. (2x2)[1]

Many versions of this song, which is colloquially known both as "Giminės" (Song of the Family) or "Giminių daina" (Family Song), can be heard sung at similar occasions and in a very similar manner. The participants in the events sing the song themselves, often standing and holding hands, as if it were an anthem. These events include family members' milestone birthdays, community gatherings in now-gone villages, town festivals, and wedding receptions, among others: anywhere the aim is to emphasise the ideas of family, kinship, community cohesion, unity, preservation of memory, and emotions of mutual respect. Drawing on Bronner's insights, we can consider these as folklore practices that help us identify a song as a variant of folklore and as part of a larger body of tradition, as well as observe the moment of transmission, i.e. the spread of the song. Through song, we recognise tradition as a mode of thinking, used to create, strengthen, and maintain social connections (Bronner 2013: 189–191).

However, it is also necessary to pay attention to other areas of cultural interaction reflected in this song. The history of "Giminės" dates back to 1993. The main origin of the impulse to develop this folklore practice is an original piece from popular culture.

The song "Giminės" (Song of the Family). Lyrics by Jonas Strielkūnas, music by Tomas Leiburas, 1993 (Vosylius 2023):

Kur gimėm, kur augom, kur žemė šventa,
Sustokime, sesės ir broliai,
Užtraukime dainą, kurią kažkada
Dainuodavo mūsų senoliai.

Pamirškim nelaimes, pamirškim vargus,
Kiekvieną sutikim kaip svečią.
Tegul mūs daina, mūsų stalas dosnus
Sukvies visą giminę plačią.

Te saulė tėvynės padangėj melsvoj
Išsklaido nesantaikos rūką,
Užtraukime dainą, kurią Lietuvoj
Dainuos mūs vaikai ir anūkai.

Kur sukas vestuvės, kur supas lopšiai,
Kur džiaugsmas ir skausmas praeina,
Po tėviškės medžiais sustokim gražiai,
Užtraukim lietuvišką dainą.

Where we were born, where we grew up, where the land is sacred,
Let us stand, sisters and brothers,
Let's sing a song once upon a time
Sung by our grandparents.

Let us forget our misfortunes, let us forget our woes,
Let us welcome everyone as a guest.
Let our song, our table be generous
It shall bring the whole family together.

Let the sun shine in the sky of our homeland
Dispel the mists of discord.
Let us sing the song that in Lithuania
Our children and grandchildren will sing.

Where weddings are held, where cradles are rocked
Where joy and pain pass away
Let us pause under the beautiful trees of our homeland,
Let us sing a Lithuanian song.

The song was publicly released as the soundtrack for a promotional video clip for the TV series of the same name, Giminės (The Family). In fact, it should be

considered folkloresque. When creating this commissioned commercial product, folkloric imagery (i.e. imagined to be characteristic of folklore) was selected and adapted. Both authors of the song – the poet and the composer –, considered their audience's needs in a highly professional manner. The song was created consciously and masterfully imitating the folk style, although we will not find any recognisable quotations in either the musical or poetic material. Some characteristics typical of folk songs are employed: the form of four-line verses, the theme of family adoration, and fragmentary, declarative rather than narrative content, as well as a simple folk-like waltz rhythm melody and folk romance intonations.

The creation of the song as a promotional product for the series was also linked to a range of marketing measures that contributed to its commercial success. The Lithuanian pop stars Stasys Povilaitis and Aušra Stasiulevičiūtė were the ones to perform the song. The clip was first shown, accompanied by the song, on the TV show Sveikinimų koncertas (Greetings Concert), dedicated to New Year 1994, which was the most-watched programme of its time. The video was intended to congratulate the financial sponsor of the series, a commercial bank, on the occasion of New Year. These measures instantly popularised the video as an advertising product, helped increase the viewership of the series, and undoubtedly contributed to what made the song well known and popular. Other fans of the Greetings Concert programme began to request this song as a greeting for their loved ones, so it was played more and more often in public.

However, this marks the start of another chapter in the song's history. "Giminės" evolved from being merely a popular tune that was initially a folkloresque, commercially driven product that exploited folklore, to becoming an integral part of folklore itself. It transitioned into a living tradition, now considered part of genuine folklore. Over its 30-year existence, the song has largely faded from the pop scene but has gained recognition as a folk classic, embodying the characteristics of true folk music. It is typically learned informally by ear and repetition without direct teaching. The song has diversified, becoming a symbol of modern community rituals such as singing during key moments while standing and holding hands, and has lost its original authorship. It is reworked, parodied, and forms the basis for new compositions, thus cementing its place in contemporary tradition. For example, communities choose to use the reworkings as their anthems, giving it the status of a ritual symbol (school anthem, see VDU ER 2075-116, recorded in 2010; anthem of the community of the restored old Baltic faith, see Satkevičius 2023).

In commerce, another narrative emerges from different assumptions. After the series and the song became popular in the late 90s in agreement with the creators of the series, "Giminių dešrelės" (Family Sausages), "Giminių duona" (Family Bread), and the strong alcoholic beverage "Giminių trauktinė" (Family Liqueur) appeared on the market. These new products used ideas and images from the series in their

advertising. However, even later, after the series ended and the popularity of the pop songs faded away, the meanings conveyed by these products, which were skilfully exploited by marketing, were probably still supported by the fact that the song had become known as something functioning in the folklore sphere. The material form of the sausages, neatly arranged in a package and 'lovingly' huddled together, embodies the idea of close, intimate, and equal communion. A loaf of bread is also naturally associated with family comfort, togetherness, and security. And the liqueur is a direct reference to family gatherings around a table laden with food, where people traditionally raise glasses to the success and health of loved ones. However, although the liqueur and bread disappeared from the market shortly after due to the restructuring of manufacturing companies, Family Sausages became an exceptionally strong brand that still exists today, with a product range that is constantly being updated to suit changing consumer tastes. The core of marketing is to highlight, emphasise, or craft a vivid, memorable, and relevant meaning and significance. It is this meaning, rather than the product's material form, that influences buyers' choices. In this case, this logic worked to its fullest potential. People buy sausages that still play on the idea of bringing together and uniting a close-knit community of loved ones, as transmitted by "Giminės".

By using the symbolic value of a song as a popular piece, additional value is generated for the material consumer products. However, the longevity of a brand is no longer determined by a popular work on the public stage (its popularity has already waned), but by the emotional resources created by localised folklore. It is no longer a TV series or pop stars (since the tastes of popular music consumers change as quickly as those of consumers of mass-produced products), but the idea of family, kinship, and community cohesion that has kept the food brand alive for so long.

However, that is not the full symbolic potential of the song being used as a marketing tool. There are a few more examples of how it can act as a cultural resource. One is in the titles of media articles, events, publications, and advertisements. Here, the song appears as a resource with almost no additional connotations, most often as a quotation or direct reference. It is only slightly modified according to the circumstances (for example, "Where we were born, where we grew up" becomes "Here we were born, here we grew up"). "Giminės" is used particularly often as a means of social communication, with its allusions and quotations constantly appearing in the information environment, including a kindergarten drawing competition in 2017, a 2011 book by a local historian dedicated to his family history, the names of local festivals and family reunions, and a reunion of several generations of high school graduates. The symbolic capital of the song has already been established, forming a foundation for a predictable emotional connection. This connection is

rooted in the native place, scenic surroundings (always in natural surroundings, never in the city), familiar people, cosy interactions, and nostalgia for the past.



Fig. 3. Screenshot of provincial town newspaper website. Article on the "Where we were born, where we grew up" community celebration (Aputytė 2025).

Conclusion

To argue that a TV series, many decades old, continues to influence popular culture with its ideas, images, vivid characters, and relevant events blending with commercial interests would be challenging without mentioning its soundtrack. The soundtrack features a song rooted in local folklore that has gained extraordinary significance in modern rituals. It is "Giminės" that, through its vital force, encourages the flow of meanings in all directions in the sphere of folklore, popular culture, and commerce.

After analysing the case presented, the functions of songs as a hybrid phenomenon become apparent. The song in question belongs to both local tradition and globalised popular culture and is used in various forms for commercial purposes. First, I emphasised its reliance on the realm of popular culture, as it is produced as a commercial, mass-market product. The performers are selected from among the most prominent local pop stars, so their popularity ensures the product's recognition and increases its chances of commercial success. Commerce cleverly capitalises on the popularity of the series and its songs by ingeniously employing marketing tools.

Nevertheless, the creators incorporate folklore elements, such as verse songs, images of harmonious families and extended supportive clans in the text, imitation of folk song intonations, and traditional rhythmic patterns. The work is thus conceived as a folk song, situating it at the intersection of folklore and popular culture. However, the song gradually becomes absorbed into the realm of folklore. People remember it, start repeating it, sing along, and incorporate it into their lives, leading to an increase in these practices. From folkloresque, the song becomes a work of folklore. We recognise its practice as an interactive, dynamic process of creation, communication, and performance, in which experiences are constantly shared.

When the popularity of the series and of the pop stars fades, the song does not disappear; instead, as a piece of folklore, it gains further cultural, symbolic, and emotional capital, which is once again used as a marketing resource. Because the song has become a key element of local cultural traditions, it has developed into a sustainable commercial resource over time.

Notes

[1] Here and below lyrics translated by Gabriella Žičkienė.

Abbreviation

VDU ER – Digital Archive of Ethnology and Folkloristics (Vytautas Magnus University Faculty of Humanities Department of Cultural Studies)

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