

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

**14th International Conference
of Young Folklorists**

Humble Theory
and
The Power of the Vernacular

25th-26th September, 2025
University of Tartu

ABSTRACTS

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The conference is organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore (University of Tartu), and Tartu Nefi Group, in partnership with the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (Vilnius), the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art (University of Latvia), Folklore Studies, Faculty of Arts (University of Helsinki), and the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR).

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On ‘Humility’ and Foregrounding the Vernacular

The theme of the 14th International Conference of Young Folklorists, held at the University of Tartu, Estonia, on September 25–26, 2025, represents the stance that Folkloristics has always embraced by centrally positioning a theory grounded in humility and inclusion: it is narrative and the stories that we tell and research that inform our methodological approaches. In a disciplinary landscape shaped by boundary-making—where the pursuit of a majestic, overarching theory has never been the folklorist’s prerogative—this year’s conference theme invites new, tentative, and emerging voices to join ongoing discussions in contemporary folkloristic debates. Guided by Dorothy Noyes’ concept of humble theory (2016), which situates analysis in the “middle territory between grand theory and local interpretation,” the conference emphasises the importance of grounded, vernacular-focused research and invites participants to rethink the relationship between ethnography, theory, and the everyday practices of communities.

The Young Folklorists Conference began in 2011 as a one-day symposium featuring twelve presentations, organised by the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore and focused on the keywords of “Belief, Tradition, and Identity”. From these modest beginnings, it has since developed into a collaborative tradition. The second edition, hosted by the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in April 2012, marked the beginning of a broader partnership that initially connected the Baltic states and, in more recent years, has also welcomed Finland into its circle. In 2022, the 11th edition of the Conference series was organised in Helsinki, and in Riga in 2023, and in Vilnius in 2024.

The 2025 conference seeks to address contemporary challenges in folklore research. In a digital world where algorithms, social media platforms, and AI mediate, articulate, and inform cultural expression, the vernacular becomes simultaneously more visible and more fragmented. How can we apply humble theory in these digital spaces? This focus is particularly important in an era where the pressures of interdisciplinarity and metrics-driven evaluation risk overshadowing the experiential, relational, and contextual knowledge that lies at the heart of our discipline.

By linking this year’s focus to the themes of everyday creativity and folklore’s role in social adjustment, the conference demonstrates how folkloristics can remain attentive to vernacular practices, listen carefully to them, and allow them to inform theoretical meaning-making. We hope that participants leave inspired to carry these conversations forward in their own research, shaping the future of our discipline through careful attention to the ordinary, the situated, and the creatively lived. This conference presents contributions that exemplify the application of humble theory in

practice, including case studies, original research findings, and reflections on methodological challenges.

This year, we have 40 presentations covering a wide range of topics and multiple genres of folklore research. Our keynote speakers, Dorothy Noyes (Ohio State University) and Mariya Lesiv (Memorial University of Newfoundland) will deliver talks engaging with the precarities of crucial disciplinary issues and the ongoing contexts of war.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

September 25, 2025 (Thursday)

- 09:00 – 09:30

Registration (University of Tartu Library, W. Struve 1, Tartu)
- 09:30 – 09:45

Opening of the Conference by Prof. Riho Altnurme, Vice Dean for Research, Faculty of Arts and Humanities (Conference Hall)
- 09:45 – 11:00

Keynote Lecture 1
Dorothy Noyes, Ohio State University
The Vernacular Ground and the Field of Folklore
Moderated by **Ülo Valk** (Conference Hall)
- 11:00 – 11:30

COFFEE BREAK
- 11:30 – 13:00

Sessions 1-3

	Session 1: Folkloristic Theories I (Conference Hall) Chair: Lodewyk Barkhuizen	Session 2: Human-Animal Interactions (Seminar room Töstamaa) Chair: Margaret Lyngdoh	Session 3: Performance and (Un)tellability (Seminar room Kodavere) Chair: Marje Ermel
11:30 – 12:00	Evgeniya Litvin , <i>Humble Theory in Minority Language Literature Research</i>	Haozhen Li , <i>Between Religious Revival and Reinvention: Three Strategies of Revitalisation for Shamanism in Northeast China</i>	Jaana Ahtiainen , <i>Beyond Institutional Lenses: Rethinking Sex Work Research Through Folklore Studies</i>
12:00 – 12:30	Digne Üdre-Lietbārde , <i>Academic Endeavours and Popular Imaginations: The Question of Lay and Academic Voices in Folklore Studies</i>	Jasmina Rejec , <i>Animal Folk Tales as Vehicles of Moral Values and Social Critique</i>	Pema Choedon , <i>Gorshey: An Expression of Resilience and a Unified Identity through Tibetan Folk Dance</i>
12:30 – 13:00	Ivan Praštalo , <i>Between Grand and Humble Theory: What Can We Learn from the History of the Discipline through Sima Trojanović</i>	Chloe Lundrigan , <i>“It’s Tradition, but also Breaking Tradition”: Performing Multi-species Environments in Newfoundland</i>	Yun Dai , <i>Bear Grandmother: Hearthside Storytelling</i>

13:00 – 14:30 LUNCH BREAK

14:30 – 16:00 Sessions 4-6

	Session 4: Folkloristic Theories II (Conference Hall) Chair: Alina Oprelianska	Session 5: Narrative Reflections (Seminar room Tõstamaa) Chair: Pihla Maria Siim	Session 6: Vernacular Expressions (Seminar room Kodavere) Chair: Haozhen Li
14:30 – 15:00	Abhirup Sarkar , <i>Some Notes on the Viability of the 'Humble Approach' in Folkloristics</i>	Iida Rätty , <i>Illness Narrative as an 'in Between' Category</i>	Dan Zhou , <i>Reframing 'Vernacular': The Localisation of a Global Concept in Japanese Folkloristics</i>
15:00 – 15:30	Li Feng , <i>Why Is Chinese Folkloristics Theory Still Not So Humble?</i>	Mikhail Popov , <i>"A Ruse Occurred, a Tale Was Born": The Transmission, Transformation and Social Background of One Folklore Plot in Chulyum Turkic Folklore</i>	Anja Mlakar , <i>Folklore as Contested Knowledge and the Struggle for the Vernacular</i>
15:30 – 16:00	Mar'yana Svarnyk , <i>Sustainability: A Concept without a Theory?</i>	Mirjami Sipitä , <i>Exploring Livonian Counting Rhymes and Their Presentation in the Volkslieder der Liven (1936) Collection</i>	Susanna Jurvanen , <i>Bridging Theory and Ethnography: Multimodality in the Study of the Finnish Helka Festival</i>

18:00 – 21:00

Reception at University Cafe (Ülikooli 20) for Registered Participants

Musical Performance by **Estonian flute duo Kuula Hetke** (Kärt Pihlap & Katariina Tirmaste)

September 26, 2025 (Friday)

09:45 – 11:00

Keynote Lecture 2

Mariya Lesiv, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Folklore of Anger in the Precarity of War: Humble Theory and the Unhumble Vernacular

Moderated by **Anastasiya Astapova** (Conference Hall)

11:00 – 11:30

COFFEE BREAK

11:30 – 13:00

Sessions 7-9

	Session 7: Placelore (Conference Hall) Chair: Kikee Doma Bhutia	Session 8: Social Media and AI (Seminar room Tõstamaa) Chair: Andrus Tins	Session 9: Belief Narratives (Seminar room Kodavere) Chair: Kristel Kivari
11:30 – 12:00	Lachlan Bell , <i>The Sõrve Bunyip: Reimagining a Colonial Cryptid in an Australian-Estonian Context</i>	Jasmine Aavaranta Hansén , <i>Listening Objects: AI- enhanced Museum Exhibitions Aided by Humble Theory</i>	Roope Kotiniemi , <i>Navigating Contradictions: Analysing Magical Pouches in Finnish and Karelian Belief Narratives</i>
12:00 – 12:30	Linda Saraswati Klausner , <i>When Trees Wear Saris: Ritual Dressing and Sacred Power</i>	Hanna-Kaisa Lassila , <i>Everyday Entertainment of Vernacular Disciplining on Social Media</i>	Anete Saulīte-Stačkune , <i>Personal Insight as an Aid, Not the Enemy: An Example on Latvian Folk Belief Research</i>
12:30 – 13:00	Pallavi Dutta , <i>Mohan Phador: A Sacred Stone of the Tiwa Community, North East India</i>	Joan Jürgens , <i>'Timeless Reading': Fortune Telling with Tarot Cards in Estonian- speaking Social Media Channels</i>	Hanna Dudkowiak , <i>Our Lady and the Golden Foam: Tracing the Medieval Polish Magical Charm</i>

13:00 – 14:30 LUNCH BREAK

14:30 – 16:00 Sessions 10-11

	Session 10: Ritual Practice (Conference Hall) Chair: Alevtina Solovyeva	Session 11: Material Folklore (Seminar room Tõstamaa) Chair: Digne Üdre- Lielbārde	
14:30 – 15:00	Nataliia Rygovska , <i>The Invisible Front: Vernacular Spiritual Practices in Contemporary Ukraine</i>	Mila Santala , <i>From Tradition to Modernity: The Enduring Legacy of Kalevala Jewellery and the Kalevala Women's Association</i>	
15:00 – 15:30	Lodewyk Barkhuizen , <i>Existential Weakness as Method in the Spiritual Teachings of South African Traditional Healers</i>	Edgar Mirjamsdotter , <i>Following the Threads – Exploring the Aibo Tapestry through Ethnography</i>	
15:30 – 16:00	Baobao , <i>Sutꞑywu and Sutꞑywumini of Misfortune Transferability in the Eastern Minyag Community</i>	Kikee Doma Bhutia , <i>Thensay Yaksay and the Burden of Ritual Gift-Giving in Sikkimese Villages</i>	

16:00 – 16:30 Closing of the Conference

KEYNOTE LECTURE | THURSDAY, September 25

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DOROTHY NOYES

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The Vernacular Ground and the Field of Folklore

This talk revisits the age-old squabble over folkloristic keywords in an age-old effort to reframe the debate and get on with our lives. Revisiting the lineage of the "vernacular" in historical linguistics to develop recent claims for its utility to folklore scholarship, I propose to understand the term as the everyday ground of cultural practice in social interaction. Upon this ground diverse inputs and actors come into recurrent contact, sometimes casually, sometimes intensely. In knots of intense engagement, the ground of ordinary practice may give rise to performances, valorized traditions, codified procedures, ideologies, projects, and other focused cultural forms, occasionally culminating in durable institutions. Attention to these dynamics highlights the dependence of institutional forms of knowledge and registers of expression upon vernacular foundations. It also reminds us of the temporal contours of institutions: their emergence, transformation, and decline. Systematic attention to such interactions debunks the binary thinking that credits the "official" with too much power and the vernacular with too much virtue. Especially in this moment, a more nuanced approach to cultural power will serve us better.

Understanding the vernacular as uneven, shifting ground can also help us to map the range of conversations across the notoriously uneven, shifting field of ethnology and folklore studies. Building humble theory around the how-questions of cultural process (Noyes 2016) and the "particular analytical challenges that arise from [our] empirical research" (Panchenko 2023) makes room for a wide range of conceptual frameworks that illuminate their own ground and allow us to be useful to those upon it. Conversely, so decentralized a field will struggle to achieve anything beyond this situated usefulness. But this is why we have societies, journals, and conferences. Our large forums are best used not to dispute the identity

of the field or, at the other extreme, to exchange rich ethnographic reports (I myself have regularly used them for both purposes). Instead, we can cultivate mutual awareness by presenting our analytical frameworks and what they seem able to accomplish in situ. An academic field conceived as relational can develop its intensity over time as we grow increasingly aware of complementarities, overlappings, family resemblances, and contradictions in our approaches. From these observations we can work towards more sensible frameworks, through which we can make more robust claims. At a minimum, when we return to our own piece of ground, we will be more aware of its positioning in the ever-changing ecology of the vernacular.

Bionote

Dorothy Noyes (PhD, Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania) is University Distinguished Scholar, Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English, Professor of Comparative Studies, and Director of the Merishon Center for International Security Studies at the Ohio State University. She studies the traditional public sphere in Europe, the careers of policy concepts, and performance and ritual in international relations. Among her books are *Fire in the Plaça: Catalan Festival Politics After Franco* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Indiana University Press, 2016); and *Sustaining Interdisciplinary Collaboration: A Guide for the Academy* (coauthored with Regina Bendix and Kilian Bizer; University of Illinois Press, 2017). *Exemplarity in Global Politics*, coedited with Tobias Wille, will appear in November 2025 from Bristol University Press. She is a past President of the American Folklore Society, and was awarded a doctorate honoris causa by the University of Tartu in 2018.

KEYNOTE LECTURE | **FRIDAY**, September 26

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MARIYA LESIV

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Folklore of Anger in the Precarity of War: Humble Theory and the Unhumble Vernacular

“Humble theory” defines the work of many Western folklorists, including their choices of research topics and critical perspectives. These choices often highlight the voices of marginalized individuals and groups – voices that many folklorists are inspired by, align with, or advocate for. This trend largely reflects the discipline’s growing commitment to equality, inclusivity, social justice and the larger ideals of positivity and “niceness.” Are Western theoretical frameworks developed in contexts of relative social stability, security, and peace applicable to the situations of war, related rupture, and the daily precarity of life and death? Drawing from my recent individual and collaborative work (Lesiv 2021; Howard and Lesiv 2025), I will engage with this question while exploring creative responses by Ukrainians to Russia’s full-scale invasion, particularly focusing on expressions that are rooted in traditional curses.

Western folkloristic perspectives that might place such folklore as “Russians, may you all die like dogs!” in the category of unhumble manifestations of aggression, anger, and hate speech, fail to understand many meaningful nuances. However, if approached through the lens of humble theory (with associated empathy and attention to insider voices on the ground), while avoiding the biases of Western ideals, such expressions reveal vernacular responses to the subtle dynamics of Russian systemic vernacular imperialism. This phenomenon – whose formation trajectories resemble those of systemic racism – remains largely invisible to outsiders but fuels Russian aggression. Understanding systemic vernacular imperialism has significant implications for decolonization processes in regions historically dominated by Russia and for related regional studies.

Bionote

Mariya Lesiv is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Her research interests include folklore and politics, belief and religious folklife, and diaspora studies. Lesiv's book, *The Return of Ancestral Gods: Modern Ukrainian Paganism as an Alternative Vision for a Nation*, was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2013. She has also contributed articles to edited volumes and academic journals, including *Anthropologica*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Ethnologies*, *Folklorica*, and *Western Folklore*.

She is a recipient of both the Insight Development Grant and the Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Her most recent funding supports the project "Trauma and Heritage: Ukrainian War Migrants in the Host-Region of Newfoundland."

Lesiv served as President of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada / l'Association canadienne d'ethnologie et de folklore (2021–2022), and as President of the Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Folklore Association (2020–2024).

JASMINE AAVARANTA HANSÉN

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Listening Objects: AI-enhanced Museum Exhibitions Aided by Humble Theory

As museums increasingly integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into exhibition processes, new questions arise about authority in meaning-making. This paper explores applied humble theory in museum spaces and is grounded in a case study at the National Historical Museums of Sweden. The case study looks at the potential of the role of listening in digital curatorial practices, as articulated by Dorothy Noyes. The paper aims to serve as a guide to a deepened discussion on ethical and creative approaches to AI-assisted exhibition-making in the future.

Digital systems, not least AI-based, promise both personalisation and increased efficiency, but at the same time risk flattening complexity through predictive logic, generic assumptions, inbuilt bias and a polished voice. In contrast, humble theory constantly raises contradictions, uses lived experience, and invites messiness. How can these two processes be combined to serve each other? How can we both invite AI into new curatorial practices, while humbly maintaining an audience connection? I propose a framework test model in which AI tools do not ‘speak for’ objects or communities but instead serve as platforms for multiple narratives. This is done by using ‘speaking objects’ that evolve into ‘listening objects’.

Rather than museums dismissing generative AI for curating, or treating AI as a neutral mediator, or humanising it to have a point of view and agency of its own, I argue for a humble curatorial ethic that openly invites in AI-aided models of digital curation without losing contact with multiple audiences. In doing so, museums might evolve to be spaces where we can listen even more keenly.

JAANA AHTIAINEN

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Beyond Institutional Lenses: Rethinking Sex Work Research Through Folklore Studies

In many respects, sex work research relies on perspectives from legal studies, criminology, and social sciences. Criminological, jurisprudential, and sociological frameworks utilise grand, commonly used theoretical constructs on sex work and focus on institutional perspectives, such as the legal system, policymakers, social welfare, healthcare, and other authorities. In these cases, sex work is perceived through institutionalised and often normative lenses.

In my presentation, based on my ongoing doctoral research, I approach sex work as a stigmatised vernacular and examine how to research sex work outside of these typical institutionalised perspectives and theoretical frameworks. I will focus on theoretical reflections on studying sex work outside commonly utilised theoretical frameworks and delve into how meanings and interpretations derived from the field can elaborate and deepen our understanding of sex work as a complex network of interactions, effects, and influences.

Researching sex work in folklore studies provides a different kind of grasp on the social life of sex workers and the narratives and beliefs feeding into and emerging from a stigmatised vernacular. Folklore studies offer tools to view stigma and stigmatised groups through the dimension of inter-group relations and recognise both narrative normativity and untellable stories related to sex work. Above all, it presents a means to step outside of grand and commonly used theories and instead draw from local interpretations and vernacular layers. At its best, exploring sex work research through folklore studies challenges the researcher methodologically and leads to various theoretical realisations and ideas.

BAOBAO

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Suteywu and Suteywumini of Misfortune Transferability in the Eastern Minyag Community

The transferability of misfortune among the Eastern Minyag consists of Suteywu and Suteywumini, which provide the Minyag people tools to handle the adversities encountered. Suteywu is a Minyag term that refers to Minyag religious specialists and all the rituals that they perform. Thus, with this term, Minyag people distinguish rituals from the practices performed by ordinary Minyag men. Only the rituals performed by the Suteywu can be called Suteywu, including all the transferring rituals. Ordinary Minyag people also have their own methods for transferring misfortune, which are practiced without the assistance of Suteywu (religious specialists) and are therefore considered Suteywumini, non-Suteywu practices. Comparisons between these two types of transference explore the mechanism of transferring misfortune, selection considerations, and community implications. The researcher finds Suteywu to be official and legitimate public activities that, hence, create community cohesion, while Suteywumini is a private, unprofessional practice that causes tension between community members. However, Suteywu and Suteywumini are not binary; they are mutually supplemental and intertwine to fulfil Minyag demands. I try to address the continuities and shared logic that supports Suteywu and Suteywumini practices, as well as their differences and similarities. The vernacular concept framework was applied during the analysis in order to interpret the Minyag perspective on the transferability of misfortune.

LODEWYK BARKHUIZEN

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Existential Weakness as Method in the Spiritual Teachings of South African Traditional Healers

South African traditional healers are spirit mediums who rely on the teachings of gobelas (teachers) to develop their praxis. This reliance stems from a healing tradition that, in lieu of a foundational text, embraces ongoing creative adaptations based on the lived experiences of healers. While these teachings are mainly focused within an impande (healers in the same spiritual lineage), the recent proliferation of online video teachings reveals, in more stable forms, the didactic strategies employed by gobelas. Following Gert Biesta's three-domain model of education (2013), this paper analyses a selection of online video teachings produced by healers. The analysis, supported by interviews with practicing healers, shows that while these teachings may fulfil the educational functions of accreditation (the acquisition of skills) and socialisation (becoming part of existing traditions), they primarily facilitate subjectification: creative acts through which subjects are formed and new orders are created. Biesta holds that subjectification is an event rather than an essence and is therefore existentially weak: temporary, explorative, and open for reinterpretation. It is exactly this weakness that holds educational power as its innate lack of stability makes it sufficiently malleable to both discover and explore new expressive forms. Healers embody this weakness by not only subordinating themselves to the ancestral spirits who teach through them but also by embracing the continuous revision, even contradiction, of their own prior conceptual models. Accordingly, I draw parallels between the vernacular theorising of healers, Biesta's subjectification, and humble theory's recognition "that all our work is essay ... a trying out of interpretation, a provisional framing" (2016: 16).

LACHLAN BELL

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The Sõrve Bunyip: Reimagining a Colonial Cryptid in an Australian-Estonian Context

The anglophone term ‘bunyip’ refers to an elusive shapeless entity in First Nations mythology and colonial-Australian folklore. Rooted in 19th-century colonial interpretations of Indigenous Dreamings, the bunyip has taken on a unique role at Sõrve, an Australian-Estonian cultural summer camp located on the shores of Awaaba (Lake Macquarie). Known to elanikud (campers) as ‘The Bunyip’, it performs the role of a secular guardian of the lilypond, introduced to children under seven years old through improvised storytelling and acting. Its ambiguous nature allows for co-creation across generations, with documented ‘sightings’ appearing in the daily camp newspaper, The Sõrve Sosin, since 1999.

The Bunyip has evolved as a figuration of white settler folklore, departing from their role as hyper-local protective water spirits into fearsome, billabong-dwelling cryptids of colonial Gothic fiction and nursery bogies. Drawing upon interviews, personal correspondences and archival documents, I examine how Sõrve elanikud and the juhtkond (leadership) have collectively reimagined, re-Indigenised and more recently ‘Estonianised’ the Bunyip to negotiate feelings of belonging and unfamiliarity through processes of layering. This presentation draws upon my heritage as a descendant of English settlers and Estonian migrants, and my experience volunteering as a juht (camp leader) and forms part of ongoing research into the role of tradition within the identity of foreign-Estonian summer campers.

KIKEE DOMA BHUTIA

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Thensay Yaksay and the Burden of Ritual Gift-Giving in Sikkimese Villages

This paper examines the concept of thensay yaksay – translated as ‘take out and keep it’ – as a cultural practice underpinning the gift economy in Sikkimese village communities. Offering money as a symbolic gift is central to major life events such as weddings, funerals, childbirth and house inaugurations, reflecting a tradition rooted in love, respect, and reciprocity. However, this practice also creates a significant burden for villagers, who are continually obligated to participate in these exchanges, even amidst economic constraints. Drawing on ethnographic evidence, the study situates thensay yaksay within a fluid economy of exchange, where monetary gifts are a socially embedded medium rather than impersonal transactions. Using Marcel Mauss’s theory of the gift and Parry’s critique of monetary exchange in non-Western societies, this paper argues that thensay yaksay simultaneously strengthens social bonds and perpetuates economic strain, revealing a paradox within traditional Sikkimese social structures. The study presents case studies of how this practice adapts to modern socio-economic pressures while raising critical questions about sustainability and equity in village communities.

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Gorshey: An Expression of Resilience and a Unified Identity through Tibetan Folk Dance

In recent years Tibetan traditional circle dance, gorshey, has gained momentum like never before. Traditionally gorshey is performed in ceremonies and communal gatherings such as festivals, weddings and religious gatherings. Every region of Tibet has its own way of performing the singing and dancing. However, the formation of a circle with arm length distance as one dances in synchronized steps typically make them almost similar. One must know the beats, regional dialect used in songs, and ways of moving to differentiate them. The gorshey has now suddenly become favorite of all Tibetans irrelevant of ages and gender. However, the difference in gender is hand and body movements, the men should bounce more, and their hand gestures are more forceful and active.

It is not only ubiquitous in communal gatherings but from my personal observation they have also taken over social media specially in YouTube and Instagram. Like any traditional forms this form of artistic expression has formed other meanings beyond just being a traditional entertainment. It would not be wrong to say that Tibetans are people are politically and socially a struggling ethnic people, and therefore a vulnerable people both inside and outside Tibet with pressure from other dominant cultures. If in the diaspora they are landless refugees spread from India, USA to Europe, Tibetans inside Tibet are to a greater degree suppressed by the Chinese Communist Party's rule in their own land. Their cultures threatened both inside and outside Tibet, and such conditions have made Tibetans everywhere always more aware of their cultural roots such as their religion, traditional ways of living, culinary culture, clothing, literature, language and not least their traditional dance. It is no wonder that one of the few things the Dalai Lama first took into action after coming to the exile was to form a Tibetan dance group known as Tibetan Institute of Performance and Arts.

More than the history and the choreography I am interested in the use of gorshey as an expression of ethnic unity and as a form of grassroot resilience and resistance to the world where they are voiceless both politically and socially. For the Tibetans their rich culture and literature always serves to show their existence both inside and outside Tibet. Their political invisibility as refugees in the diaspora, however, is very clear with

many international social and political supports fading with time. However, it seems that they always make use of their culture to surface and make themselves visible in the world.

My presentation will be presented based on fieldwork in Norway where I live and Paris which probably has the largest concentration of Tibetans living. I will, for theoretical basis, use Dorothy Noyes' the "Folk Resilient", vernacular invention and tradition from her book *Humble theory and Power of the Vernacular*. The concept of invention of tradition, nationalism, ethnicity and "folk resilient" for the presentation.

YUN DAI

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Bear Grandmother: Hearthside Storytelling

The Bear/Wolf/Tiger Grandmother folktale (Chinese: Xiong Gapo) remains deeply familiar to children across southwestern China, having been transmitted orally through generations of family storytelling traditions (Ding 2008, 64). Often considered a Chinese counterpart to Little Red Riding Hood, it plays a crucial role in shaping cultural values and perceptions of danger. The stories were collected during evening gatherings by the hearth and bedtime rituals, reflecting their role in familial socialisation. By analysing Bear Grandmother through a four-part rubric -content, context, form/structure, and function -this abstract clarifies how the tale influences worldview formation and adapts to contemporary fears. Levi-Strauss's (1963) binary oppositions (human-beast, tame-wild) frame the tale's pedagogical role in demarcating cultural boundaries. Collected from 32 villages in southwest China's mountainous regions, the tales reflect historical threats like bear attacks and banditry. Liu's (2002) fieldwork highlights how geographic isolation and oral transmission preserved regional variants. The tale socialises children into a worldview where danger hides behind familiarity, rewarding scrutiny and ingenuity. It also preserves regional identity; for instance, Yunnan's Dai minority embeds local idioms about forest safety.

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HANNA DUDKOWIAK

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Our Lady and the Golden Foam: Tracing the Medieval Polish Magical Charm

The manuscript Rps 3030 I, held in the National Library of Poland, preserves rare medieval Polish magical formulas on its final page, within a codex otherwise dedicated to sermons and hagiographies. These charms are of particular interest due to their rarity; only two other such Polish charms, dating to the 15th century, are known from a separate manuscript kept in the Archives of the Polish Province of the Dominicans in Cracow.

One of the formulas takes the form of a narrative healing charm (*historiola*), portraying the Virgin Mary journeying across the sea to gather golden foam, in which she is met by Saint John and declares her purpose: healing her son. This apocryphal dialogue illustrates the association between sacred figures and the magical efficacy ascribed to them.

What explains the presence of this charm in a manuscript otherwise devoted to sermons and hagiographic texts? Was it part of a homiletic critique, a note on illicit vernacular practices, ethnographic-style ‘field material’, or a pragmatic preservation of healing formulas for Christian devotion?

To illuminate the cultural logic and continuity of such formulas, my presentation places the medieval material in dialogue with 19th century Polish ethnographic records, in which structurally similar incantations were used to heal illness and ward off harm. This comparative lens helps reconstruct the vernacular worldview in which these charms circulated and reveals the longevity of Christian-magical healing traditions in Polish culture.

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**Mohan Phador: A Sacred Stone of the Tiwa Community,
North East India**

The Tiwa are an indigenous group inhabiting North East India. They are divided into two sub-groups, Hill and Plain Tiwa. Bormarjong villag in West Karbi Anglong district in Assam is considered the nerve-centre of the Tiwa. A sacred monolithic stone, Mohan Phador, is located in this village and is the centre of several narratives in Tiwa society. This chief patron is sculpted on the monolithic stone, which symbolises power and strength in Tiwa society. Some villagers think that he was the forefather of the Tiwa while nother villagers consider him a deity. Despite the identity of this figure being indistinct he is certainly revered by the villagers, who look up to him for their wellbeing. Different narratives clustered by Mohan Phador and some practices associated with him indicate his supernaturalism and immortality. This paper will discuss the significance of Mohan Phador in Tiwa society in the past and present from the perspective of ethnographic field study.

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Why Is Chinese Folkloristics Theory Still Not So Humble?

The term ‘folklore’ has different connotations in different cultures. Since Mencius (孟子), the Second Sage of Confucianism, ‘民’ (the folk, i.e. people) became a very important political concept in China, developing into Minbenism (民本主义), which proposed that ‘民’ (the folk) are the centre of politics. Over the following two thousand years, China left a large number of records of folklore and folkways under the heading ‘风俗’ (vernacular). However, at the beginning of the 20th century a new generation of Chinese humanities scholars finally chose ‘民俗’ rather than ‘风俗’ as the translation of ‘folklore’, implying a political orientation towards enlightenment. In modern times, the study of folklore in China faces the challenge of nationalism, with folklorism, brought about by officialdom, leading the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Some Chinese folklorists have attempted to develop a grand theory of Chinese folklore beyond sociology and anthropology by continuing to focus on ‘民’ (the folk) in order to counter nationalism and folklorism. Meanwhile, humble theory has also developed in China. On this basis, humble theory and the grand theory are not in conflict in the study of folklore in China today.

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‘Timeless Reading’: Fortune Telling with Tarot Cards in Estonian-speaking Social Media Channels

Tarot card reading or interpretation is one of the most common methods of fortune telling. These practices have also found their place in social media, where a simple search or algorithm can lead to a video or image asking the viewer to choose a symbol to receive a prediction. Often, this is called a ‘timeless reading’, meaning the upload and viewing dates may differ, but the prediction remains valid.

The aim of this presentation is to investigate accounts that post predictions or readings done with tarot cards in Estonian. The community using tarot cards is multifaceted, making it difficult to give them a unified name. I refer to specific users by the names they have given (for example, clairvoyant, shaman, energy worker) or as tarot card readers.

Observation was conducted on three social media platforms: YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The focus was on posts featuring tarot card predictions for the viewer. The work also considers currently inactive accounts, as their content still sheds light on trends within the online practice. Interviews were conducted with card readers who were willing to reveal the background of their activities.

With this work, I hope to uncover the background to the posts and provide an overview of the current state of Estonian tarot card reading online.

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Bridging Theory and Ethnography: Multimodality in the Study of the Finnish Helka Festival

In folkloristic discussions, theory and ethnography are sometimes framed as separate, or even opposing, approaches. This presentation challenges this binary by reflecting on two cases of ethnographic observation at the same event, conducted in different years. I explore how a researcher's positionality and prior knowledge shape both data collection and interpretation. Approaching this case study through the lens of multimodality, I argue that ethnography is not only a methodological tool but also a theoretical process that engages multiple modes of meaning-making – textual, performative, spatial, and visual. These modes of meaning-making offer a deeper understanding of the intertwinings of theory and practice.

The presentation draws on my PhD study of the Helka festival, held in the village of Ritvala, Finland. The festival consists of a singing procession of local young girls performing Kalevala-metric ballads, traditionally believed to originate as an agrarian fertility ritual. By viewing the Helka festival as a multimodal performance, I propose that Dorothy Noyes' concept of humble theory can act as a bridge between ethnographic engagement and theoretical reflection. This framework fosters a more nuanced understanding of ethnographic practice, allowing for a dynamic interplay between the ethnographic practice and theoretical analysis.

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When Trees Wear Saris: Ritual Dressing and Sacred Power

Dressing natural forms—such as trees, plants, stones, rivers, and even fire—is widespread across India, in both Hindu and Indigenous traditions. This includes the Santali, one of South Asia’s largest Indigenous groups. These practices are especially meaningful to marginalised groups because they are open to all—regardless of caste or status. Even as research on lived religion expands, a significant gap remains regarding ritual dressing practices—particularly within Santali contexts. While dressing trees or plants in Santali and Hindu traditions may look the same, the underlying beliefs are fundamentally different. However, Santali is not officially recognised as a separate religion, which reinforces ongoing marginalisation and social exclusion. Through these practices, this research demonstrates the distinctiveness of the Santali religion, and how these every day, hands-on acts of devotion generate sacred presence and ritual authority—asserting they are equal to more formal religious systems. Since saris are widely used in ritual dressing, the research also highlights feminine agency and the contributions of women who are doubly marginalised—by both religion and gender. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork in Jharkhand—the primary centre of Santali religious life—this talk will seek to demonstrate the geographic and cultural scope of scholarship on ritual ecology in South Asia. Ultimately, the aim is to reframe understandings of sacred power and religious legitimacy by centring hands-on, lived and experienced practices, that give voice to marginalised communities. In doing so, the project contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on social inclusion, gender equality, and environmental awareness.

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Navigating Contradictions: Analysing Magical Pouches in Finnish and Karelian Belief Narratives

The topic of my presentation stems from my master's thesis, in which I study belief narratives concerning Finnish and Karelian sorcerers, with a particular focus on the magical objects they wield within belief narrative traditions. My thesis is a case study that narrows down the broad spectrum of magical objects mentioned in these narratives to those associated with a specific magical object: a magical pouch. I argue that magical pouches are considered both individual objects and collections of objects.

In the presentation, my focus is on the relationship between practiced tradition, materials, and theory, as well as the problems that arise from the source material. The first question is how to approach material that varies and even contradicts itself significantly, yet does not seem to be random. How can a researcher capture a system that is not a system per se? Second, what kind of relationship can we postulate between the source material and the lived experience from which the source is thought to stem? Belief narratives not only depict actual life but are also good stories influenced by the logic of storytelling.

I will discuss some possible solutions or at least partial solutions to these problems. The main objective of this presentation is to generate a discussion on whether the best way to solve these problems is to refine the methodology and analyse these aspects from the material, or to adjust the question so that one does not have to engage with such a problem at all.

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The Everyday Entertainment of Vernacular Disciplining on Social Media

Public shaming on social media as vernacular discipline often brings to mind cases in which individuals become the targets of large-scale public outrage. These cases often involve brigades of online citizens using visual and textual practices of shaming to condemn and punish individuals for their perceived misdeeds. The actions deemed reprehensible typically include acts of racism, misogyny or other forms of social transgression, with the accompanying public punishment frequently involving digital vigilante tools such as doxing. In other cases, public shaming on social media has been used to silence or ostracise people, or simply for revenge. However, not all acts of public shaming on social media are so overt or seemingly punitive. Some public shaming on social media is more casual, perhaps done more for entertainment rather than vigilantism. These may not often attract the same public attention (or notoriety), as the more targeted incidents of public shaming, since the disciplinary nature of the shaming is not as explicit. The more casual public shaming on social media includes social media accounts that aggregate shaming content for the amusement of their audience and, for example, the combination of gossip and public shaming. In this paper, I explore this everyday entertainment derived from public shaming on social media using examples from my doctoral research, which examines the vernacular practices of public shaming on social media.

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Between Religious Revival and Reinvention: Three Strategies of Revitalisation for Shamanism in Northeast China

After a period of radical anti-religious movements during the last century, almost all Chinese religious practices have experienced profound revitalisation in various forms, whether through the revival and reconstruction of old practices or the regeneration and invention of new religious behaviours. As mainstream attention focuses on the rejuvenation of the state-sanctioned institutional religions, various folk religious practices are also reclaiming their influence in Chinese people's everyday lives through similar mechanisms. This paper will shed light on the vernacular religious behaviours, both verbal and nonverbal, of the ritual experts in northeast China, who are called Xian (immortals, spirits) and practice as shamanic spirit mediums and worship animal spirits.

By observing the Xian shamans' endeavours to build, maintain, and increase their authority among present and potential adherents, I propose three strategies applied by the ritual experts of folk religion to revitalise their religious practices: ritualisation, according to which the shaman would reconstruct the material and formal aspects of her or his religious behaviours in a way as (seemingly) authentic as possible; theorisation, in which case the shaman would organise her or his knowledge of religious behaviours in very reflective way and even develop a specific type of vernacular theology; and minimalisation, shamans applying this strategy would keep the verbal and ritual aspects of their practice on a minimalist level and maintain their authority based on their charismatic personality and adherents' trust. These strategies reveal the diversity of vernacular religious behaviours in religious revitalisation.

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Humble Theory in Minority Language Literature Research

Endangered linguistic minority literatures, often marginalised within global literary discourse, demand context-specific and ethnographic approaches that transcend purely theoretical frameworks. Dorothy Noyes's humble theory offers a valuable methodology for transitioning from localised examples to comparative analysis, prioritising community perspectives and mitigating broad generalisations.

Following this approach involves ethnographic immersion and participatory research in local communities; analysing the social, cultural, and political contexts in which these literatures are created; mapping the networks of production, distribution, and consumption of minority language literatures; and acknowledging historical marginalisation and expressions of cultural rights.

This research draws upon the literary output of linguistic minority communities in southern Italy, with a focus on the Griko dialect of the Salento peninsula. Despite varying degrees of direct folkloric connection, a robust understanding of local folklore traditions and the methodologies of oral literature studies is crucial. The relationship between contemporary minority literature and folklore is multifaceted, encompassing genetic links through adaptation of traditional plots, structures, and genres; pragmatic integration or replacement of traditional practices in community and family events; and commercial manifestations in cultural tourism. A folkloristic perspective is therefore essential for comprehending both the perpetuation and innovation within these literary forms.

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“It’s Tradition, but also Breaking Tradition”: Performing Multi-species Environments in Newfoundland

Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, is recognised for its provincial bird: the viral, charismatic, oh-so-beloved Atlantic puffin. Alternatively known as sea parrots, hatchet bills, and clown birds in the province, the species has become symbolic of its habitat and the human communities it shares it with. The most notable colony is in Witless Bay, once a profitable fishing ground, now a government-managed ecological reserve. Ecotourism ventures were founded in the reserve by local families in the 1980s, who repurposed their fishing equipment and knowledge of the environment to found the industry in the wake of the ongoing collapse of the Atlantic cod stock. Many of these tours include traditional Irish music, screech-in ceremonies, and local history recitations, which draw overt links between the ecosystem and its settler history. Influenced by Noyes’ work on cultural resilience amid climate catastrophe, this paper explores the various seascapes and iterative identities of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve through ethnographic fieldwork with seabird interpreters to explore the role of their layered performances in the creation of Newfoundland as an Extraordinary Place.

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Following the Threads – Exploring the Aibo Tapestry though Ethnography

This paper illustrates the importance of empirical material gathered through ethnography as an early step in the research process. My case focuses on Aibotapeten – The Aibo tapestry – at the Aiboland museum in Hapsaalu. The museum is a grassroot institution that works as a key site for (re)shaping, performing and preserving Estonia-Swedish cultural heritage.

I take an open-ended approach. Through fieldwork at the museum I follow different threads to uncover how the Aibo tapestry is connected to cultural understanding and why it was made. The Aibo tapestry is not just an artefact, I view it as a dynamic performance of cultural heritage and history. Its creation involved active participation, storytelling, and community engagement, making it a performative act of cultural transmission. The guided tours further stage this heritage, shaping visitors' understanding through curated narratives.

The foundation we – folklorists and ethnologists – stand on is our ability to conduct ethnography, and that's what we ought to build on. Rather than imposing a fixed theoretical lens, I let the material guide my theoretical choices, which in turn helps me unlock and decode the material. It's an ongoing interplay between material, method and theory. This flexibility allows for a more nuanced understanding of how cultural heritage is performed. A humble approach to theory lets me adapt to the field rather than moulding the field to fit my chosen theoretical perspective or hypothesis.

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Folklore as Contested Knowledge and the Struggle for the Vernacular

This contribution examines how ‘superstition’ has been presented, categorised, and contested within Slovenian ethnographic discourse. While interpreted from above by scholars working in specific ideological contexts (emerging nationalism in the 19th century and socialism in the mid-20th century) drawing on humble theory, which prioritises the resilience of local knowledge despite institutional pressures, the contribution will explore how superstition was a system of beliefs and practices that was continuously reframed to fit dominant ideological projects.

Using two case studies – the 19th-century Slovenian press and the 1963 Slovene Ethnographic Museum exhibition *Superstition in Slovenia* – this contribution will explore how folklorists and other intellectuals functioned as intermediaries and active sculptors of vernacular knowledge who tried to mould this knowledge into nationalist and socialist discourses. In both cases, superstition was presented as an obstacle to progress, either as an obstacle to national and moral enlightenment in the 19th century or as a relic incompatible with socialist modernity in the 20th.

Despite the absence of direct vernacular voices, I would argue that the persistence of superstition within these scholarly narratives reveals an underlying tension and problem of easy categorisation or eradication of so called ‘superstition’. By shifting focus to how institutions defined, regulated, and disciplined vernacular beliefs and practices, this contribution will contribute to broader discussion on the contested nature of folklore, the limits of ethnographic authority, and the ongoing power struggles over what counts as legitimate cultural knowledge.

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“A Ruse Occurred, a Tale Was Born”: The Transmission, Transformation and Social Background of One Folklore Plot in Chulym Turkic Folklore

The Chulym Turkic text *Mongush* belongs to the corpus of southern Siberian Turkic epic narratives, broadly categorised as the Tale of Ak Kobek, after the best-documented example. While these texts maintain a degree of uniformity in plot structure and setting, *Mongush* stands out due to the omission of many socially significant details.

A standard feature of Ak Kobek-type narratives (and most southern Siberian epic texts in general) is the depiction of a complex social hierarchy. In *Mongush*, however, this hierarchy is almost entirely lost, persisting only in brief, atavistic titles.

Beyond this, the text exhibits transformation not only at the level of setting details but also as a whole. At least three recorded versions of *Mongush* exist, one of which can be considered more or less complete, while the two others are extremely fragmentary. Yet even the most complete version omits key elements found in other southern Siberian analogues.

This raises a legitimate question: how do epic texts (using the example of a specific Chulym Turkic text) fragment over time? Why do certain details get lost during retelling while others persist? How do the patterns and conditions of social reality in which the text exists and is transmitted shape this process?

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Between Grand and Humble Theory: What Can We Learn from the History of the Discipline through Sima Trojanović

The Psychophysical Expression of the Serbian People, Mainly without Words (1935) is the final work by Sima Trojanović, the prominent Serbian ethnologist of the early 20th century. The book represents a pioneering endeavour in Serbian culture (for a long time without a successor) in the field of non-verbal communication research, or, more precisely, in the ethnological and anthropological study of the human body. Drawing on his own field research as well as on material collected by others, Sima Trojanović examines and classifies various types of non-verbal communication (such as ways of greeting, gestures, exclamations and methods for calling or driving off animals), comparing them with available contemporary data from other cultures on the same subjects. Through an exploration of the history of the discipline, we aim to provide a critical understanding of the results of Trojanović's research. On the one hand, in the manner of his time, Trojanović attempts to offer universal conclusions, while on the other hand when met with the reality of the collected material he occasionally acknowledges the limitations of such efforts. This, we believe, will offer us an opportunity to reflect on and better understand our own contemporary position between the desire for a grand theory and the need for a humble one.

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Illness Narrative as an ‘in Between’ Category

Illnesses are located in a liminal space, as are the narratives about them. Illness is something deeply personal and individually experienced that also comes with a significant amount of shared knowledge, cultural norms, and community-controlled practices.

In my dissertation, I examine the experience-based illness narratives of people living with coronary heart disease. The narratives I study are biographical accounts about and of the illness. Although these narratives are personal, they also are, to a large extent, vernacular. These narratives combine personal experiences with institutional narratives and conceptions of illness, disease, and being a patient.

The narratives I study are ‘something between the big and the small’, which reflects my position as a researcher. In this paper, I explore what it is like to be a folklorist in a field that usually belongs to medical professionals from the ‘bigger’ sciences. What do folklorists have that they don't? What kind of information about health and illness can be gained through the eyes and ears of a folklorist? And what significance can such research have for individuals and communities?

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Animal Folk Tales as Vehicles of Moral Values and Social Critique

This paper examines how animal folk tales contribute to the transmission, reinforcement, and negotiation of moral and social values within Slovenian folk tradition. It draws on a selection of tales classified in *Tipni indeks slovenskih ljudskih pravljic: živalske pravljice in basni*, which includes material from archival collections, print editions, and periodicals. The analysis will focus on five to 10 animal folk tales selected for their structural similarity and moral ambiguity. These tales will be annotated using a basic moral value lexicon, following the approach of Wu, Wang, and Mihalcea (2023), to identify recurring patterns of trickery, imitation and punishment, combining close reading with basic computational methods. While the primary emphasis is on the moral and social values embedded in these tales, computational tools offer a complementary perspective.

As Noyes (2016) suggests, folklore operates within the space between tradition and adaptation, transmitting communal values while simultaneously questioning them. Drawing on this framework, the paper argues that animal folk tales function as vernacular moral frameworks, both reinforcing and renegotiating societal norms as they contribute to collective cultural identity. Animal characters serve as symbols of particular traits, representing acceptable and/or unacceptable patterns of behaviour within society.

In this sense, I build on Noyes' theory by applying it to the moral dimensions of animal characters, showing how they serve not only as moral examples but also as flexible figures through which cultural norms are challenged, and reshaped. In this way, they provide a structured and socially acceptable way of challenging societal norms, embedding reflection on expected behaviour within their narratives while simultaneously allowing space for critique and adaptation.

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The Invisible Front: Vernacular Spiritual Practices in Contemporary Ukraine

The full-scale war in Ukraine has received multiple responses from Ukrainian society. Everyone resists and contributes to victory as much as they can, and in the form they can afford. The word ‘front’ is colloquially used to describe these diverse activities. The media is full of references to cultural, humanitarian, psychological and economic fronts. However, many Ukrainians condemn the diversification of usage of this term and insist on the one and only correct meaning – the military front. I see this verbal variety as a pointer to the spheres that form a homeostasis of Ukrainian society in war. Among other fronts one has no name or visibility, corresponding to the spiritual sphere of life. Various practices represent this front, for instance, the proposal to create a ‘protective dome’ over Ukraine, guiding the souls of bombing victims or dead soldiers to the other world, along with other supportive and protective vernacular practices.

My research studies soul guiding – a vernacular practice in contemporary Ukraine during the war. This practice is aimed at helping the souls of the dead (soldiers who died on the battlefield or civilians killed in bombings) to leave the material world and pass to the other world. In this presentation, I would like to explore the context in which soul guiding exists, the realm of the invisible front, and discover what sustains its vernacular power.

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From Tradition to Modernity: The Enduring Legacy of Kalevala Jewellery and the Kalevala Women's Association

In the 1930s, culturally influential author Elsa Heporauta (1883–1960) developed Kalevala Jewellery and founded the Kalevala Women's Association, both of which have played a significant role in shaping the image of Finnish identity. Her vision was influenced by her interest in the Kalevala and esoteric spirituality.

In this presentation, I examine how Heporauta's esoteric and spiritual views influenced the development of the institutions she created and how their legacy is manifested today. I utilise archival materials, Kalevala Jewellery brand materials and interviews with members of the Kalevala Women's Association to map out how Heporauta's legacy lives on in the experiences of contemporary consumers and communities.

I approach the topic through humble theory, emphasising everyday and practical meanings over grand theoretical frameworks. When examining the legacy of Kalevala Jewellery and the Kalevala Women's Association, humble theory provides a tool to understand how folkloristic institutions and individuals experience, shape and redefine tradition.

It has been 88 years since the founding of Kalevala Jewellery and 90 years since the founding of the Kalevala Women's Association, a human lifetime. How does the vision that Elsa Heporauta once outlined compare to what these institutions represent today? My presentation begins a discussion on how folklore adapts to contemporary cultural and commercial contexts.

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Some Notes on the Viability of the ‘Humble Approach’ in Folkloristics

This presentation discusses humble theory, as proposed by Dorothy Noyes, as an approach rather than a theory and how it could become a complement to vernacular theory in folkloristics, wherein the frameworks of interpretation of those sharing the narratives feed into academic analysis. I look at the component of humility, which is inherent in folkloristics as a discipline, in conversation with Briggs’ ‘vernacular theorising’. The presentation debates, through argument for support and contention, the employability of humble theory in folkloristics. As points of support, this presentation looks at how might the ‘humble approach’ become a way of analysing folkloric phenomena not as an epilogue to the process of sharing but also as a synchronous process, therefore ensuring the active participation of culture bearers in the process of analysis. While Noyes leaves the finer details of what the theoretical components of humble theory might be comprised of, I take the liberty of open-endedly interpreting the means of analysis depending on each folklore phenomenon I encounter.

Using interview excerpts and highlighting features of the process of narrativisation, the presentation will share insights into what the ‘humble approach’ incorporates or lacks in its folkloristic endeavours to avoid or escalate the issues that have been a part of early folkloristic attempts and keeps the culture bearers close to not only the process of folklore production but also its analysis. Therefore, this presentation aims to exemplify through analysis of folkloric materials whether the ‘humble approach’ can be a viable aid to the folkloristic perspective.

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Personal Insight as an Aid, Not the Enemy: An Example on Latvian Folk Belief Research

Objectivity is often posed as a way of carrying out research in many fields, including folkloristics. But what if one tries to become more humble and acknowledge that folklore, which is given life by a larger or smaller group of humans, is inherently human? That in some cases a touch of personal insight could be beneficial in folkloristics?

To illustrate the problem of the, seemingly, often inevitable subjectivity in folklore research and how it can be of use, an example of Latvian folk belief research will be looked at. The main focus of folk belief is intertwined in the term itself – belief. Believing is inherently subjective and human and is looked upon differently even within the user community of which one is inevitably part. Thus, trying to accommodate the rather high standards set by objectivity means some of the folk in folklore would have to be ignored.

One of the first scholars to research Latvian folk belief, Pēteris Šmits (1869-1938), proposed an ethnographic approach to texts, accentuating their use, roots in cultural practice, and intertextuality. One of the questions not directly proposed by him, but which one could add to Šmits' perspective, would be where does the researcher stand within the use and meaning of texts centred around belief?

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Exploring Livonian Counting Rhymes and Their Presentation in the Volkslieder der Liven (1936) Collection

Counting-out rhymes are a type of oral tradition typically used to select a person from the group in children's games. These rhymes can, in addition to being playful verses, reflect local ethnic relations and unique cultural aspects of a particular area. They offer an interesting lens through which it is possible to study the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural landscape of a region at a specific historical moment.

In this presentation, which is partly based on my master's thesis, I explore the Livonian counting-out rhymes compiled by the Estonian folklorist Oskar Loores in the early 20th century. I have examined both the original manuscripts located in the Estonian Literary Museum and in the *Volkslieder der Liven* (1936) collection in which a selection of Livonian counting-out rhymes have been published. Loores included comments given by the informants and additional contextual information in the collection. This enriches the collection by providing vernacular meanings and the contexts in which these rhymes were used.

I will analyse the counting-out rhymes, the comments made by informants and Loores' own remarks and discuss the picture they paint of the social reality of Livonian life (as well as Loores as a researcher) a century ago. Through Loores' documentation, we gain a modest yet insightful glimpse into the different cultural dynamics of Livonians in early-20th-century Courland.

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Sustainability: A Concept without a Theory?

Sustainability has become a concept that is widespread in different fields and quite a buzzword indicating good practices and future oriented and ethically responsible approaches to implementation of processes and solutions. And yet, this concept appears to be without a theory that it would be grounded in. Having been infused into academic and policy discussions often through the medium on UN communications, and the implementation of the processes related to UN institutions, the concept is being understood as practical and applied rather than theoretical.

In this presentation I will give a general summary of how sustainability is used in academic texts within the broad fields of folkloristics, cultural anthropology, and heritage and craft studies. I will then focus in more detail on how Tim Ingold positions his notion of “sustainability of everything” in contrast to the UN- or UNESCO-driven approaches. I will attempt to trace the influences of phenomenological philosophy, in this case of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, in Ingold’s development of the concept of sustainability.

I will conclude with some questions about the uses of phenomenology in the fields of cultural research, and the theory that is embedded within the phenomenological approaches, in the context of “humble theory”.

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Academic Endeavours and Popular Imaginations: The Question of Lay and Academic Voices in Folklore Studies

Folklore is a subject that has always drawn the attention of nonprofessional enthusiasts. Their contribution in many ways has been indispensable: from historical folklore collections to contemporary citizen science. Collecting folklore, nonetheless, is different from 'folk research', which, according to Stephen Olbrys Gencarella, is the "research" conducted by individuals without formal training.

In the history of folklore studies, at different times the question of nonprofessional enthusiasts has dealt with different, even opposing attitudes from Richard Dorson's neologism 'faklore' with which among other things he targeted amateurs who according to him falsified and abused the academic study of folklore, to Charles L. Brigg's work on vernacular theorising in which he invited folklorists to collaborate with non-academics regarding the theoretical issues in folkloristics.

By addressing the question of the anxieties and challenges faced by folklorists in positioning their work within broader academic and social contexts, the presentation will discuss the lay and academic voices in folklore studies in Latvia both in historical contexts as well as the current situation. In Latvia, folklore in popular understanding is often still trapped in the image of 19th-century romantic-nationalist-simplified perceptions that conceptualise the subject of folkloristics as vanishing vernacular knowledge of bygone generations. With this kind of framing, not only does critical assessment become complicated, but research topics that are uncomfortable and contested tend to receive less attention. At the same time, the romantic image is what draws many people to folklore and folkloristics in the first place.

Humble theory by Dorothy Noyes, which is the central theme of this conference, explores the middle territory between grand theory and local interpretation; following this, this presentation will explore folklore studies as the middle territory between academic endeavour and popular imagination.

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Reframing ‘Vernacular’: The Localisation of a Global Concept in Japanese Folkloristics

This study investigates how the concept of vernacular, originally rooted in global academic contexts, has been introduced and localised within Japanese folkloristics. Rather than a direct transplantation, this process constitutes a culturally situated act of translation, one that redefines the terms *minzoku* (folklore) and *minzokugaku* (folkloristics) through the lens of Japan’s intellectual traditions.

Since the early 20th century, Japanese folkloristics has shown a consistent interest in the marginal and everyday, as seen in paradigms like ‘small things studies’ (*Chiisaki mono*), ‘modern customs studies’ (*kōgengaku*), and ‘marginal art theory’ (*genkai geijutsuron*), which laid the groundwork for later vernacular discourse. From the 1980s to early 2000s, related ideas were introduced, such as Ivan Illich’s critique of modern society, the Japanese translation of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, and Leonard Primiano’s theory of vernacular religion. Yet these concepts remained marginal, lacking integration due to limited theoretical foundations in Japanese folkloristics.

After 2010, a third generation of Japanese folklorists began to actively engage with vernacular as a key concept through research projects, translations, and curated volumes, embedding it in contemporary scholarship. Takanori Shimamura defines vernacular as the “dimension of lived experience”, grounded in informal, everyday knowledge. Yutaka Suga sees it as a condition “deviating from the center”, where the centre signifies political, economic, or symbolic power. Vernacular, then, refers to marginal cultural forms often unrecognised by their distance from power. This trajectory aligns with Dorothy Noyes’ humble theory, showing how everyday, local contexts can generate critical, practice-based knowledge from the margins.

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