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In[visibilité] | In[visibility]

CULTURE & TRADITION

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Culture et Tradition (C&T) est coordonnée, éditée et publiée par un comité multigénérationnel composé d'étudiants des cycles supérieurs, de chercheurs et professionnels émergents et de professeurs établis. Historiquement publié par des étudiants des cycles supérieurs de l'Université Memorial et de l'Université Laval, C&T a été réédité en 2024 avec un comité élargi, une vision élargie et une priorité accordée à l'accessibilité. Tout en examinant le travail et les contributions de ce numéro, nous devons reconnaître l'histoire du colonialisme au Canada et nous rappeler les nombreux sacrifices involontaires des peuples autochtones pour la création et le maintien des territoires coloniaux.

Le comité de rédaction reconnaît que le territoire sur lequel nous travaillons et étudions appartient de plein droit aux Béothuks, dont la culture a été effacée à jamais. Nous reconnaissons également avec respect les peuples Mi'kmaq, Innus et Inuits de l'île de Ktaqmkuk (Terre-Neuve). Dans un esprit d'amitié, l'Université Laval rend hommage aux Premiers Peuples sur le territoire desquels elle est située. Situés au carrefour du Nionwentsïo du peuple Huron-Wenday, du Ndakina du peuple Wabanki, du Nitassinan du peuple Innu, du Nitaskinan du peuple Atikamekw et du Wolastokuk du peuple Wolastoqey, nous honorons notre relation les uns avec les autres.

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Culture & Tradition (C&T) is coordinated, edited, and published by a multigenerational board of graduate students, emerging scholars/professionals, and established faculty. Historically published by graduate students of Memorial University and Université Laval, *C&T* remerged in 2024 with an expanded board, vision, and focus on accessibility. While we consider the work and contributions of this issue, we must recognize the history of colonialism in Canada and remind ourselves of the many involuntary sacrifices of Indigenous peoples in the creation and maintenance of settler spaces.

The editorial board acknowledges the land on which we work and study rightfully belonged to the Beothuk peoples, whose culture has forever been erased. We also acknowledge with respect the Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit peoples of the island of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland). In a spirit of friendship, Université Laval pays tribute to the First Peoples on whose territory the university is situated. Being at the crossroads of the Nionwentsïo of the Huron-Wendat people, the Ndakina of the Wabanaki people, the Nitassinan of the Innu people, the Nitaskinan of the Atikamekw people, and the Wolastokuk of the Wolastoqey people, we honour our relationship with each other.

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INTRODUCTION

Visible et invisible: Folklore, in[visibilité] et politique de l'absence

Pour certains, le mot « invisibilité » évoque une atmosphère fantaisiste: des fantômes, des fées, des feux follets qui les invitent à descendre dans la forêt. Mais sous ce vernis enchanteur se cache souvent une réalité plus sombre: l'invisibilité comme lieu d'effacement, d'exclusion et d'impuissance. Qui contrôle le regard qui rend certains visibles tout en reléguant d'autres dans l'ombre? Cette question a inspiré le 36e numéro de *Culture & Tradition*. En réfléchissant à ses nuances, nous nous sommes retrouvés en terrain glissant. Être invisible, c'est être systématiquement ignoré. À l'inverse, l'hypervisibilité signifie souvent être surexposé, mal interprété ou symbolisé.

Dans ce numéro, l'in[visibilité] apparaît sous plusieurs formes: les silences des archives qui effacent les voix marginalisées, l'aplatissement des expériences vécues et la manière dont la perte façonne ce qui reste. En tant que chercheurs, artistes et membres de la communauté, nous avons la responsabilité de remettre en question ces schémas, y compris ce que nous perpétuons. Quelles histoires restent trop difficiles à voir, dont les perspectives sont trop génantes ou indisciplinées pour être incluses? Quelles traditions ont été rejetées comme insignifiantes, déviantes ou éphémères, et quels changements sont visibles lorsque nous les mettons au centre de nos préoccupations?

Les paranthèses dans notre thème sont intentionnelles : elles marquent un espace liminaire où le visible et l'invisible ne sont pas des binaires, mais des états d'être enchevrés. Nous avons sollicité des contributions qui s'attardent sur cette tension et retracent comment l'invisibilité façonne, obscurcit et révèle les paysages traditionnels que nous étudions et dans lesquels nous vivons. Les contributeurs à ce numéro ont relevé le défi de démêler ces ramifications. Leurs œuvres abordent les thèmes de la mort, les récits queer et trans, du handicap, de la représentation, de la religion vulgaire, etc. Ces essais et ces œuvres créatives résistent à une séparation claire entre les « sujets » folkloriques, attirant notre attention sur la politique de l'absence.

Cette collection commence par des silences d'archives. Dans « L'obom et son impact sur l'environnement socioculturel au Cameroun », Bridgette Ondigui retrace la réclamation de l'obom, un vêtement traditionnel camerounais en écorce, comme symbole de résilience culturelle, de lien avec l'environnement et d'identité postcoloniale. *An ordinary kiss (Un baiser ordinaire)*, un poème effacé par Daze Jefferies, témoigne de la surveillance et de l'effacement des vies et des corps des travailleuses du sexe dans la Terre-Neuve du XIXe siècle.

Dans son ouvrage intitulé « Battles in the Cemetery: Power Structures Acting Upon African-American Mortuary Landscapes in the United States », Heather Tough présente les cimetières afro-américains comme les lieux de résistance, où ces communautés ont exprimé leur résilience face à l'oppression politique et sociale. Une œuvre visuelle par Kyra Helena, *The Hall of Very Important People: Why Representation Matters,* met en lumière la représentation institutionnelle et réfléchit à la manière dont la visibilité est accordée, contestée et réfusée.

Nous poursuivons avec des œuvres qui examinent l'expérience vécue de l'in[visibilité]. L'ouvrage de R. Caroline Stampliaka, « Seen and Unseen: The Persistence of the Evil Eye in Greek Culture », explore la manière dont les dimensions invisibles du mauvais œil persistent et s'adaptent dans la culture grecque moderne. En examinant son rôle dans l'interprétation de la malfaisance, avec le remède populaire *mati*, cette étude éclaire les manières dont les pratiques vernaculaires maintiennent l'autonomie et un sentiment de sécurité. *Stretch*, une peinture d'Amelia Smith représentant la cérémonie privée de l'étirement matinal, célèbre la positivité et la neutralité corporelles et inclut des caractéristiques souvent stigmatisées par les normes de beauté traditionnelles. Situé dans le paysage liminal du sud des États-Unis, *Swamp Girl* de Kelsey Yandura réinvente le conte de fées *Undine* de Fouqué pour évoquer l'expérience d'éloignement. Dans «'They Do Things Other People Don't Like': A Folkloristic Approach to Extreme Metal Music,» Ainjel Stephens s'intéresse à la manière dont le métal extrême offre un puissant mode d'expression et de catharsis.

Dans la dernière partie de ce numéro, les contributeurs attirent notre attention sur les forces invisibles qui façonnent notre compréhension de la perte. Dans « Invisible Complexes of Death: A Preliminary Review and Personal Reflections on Researching Deathlore », Israt Lipa réfléchit sur les recherches folkloriques historiques et contemporaines sur la mort, notamment les coutumes funéraires, les mémoriaux routiers, les cimetières et les croyances populaires. Alors que l'ouvrage de Lipa examine un paysage folklorique académique, UminokoDefrayne met en lumière le paysage physique dans *Disappearing, softly*, où le vent implacable devient l'artiste, érodant les détails et faisant écho aux thèmes de la perte et de la transcendance dans le paysage et l'identité de Terre-Neuve.

Enfin, ce volume présente le lauréat du prix *Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Award for Folklore Field Research*, qui récompense les travaux universitaires de premier cycle exceptionnels. Dans « Differences in Meaning Between the Grimms' and Perrault's Versions of Sleeping Beauty », Jasper Harris-Kavanagh propose une exploration réfléchie des représentations divergentes de *La belle au bois dormant* dans les versions des Frères Grimm et Charles Perrault.

Plutôt que de chercher à résoudre les complexités de l'in[visibilité], ces oeuvres invitent les lecteurs à réfléchir avec eux en prêtant une attention particulière à ce qui a été passé sous silence, mal interprété, ou rejeté. À travers les réflexions sur le domaine d'étude, la création de recherche et les portraits éthnographiques, chaque contribution est une vitrine avec laquelle on peut voir de multiples façons dont la visibilité est accordée ou refusée. En tant que rédacteurs, nous vous invitons à lire ce numéro non seulement comme un recueil d'études et de créativité, mais aussi comme une conversation en cours sur la présence et l'absence: ce qui est mis en lumière, ce qui reste dans l'ombre et ce qui devient possible lorsque nous choisissons de regarder de plus près.

DENIELLE HILL AND KELSEY YANDURA

INTRODUCTION

Seen and Unseen: Folklore, In[visibility], and the Politics of Absence

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For some, the word "invisibility" conjures up a mood of whimsy—ghosts, fairies, will-o'-the-wisps beckoning down into the forest. Yet beneath this enchanting veneer often lies a darker reality: invisibility as a site of erasure, exclusion, and powerlessness. Who controls the gaze that renders some visible while consigning others to shadow? This question shaped the 36th issue of *Culture & Tradition*. As we considered its nuances, we stumbled into fraught terrain. To be invisible is to be systematically unacknowledged. By contrast, hypervisibility often means being overexposed, misread, or tokenized.

In this issue, in[visibility] emerges in multiple registers: archival silences that erase marginalized voices, the flattening of lived experience, and the ways in which loss shapes what is left behind. As scholars, artists, and community members, we are responsible for interrogating these patterns, including those we perpetuate. What stories remain too difficult to see, whose perspectives are too inconvenient or unruly to include? Whose traditions have been dismissed as insignificant, deviant, or ephemeral, and what shifts when we center them?

The brackets in our theme are intentional: they mark a liminal space where what is visible and invisible are not

binaries, but entangled states of being. We invited submissions that dwell in this tension and trace how in[visibility] shapes, obscures, and reveals the cultural and traditional landscapes we study and inhabit. Contributors to this issue have taken up the challenge of untangling these branches. Their work engages with deathlore, queer and trans narratives, disability, representation, vernacular religion and more. These essays and creative pieces resist tidy separations of folklore "subjects," drawing our attention to the politics of absence.

This collection begins with archival silences. In "L'obom et Son Impact Sur L'environnement Socioculturel au Cameroun," Bridgette Ondigui traces the reclamation of the obom, a traditional Cameroonian barkcloth garment, as a symbol of cultural resilience, environmental connection, and postcolonial identity. *An ordinary kiss*, an erasure poem by Daze Jefferies, bears witness to the surveillance and erasure of sex worker lives and bodies in nineteenth-century Newfoundland. Heather Tough's "Battles in the Cemetery: Power Structures Acting Upon African-American Mortuary Landscapes in the United States" shows African-American cemeteries as sites of resistance, where these communities expressed resilience against political and social oppression. A visual work by Kyra Helena, *The Hall of Very Important People: Why Representation Matters,* highlights institutional representation, reflecting on how visibility is granted, contested, and denied.

We continue with works that explore the lived experience of in[visibility]. R. Caroline Stampliaka's "Seen and Unseen: The Persistence of the Evil Eye in Greek Culture" explores how the invisible dimensions of the evil

eye persist and adapt within modern Greek culture. By examining its role in interpreting misfortune, alongside the folk remedy mati, the study illuminates the ways vernacular practices sustain agency and a sense of security. Amelia Smith's *Stretch*, a painting depicting the private ceremony of a morning stretch, celebrates body positivity and neutrality and includes features often stigmatized by mainstream beauty standards. Set within the liminal landscape of the American South, Kelsey Yandura's *Swamp Girl* reimagines Fouqué's fairy tale *Undine* to evoke the experience of estrangement. In "'They Do Things Other People Don't Like': A Folkloristic Approach to Extreme Metal Music," Ainjel Stephens turns to the way extreme metal offers a powerful mode of expression and catharsis.

In the final section of this issue, contributors draw our attention to the invisible forces that shape our understanding of loss. Israt Jahan Lipa's "Invisible Complexes of Death: A Preliminary Review and Personal Reflections on Researching Deathlore" reflects on the historical and contemporary folkloristic research on death, including funeral customs, roadside memorials, cemeteries, and folk beliefs. While Lipa's work examines an academic folkloristic landscape, Uminoko highlights the physical landscape in *Disappearing, softly,* in which the relentless wind becomes the artist, eroding details and echoing themes of loss and transcendence within Newfoundland's landscape and identity.

Lastly, this volume features the winner of the 2025 Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Award for Folklore Field Research, which recognizes superior undergraduate work. In "Differences in Meaning Between the Grimms' and Perrault's Versions of *Sleeping Beauty*," Jasper

Harris-Kavanagh offers a thoughtful exploration of the divergent portrayals of Sleeping Beauty.

Rather than seeking to resolve the complexities of in[visibility], these works invite readers to dwell within them by paying close attention to what has been muted, misread, or dismissed. Through reflections on the field, research creation, and ethnographic portraits, each contribution opens a window into the layered ways that visibility is granted or withheld. As editors, we invite you to read this issue not just as a collection of scholarship and creativity, but as an ongoing conversation about presence and absence—what is illuminated, what remains in shadow, and what becomes possible when we choose to look closer.

FLEURETTE NADÈGE BRIGITTE NGA ONDIGUI

L'obom et son impact sur l'environnement socioculturel au Cameroun

Pour le psychologue américain James Jérôme Gibson (1979, 127) et dans un contexte de grandes potentialités d'actions qu'offre notre biotope, l'homme a toujours cette capacité à transformer son environnement : « les humains ont tendance à altérer et modifier leur milieu de vie afin de changer ses moyens pour mieux leur convenir ». Il soutient par ailleurs que c'est une erreur de traiter le monde social en dehors de celui naturel ou encore les outils extra-muros de l'environnement naturel.

Dans cette optique, au Cameroun méridional, le milieu forestier dans lequel vit le peuple Ekang[1] influence sa façon de vivre. Il tire l'essentiel des matériaux utiles pour bâtir son logis, pour concocter ses plats, pour structurer son système de santé et pour confectionner ses vêtements. La production de ces vêtements implique l'utilisation d'essences forestières spécifiques, pour en faire des textiles résistants. Parmi ces textiles authentiques, nous avons le tissu végétal tiré d'écorce battue, *obom.* De fait, le peuple *Ekang* exploite l'*obom* pour des réalisations picturales, sculpturales, des éléments d'architecture, précisément les

[1] Ekang est un terme fédérateur des groupe *Beti-Bulu-Fang* empreinté au *mvet*. Concept unificateur de tout le groupe, il a pour synonyme le terme globalisant et supra-ethnique de *pahouin,* Beti. Le mot Fang est utilisé comme désignant aussi l'ensemble du groupe, bien qu'il se rapporte à un sous-groupe. Voir à ce propos Ossama, Nicolas. 2015. Rite et Croyance des anciens Beti. Yaoundé : PUCAC-CERDOTOLA.

décorations d'intérieur, des éléments de design de mode[2]. Ces productions sont abondantes et diversifiées au Cameroun méridional et offrent une impressionnante palette de motifs aussi bien figuratifs que abstraits.

La question que je conçois au centre de cet article, est de savoir quel impact l'*obom* a sur l'environnement socioculturel au Cameroun ? J'ambitionne d'une part, mettre en lumière l'acception du concept *obom* tout en le replaçant dans son contexte écologique et d'autre part, présenter sa place dans le passé et le présent des peuples de la forêt, tout en insistant sur le caractère métaphysique de l'arbre et la dialectique de l'*obom,* sans omettre de faire une emphase sur les conditions de son port et son processus d'obtention.

Obom : essai de définitions et particularités[3]

Pour recadrer la vision globale et l'acception du concept *obom,* il échoit de faire un éclairage conceptuel, et une présentation du milieu phytogéographique, car le contexte écologique qui prévaut dans cette grande zone du pays a permis la mise en place des données naturelles aptes au processus de production de l'*obom* et de ses produits connexes.

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[2] Le design de mode englobe le vestimentaire et la maroquinerie.

[3] Ma passion pour le savoir-faire endogène qu'est le textile *obom* a abouti à la rédaction d'un Master en Arts Plastiques et Histoire de l'Art, à l'Université de Yaoundé 1 au Cameroun, intitulé : *L'art de l'obom chez les Beti-Bulu-Fang : Du XIXème siècle à nos jours***.** À cet effet, des travaux ont été effectués sur le terrain, permettant de constater ses multiples utilisations.

Figure 1 **:** Une étoffe d'écorce battue tirée de l'essence *Andom.* Source : Nga Ondigui, 2010

Notion d'obom

Produit de l'écorce des moracées, battue au préalable, le tissu végétal *obom* est une forme vestimentaire chez les *Ekang*. C'est le textile végétal qu'arboraient naguère les aïeux des populations de la partie méridionale du Cameroun, soit en cache-sexe soit en pagne. Du point de vue étymologique, le mot *obom* vient du verbe *bôm*, désignant taper, battre, frapper (Galley 1964, 472). Le nom est né de la technicité, et renvoie à la technique de la fabrication du tissu.

Dans cette optique, l'*obom* est le tissu obtenu grâce à la « frappe » (Nga Ondigui 2011). Le concept *obom* renvoie également à la technique de réalisation, de fabrication des objets à partir de ce textile végétal. Le concept recouvre encore le sens de « entre les jambes ».

L'*obom* est un patrimoine culturel national précieux que l'on doit promouvoir et valoriser. Ce tissu d'écorce battue a ce don d'ubiquité d'être en même temps en Afrique, Océanie, Amérique du Sud, Centre, chez les

populations autochtones du Canada et pas exclusivement au Sud-Cameroun, comme nombreux tendent à le croire. Vénice et Alastair Lamb dans leurs écrits (1981) faisaient déjà allusion à l'étoffe d'écorce battue, comme prémices de l'étoffe *ndop* dans les Grasslands (Ouest- Cameroun). En effet, ils dévoilent dans l'ouvrage que cette étoffe d'écorce décorée en bleu grâce à une technique de peinture de réserve en provenance de l'Indonésie, serait le premier textile à être abondamment utilisé dans la région où l'on trouve actuellement la localité *Ndop au* Cameroun.

A l'Est de l'Afrique aussi, singulièrement au sud de l'Ouganda[4], il est fabriqué le tissu d'écorce pour la famille royale Baganda et le reste de la communauté. Depuis novembre 2008, **« l**a fabrication des tissus d'écorce en Ouganda » figure sur la liste représentative du patrimoine culturel immatériel de l'Humanité. C'est donc présenter l'omniprésence de cette technique, de ce matériau qu'on utilise un peu partout, malgré la multiplicité de ses dénominations. En République démocratique du Congo, en territoire Utiri, l'écorce battue est connue sous les patronymes *pongo*, *murumba*, *lengbe*[5]. En Indonésie, on la dénomme *daluang* ou *dluwang*. Dans de nombreuses autres zones, le nom *tapa* est courant. Le don d'ubiquité du tissu d'écorce battue et ses multiples nominations laisse penser que, dans une perspective historique, les ressemblances l'emportent souvent sur les différences. Et en concordance avec les propos de Caroline Gaultier-Kurban (2001, 30) :

[4] Chez les Baganda, un peuple établi dans le royaume de Buganda

[5] *Lengbe* a des déclinaisons phonétiques chez les populations Yambassa au Centre du Cameroun : *lenge,* qui veut dire se vêtir.

> Face à l'usage démagogique qui est trop souvent fait de la diversité culturelle, une meilleure connaissance du patrimoine commun à de nombreux peuples d'Afrique pourrait conduire à une conception où le panafricanisme l'emporterait enfin sur le tribalisme.

Le milieu phytogéographique

D'après certaines études (Letouzet, 1968), la carte phytogéographique montre qu'une grande partie du Cameroun méridional se trouve en zone de forêt dense. Cette forêt dense par la diversité de ses essences favorise la production de la fibre d'*obom* au sud Cameroun et par la même occasion l'expansion de ses productions artistiques. Or, il est à noter que, si le tissu est tiré des écorces d'arbres, toutes les espèces botaniques ne sont pas usitées pour son obtention.

La majorité d'essences utilisées pour l'obtention de l'écorce battue ressortent de la famille des Moracées : nous avons d'une part les *ficus* et d'autre part les *antiaris* représentés par des arbres, des arbustes. Tous les représentants d'*antiaris* sur le continent africain apparaissent comme un seul taxon infra spécifique à l'intérieur *d'Antiaris Toxicaria*, taxon pour lequel le rang de sous-espèce semble être le plus convenable (C.C. Berg et *al*. 1985, 106).

Le textile dans le passé comme dans le contexte contemporain

Aborder ce volet revient à faire un panorama de sa situation en contexte *Ekang* avant, pendant la période occidentale et dans la période postcoloniale.

Avant la rencontre avec l'Occident

Une fois que les mouvements migratoires prirent fin vers la fin du XIXème siècle, les populations vont se sédentariser. La forêt représentait pour les populations *Ekang* un monde nouveau. Etant de tradition semi-nomade, ils allaient trouver des palliatifs pour s'y accommoder. Dans la forêt inextricable et hostile, ils seront obligés de s'installer dans de gros villages, car la menace des animaux sauvages, lions, buffles, phacochères…et la végétation envahissante ne permettent plus un habitat disséminé (Biakolo Menyeng, 1986).

Dans leur nouvelle situation de sédentaires, ils allaient exploiter la nature particulièrement riche de la forêt ; leurs logis sont alors entièrement faits de matériaux tirés dans la forêt : boue argileuse pour les murs, feuilles de raphia tressées pour les toits, branches de raphia et branches d'arbres. Même l'habillement était le produit de cette forêt. Les plus âgés se contentaient de cache-sexe fait d'écorce et soutenu par une liane, l'*obom*[6]. Il est évident que pour se vêtir, l'homme ne peut utiliser que ce qui existe dans son environnement immédiat. On comprend

[6] Lire Thérèse Biakolo Menyeng. 1986. *L'œuvre des Sixas chez les Béti.1922-1960*. Mémoire d'Histoire, Université de Yaoundé I, 9-10.

mieux Michèle Coquet (1993, 28) qui, en parlant de la société ashanti du Ghana actuel dit : « pour ce peuple forestier, l'écorce est restée, par son ancienneté et surtout par sa nature, un morceau du corps de l'arbre, l'étoffe des grandes cérémonies religieuses ». Cet extrait nous renseigne sur la posture de l'être humain face à son biotope.

La fonction symbolique de ce tissu d'écorce battue était de maintenir l'existence d'un lien entre l'homme et le monde (Coquet 1993). Lien de la tradition, bien sûr celle d'un passé lointain où les hommes étaient plus proches des dieux, lien avec le monde de la nature où les hommes cherchent à se fondre et entre les différents âges et les étapes de la vie.

Pour des auteurs tels Laburthe-Tolra (1981), lors du rituel *So*[7], les *Mvón* étaient ordinairement parés de pagnes d'écorce d'o*bom*, teints de rouge de la poudre de padouk (*baa*)[8]. C'était précisément lors de l'exhibition des candidats au public, *meyén mvóno*. Le rouge, couleur de la joie lors des évènements solennels, à l'instar de l'initiation So, renvoie également à la beauté. Dans cette lancée, le candidat devait être plus beau que possible lors de cette cérémonie.

Lors de la période occidentale

Dès 1879 dans la région du sud Cameroun, en pays Bulu, on assiste à la conversion au christianisme menée par les missionnaires presbytériens américains (Nga Ondigui

[7] Le *So*, est le centre de la vie religieuse et sociale des Ekang, C'est le rituel d'initiation, passage de la vie infantile à celle adulte. Il se caractérise par plusieurs étapes, avec au final la circoncision de l'initié.
[8] Le *Mvón* est l'appellation locale du candidat au rituel *So.* Lire Laburthe-Tolra 1985.

2022). Mais en fait, tout commence plus de quarante ans au paravent, à la suite de l'arrivée des premiers missionnaires au Cameroun, venus d'Amériques (Jean Criaud et *al.* 1992). Il en découle un début de changements dans les mœurs des populations[9].

Figure 2 : Candidats au rituel d'initiation So, vêtus d'*obom.* Source : Laburthe Tolra (1985, 260)

Sous protectorat Allemand en 1884, les populations abandonneront les us et coutumes, de même que leurs formules de bienséance ; par extension le port du tissu d'écorce battue, *obom*, impuissants face à la domination

[9] Il faut noter qu'en 1879 le Cameroun n'est pas encore sous le protectorat Allemand. Le protestantisme, historiquement est le premier christianisme au Cameroun. Ces missionnaires occidentaux ont façonné la géographie protestante contemporaine.

allemande. De nombreuses restructurations concernant certaines pratiques, mais également les arts du corps et de la parure sont amorcés dans la zone. Le rite *So* ayant favorisé le port d'un certain type d'objets (parmi lesquels l'*obom*), sera banni des usages religieux, ainsi que le port des parures et costumes ; ceci au bénéfice des tenues occidentales (Nga Ondigui 2022). Léopold-François Eze (1969, 182-183) souligne dans sa thèse les nouvelles mises en garde du Chef Supérieur des Ewondo et des Bënë Charles Atangana et qui allaient modifier la société *Ekang*.

> Désormais, vous ne saluerez plus « ovuma », comme le faisaient les Beti depuis toujours. Si vous saluez votre frère le matin, dites « bon matin ». Vers le milieu du jour dites « bonjour » et le soir « bonsoir » …Les hommes ne porteront plus l' « obom », ne se teindront plus le corps avec le « baa », que tous portent des vêtements de tissus ; les femmes ne mettront plus l'« ebui », ni l'« ékuba ». Que finissent les anciennes tresses (koe, mesa, bevuvulu) ; toute femme ne doit porter désormais que des « minteg » ou des « bilat » ; aucune femme ne teindra plus le corps avec le « baa », que toutes portent des robes, bien que l'argent soit difficile. L'homme ne construira plus de mur en écorce. Que toutes les portes soient en bois « aban », et que tous ne construisent plus que des maisons en terre battues, avec trois ou quatre fenêtres…

Le rapport à ce tissu *obom* va donc se transformer au fil de l'histoire. C'est dire en effet que l'agentivité coloniale a pris de l'ascendance en affectant les façons de faire, de vivre et de penser.

L'obom dans le contexte postindépendance

Plus de soixante ans après l'indépendance, l'*obom* connait une résurgence. Cela est visible tel qu'évoqué en dessus, dans de nombreux domaines : la décoration d'intérieur, les productions sculpturales et picturales, le design de mode et la maroquinerie

C'est dans les années 1969-1970 qu'un intérêt pour le tissu végétal se développe. Les religieuses, singulièrement les Sœurs Clarisses installées depuis longtemps dans la région de l'Est du Cameroun (Abong-Mbang), vont valoriser des tableaux des artistes locaux utilisant le matériau *obom*. Le public Camerounais va donc entrer en contact avec le tissu, non plus sous forme de cache-sexe ou de pagne, mais comme un matériau phare pour les réalisations picturales[10]. Ces tableaux exécutés grâce à la technique de collage, représentaient dans un style figuratif, des scènes de vie quotidiennes des populations de la région de l'Est : des femmes berçant des enfants, des hommes effectuant des travaux champêtres, des femmes dans l'exécution de leur devoir culinaires, des représentations d'animaux …etc. Pour Engelbert Mveng (1980, 7),

> L'art traditionnel était une vaste encyclopédie populaire où se lisait la sagesse d'autrefois, les connaissances scientifiques, la conception du monde et de l'homme, la religion, la société, les travaux de tous les jours et les métiers, les jeux et les loisirs, et par-dessus tout, l'histoire du peuple créant sa pérennité à travers le temps.

[10] L'enjeu est d'intéresser le public sur les nouveaux usages de ce legs ancestral qu'est l'*obom* et ainsi, aider à sa pérennisation.

Une fois que ces tableaux étaient récupérés auprès des artisans, les religieuses les exposaient à la Librairie Saint- Paul de Yaoundé, pour y être vendus. C'est subséquemment par ce canal que le Révérend Père Engelbert Mveng va être fasciné par le tissu et ses produits dérivés. Par le biais de l'Atelier Art Nègre[11] de Yaoundé dans les années 1970[12], il sera question de besogner pour une valorisation et une promotion du tissu *obom* à une échelle plus nationale et internationale. L'objectif miré par l'Atelier sera de réhabiliter le blason culturel camerounais spécialement et celui de l'Afrique en général ; ce qui va dans le sens de Felwine Sarr (2016,14) :

> L'Afrotopos est ce lieu autre de l'Afrique dont il faut hâter la venue, car réalisant ses potentialités heureuses. Fonder une utopie, ce n'est point se laisser aller à une douce rêverie, mais penser des espaces du réel à faire advenir par la pensée et l'action ; c'est repérer les signes et les germes dans le temps présent, afin de les nourrir.

L'Atelier va intégrer l'*obom* à divers échelons et le faire breveter, cela permettra son succès : « Ce tissu, expérimenté et breveté par l'Atelier Art Nègre de Yaoundé, est aujourd'hui utilisé dans le revêtement : imputrescible, insonorisant, décoratif, il crée une atmosphère à la fois d'opulence, de simplicité et de beauté ». (Mveng 1980, 100).

Le début de XXI ème siècle, précisément les années 2000, sera marqué par une grande volonté de promotion et de valorisation de l'*obom*. Cette volonté est très perceptible

[11]Laboratoire artistique mis sur pied par Engelbert Mveng.
[12]Propos de l'un des dessinateurs de cet atelier, Etolo Eyah, recueillis en juin 2019.

au niveau des artistes plasticiens des régions du Centre, Sud, Est qui, dans la quête d'une originalité et d'une authenticité dans la production plastique, ont recours à l'utilisation du matériau. Des créations picturales aux créations sculpturales, en passant par le fashion design, la décoration, la maroquinerie, la tendance est à l'écorce battue. Les réalisations au truchement du matériau sont profuses et poussent à l'admiration. Les créateurs rivalisent d'adresse dans des styles et des techniques distinctes. Il demeure évident que la célébrité de l'*obom* est due à sa spécificité (tissu tiré des écorces d'arbres battues), et plusieurs œuvres plastiques en *obom* ont été offertes au cours de ces dernières années, en cadeaux aux éminents hôtes en visite au Cameroun.

En écho aux plasticiens, certains artistes musiciens se réapproprient le matériau en le vêtant dans leurs vidéogrammes et même lors de multiples montées sur scènes. L'heure n'est plus à la méconnaissance des valeurs endogènes, conséquence de l'acculturation profonde, de l'invisibilisation et de la subalternisation, menant à *l'afrodestructisme*[13]. La déconstruction de ce lessivage qui a entrainé la dissolution des traditions passe par une reconstruction de la pensée culturelle, par le recours aux sources, par la réappropriation et la valorisation des identités culturelles et cultuelles. Cela implique une

[13] Le concept d'*afrodestructisme* que j'ai élaboré s'oppose à celui d'afrofuturisme. La faiblesse de l'Afrique ici est tirée de l'histoire et des traditions occidentales. Au truchement de ce terme, les populations ont intégré que leurs savoirs locaux sont des réalités subalternes ; la négation de soi s'est installée et a créé un effacement profond. Lire à ce propos l'article de Nga Ondigui, Brigitte.2022. « Réécriture de soi chez les Ekang : entre savoir mémoriel et valeur identitaire du m'mouat (costume) », dans *Revista de Antropologia da UFSCAR*.

décolonisation des savoirs et une réinterprétation de savoirs locaux des communautés invisibilisées. Les *Ekang* ont pris conscience de l'attrait de leurs savoir-faire, savoir-être et savoir-vivre. Ces savoirs locaux font d'eux des êtres compétitifs dans la dynamique contemporaine de l'émergence.

Figure 3 : Majesté Edzoa Alphonse vêtu *d'obom l*ors de son intronisation. Chef de 3ème degré, Mimboman-Sud
Source : Nga Ondigui, 2017

Figure 4 : Abat-jour en liane et *obom*
Création : Meye Yves, 2020

De nos jours, il est courant de voir les garants de la tradition, ces hauts dignitaires que sont les chefs traditionnels du Cameroun méridional arborer l'*obom* lors de certaines solennités[14]. En effet, la culture de la

[14] L'*obom* se porte lors des cérémonies d'intronisations, lors des festivals pour Chefs Traditionnels, lors de certaines cérémonies de grande envergure.

production et du port de ce textile aujourd'hui sont synonymes de la renaissance culturelle d'un peuple, celui *Ekang* d'une part, mais encore, la réconciliation de ce dernier avec lui-même d'autre part. Subséquemment, le 25 août 2006 à Ebolowa (région du Sud Cameroun) sous le récépissé n°0087 /RDA/LO7/BAPP, le Conseil Annuel des Chefs Traditionnels, autrefois désigné Forum des Chefs Traditionnels, a réhabilité le textile végétal en l'adoptant comme tenue d'apparat :

> Après avoir jeté un coup d'œil dans le passé, la crise d'une identité culturelle vestimentaire qui apparaît au Sud, au Centre et à l'Est du Cameroun ne saurait se justifier, tant il est vrai que le génie créateur de ces peuples a bien pourvu des attributs vestimentaires bien spécifiques à ses fils et filles : l'Obom. Ce qui justifie l'adoption de la tenue imposée par l'administrateur coloniale, excepté dans la zone de l'Océan et certaines grandes chefferies du Centre résidant dans la forêt.[15]

Cette tenue d'apparat peut être entièrement ou en partie constituée d'*obom*, ceci pour la promotion de l'identité culturelle spécifique à chaque chef traditionnel.

La métaphysique de l'arbre et la dialectique de l'obom

Dans cette partie, il est présenté le côté transcendantal de l'arbre. Ce côté transcendantal qui n'a de valeur que grâce à l'homme.

[15] Lire à ce propos le document sur la 3ème édition du Forum des Chefs Traditionnels du Sud / Ambam 2008, 9.

La Conception métaphysique de l'arbre et la dialectique de l'obom

Pour Charles Hirsch (1988, 8) « l'arbre, dans sa verticalité, est un lieu sacré où le ciel s'enracine à la terre ». L'arbre, par ses dimensions quelquefois impressionnantes semble se hisser jusqu'au ciel. Il émane aussi de l'arbre, une certaine impression d'éternité. Sa lente croissance est faite de quiétude, d'aisance et de durée de temps. De nombreux arbres peuvent vivre plus longtemps que la moyenne des êtres humains.

Par sa forme, l'arbre est aussi particulièrement intéressant, car elle convoque celle de l'être humain. Les pieds de l'être humain sont les racines de l'arbre, son corps est le tronc, ses bras sont les branches de l'arbre et sa tête, le faîte de l'arbre. À cause de toutes ces particularités, l'arbre et le bois sont enracinés dans l'univers symbolique humain. Dans les Saintes Ecritures[16], l'emploi de métaphores faisant appel à l'arbre et au bois est très répandu. Ainsi, le peuple d'Israël est souvent comparé à un arbre, que ce soit la vigne, l'olivier ou le figuier (Jérémie 2, 21). Les auteurs bibliques rapprochent parfois les caractéristiques particulières de certaines sortes d'arbres aux qualités d'êtres humains. À titre d'exemple, le cèdre évoque la grandeur (Cantiques 5, 15), le chêne, la force (Amos 2, 9), l'olivier, la longévité (Psaume 52, 10). Les différentes composantes de l'arbre sont parfois associées à diverses expériences humaines. On parle de généalogie en termes de souche, de racines ou de surgeon (Esaïe 11, 1).

[16]J'ai utilisé ici Louis Second, cette *Sainte Bible*, traduite d'après les textes originaux Hébreu et Grec, Corée ; édition revue avec références de 2005.

Le fruit de l'arbre représente l'aboutissement de la descendance d'une personne (Luc 1, 42). Les feuilles et les fleurs sont associées à l'idée d'étendue, de protection, de prospérité (Osée 14, 6).

Quant au bois, on rapproche ses diverses qualités de celles des hommes et des femmes. Le livre des Lamentations décrit ainsi une misère extrême : « Leur peau est collée à leurs os, sèche comme du bois » (4, 8). Job décrit la finitude de l'être humain de cette manière : « Et lui s'effrite comme un bois vermoulu » (13, 28)

Dans la conception bantoue, l'arbre est assimilé à un Dieu. Il a des racines dans le sol et s'élève jusqu'au ciel. Quant-à l'Homme, *Nti,* il est le Seigneur : celui de la forêt. Dans cette logique, l'arbre est d'abord un lieu de paix et de repos sous lequel l'homme de la forêt se met pour régler ses conflits. Le baobab, *Adanso nia*, est cet arbre à palabre, gigantesque s'élevant fièrement. Dans les sociétés bantoues, il existe un lien étroit entre les choses et ce à quoi elles renvoient. De ce fait, l'*obom* communique les caractéristiques de l'essence dont il est extrait à celui qui le porte. C'est ainsi que : le fromager, *dum, ceiba pentandra* évoque par sa belle allure *duma,* une glorieuse réputation. Le fraqué, *akom, kom, Terminalia superbia* évoque la longue durée. Le parasolier, *aseng, Kombo, Musanga cecropioides* diminue le mal. Chez les Mpongoué du Gabon, *Kombo* est une parole magique, un terme de malédiction par lequel celui qui le prononce se protège ou se venge de tout le mal provenant de ceux au nom desquels il a invoqué la parole magique. L'*abing, Pertersianthus macrocapuslïben* « interdit » le mal **(**Théodore Tsala 1956, 537). L'iroko, *abang, Milicia Excelsa* évoque à la fois la longévité, la robustesse et l'union (Adolphe Obam 1992,

68). Au Cameroun, de nombreux lieux ont hérité de son nom : Abang Mindi dans le Nyong et Soo, Oyom-Abang, dans le Mfoundi, Abang Minkoé près d'Ambam…À cela, on retiendra que la plupart de ces essences recèlent de nombreuses vertus.

En se vêtant donc d'*obom*, les chefs traditionnels, les notables …tout comme l'arbre, s'implantent dans leurs racines pour puiser dans le terroir. Ils sont en relation avec l'au-delà où ils tiennent l'essence même de la vie, comme l'arbre majestueusement, relie le ciel à la terre. Le port du tissu tiré de l'écorce est synonyme de sagesse, de discernement et de bonne repartie. Une autre vision de la chose permet d'affirmer que cet attribut vestimentaire stipule l'appartenance à une caste spécifique : celle des initiés.

Dans les conceptions *Ekang* d'autrefois, le maniement, l'obtention du fer, le travail du bois était un privilège masculin. La confection des tissus d'écorce battue, *obom* leur était également réservée, ainsi que son port. Laburthe-Tolra (1981, 274) souligne que : « dans la même optique qui leur réservait le travail du bois, ce sont les hommes qui confectionnaient les tissus d'écorce battue (*Obom*) qu'ils étaient d'ailleurs les seuls à porter ». La société ayant muté, il faut relever de nos jours que le port ou le travail de l'*obom* ne sont plus destinés uniquement aux seuls hommes. Les femmes le confectionnent et le portent également.

Est-ce donc à dire que ce port d'écorce battue, était l'apanage de tout mâle pahouin ? N'était- il pas déterminé par certaines conditions ?

Les conditions du port de l'obom

Au Cameroun méridional, porter le tissu d'*obom* nécessite certaines exigences. Ces exigences incombent aussi bien à l'ancienne société qu'à celle actuelle ; quoique le port de ce tissu se soit démocratisé.

L'appartenance à une caste spécifique

Dans la société ancienne, le port de l'*obom* faisait référence à une caste spécifique, celle des nobles, une caste de « vrai-homme », *mfaŋ mod,* une élite au sens propre du terme. Les esclaves adultes auxquels les maîtres ne donnent pas de femmes, les captifs n'en avaient pas droit, de même que les vierges, les impubères. Une fois qu'on devenait un homme respectable, un homme libre, on pouvait s'en revêtir. C'est dans ce sens que Philippe Laburthe-Tolra (1981) relève qu'il est logique que les vierges, ou les impubères, ou les esclaves auxquels leur maître ne donne pas de femme, restent nus. Vu sous cet angle, l'*obom* peut être considéré comme le lien symbolisant le passage de la condition servile à celle d'homme libre. A cet effet, Manga dans les écrits de Laburthe-Tolra, est présenté comme un esclave à la fois nu et incirconcis :

> Dès le lendemain de son retour chez lui, Mbartsog circoncit et rasa Manga. Puis il l'habilla d'un pagne d'écorce (obom), lui donna l'une de ses femmes appelées Ovah Bino ainsi que deux ou quatre esclaves, lui fit cadeau d'une hotte d'igname, et lui dit : « je vais t'indiquer ton village ». Il l'accompagna alors sur la colline appelée Ndzendzaala et l'y installa en ces termes : « Demeure ici, en y

agissant comme le font les gens responsables du pays ».

En tant que symbole, la tenue d'apparat du chef traditionnel chez les Ekang traduit sa position sociale. Pour Wilfried Amassako (2008, 33), cela « traduit les besoins, voire les nécessités d'un groupe de s'identifier dans la communauté, de relever un statut ». Ainsi vêtu, le chef traditionnel est l'incarnation du pouvoir traditionnel ; la population lui doit obéissance et respect. Tout porte également à croire que l'*obom,* véhiculait un message de justice et de paix.

Obom : vecteur de justice et de paix

Se vêtir d'*obom* renvoyait (dans la société ancienne) à une période de paix. De la sorte, pour signifier son mécontentement, sa détresse, on se dénudait. Par la nudité, on exprimait sa détresse, mais celle-ci était surtout morale. C'est dans cet état d'esprit que Laburthe-Tolra (1981, 182) présente Okala Ntsama, chef des Enoa de Mvengué, se rendant nu à Lolodorf pour manifester la vigueur des reproches Enoa contre les Bénés, auprès du commandant allemand. Ces derniers ayant décidé de les exterminer tous en moins de trois jours. Il est dit à ce propos : « Le grand chef Enoa de Mvengué, Okala Ntsama, était l'ami des Allemands et le gardien de la route du gouvernement. Quand il apprit ce qui se préparait contre les siens, il enleva son *obom* (pagne d'écorce) et se mit à se rouler dans la poussière ». Se dévêtir est signe de colère, c'est une crise vis-à-vis de la nature, de la société.

Cette nudité en temps de guerre signifie qu'on laisse de côté toute considération de bienséance. On est donc

déterminé à tuer comme une bête, de manière cynique. Il y a également un élément de provocation dans cette tenue, puisque le sexe est avec la tête le trophée des guerres. C'est un acte de bravoure, de courage, un suicide ou un défi lancé à l'autre de venir s'emparer du trophée, en même temps qu'elle demeure affirmation de la virilité physique, toujours liée chez l'homme comme chez l'animal à l'agressivité.

Obom : nouveau langage d'une identité culturelle

Tel que présenté au monde en 1966 à l'occasion du premier Festival International des Arts Nègres de Dakar, l'art africain ne se limite pas à certains masques qualifiés de « primitifs » (Césaire 1973), mais il reflète l'aboutissement d'une évolution des formes commencées depuis six millénaires par les décors des poteries et de peintures rupestres. De même l'*obom* au Cameroun méridional ne se limite pas à la transformation du liber en tissu d'écorce battue ou encore au cache-sexe et pagne porté par les aïeux des populations Ekang.

Fort de ce dessein, cet art n'est pas resté statique. Il connait une dynamisation remarquable aussi bien synchronique que diachronique. Il appert que les habitudes de consommation ont changé. L'utilisation récurrente de ce tissu végétal, dans diverses productions contemporaines a permis des usages nouveaux, contre-coup d'une diversité de styles et de techniques ; mais encore d'un contexte postcolonial hybride. Alors, rien d'étonnant sur ces élocutions du critique d'art Sénégalais Iba Ndiaye (2003, 61) : « parler de la contemporanéité des arts d'Afrique, C'est montrer que le traditionnel n'est pas ancien, comme du reste le moderne n'est pas obligatoirement ce qui est.

C’est révéler que le postmoderne est aussi post-contemporain ». Dans une logique similaire, le rapport des Etats Généraux de la Culture de 1991 au Cameroun, préconise que l’angle de contact et la puissance d’impact, de même que l’osmose entre l’identité et l’universalité doivent être réajustés.

Avoir chez soi des créations *d’obom* (vêtements, tableau, objets de la décoration d’intérieur…) est un moyen d’attester son agentivité culturelle, son inclination à la culture, d’affirmer son rang social, son pouvoir d’achat et sa personnalité ; mais encore son identité culturelle. C’est dire donc que le rapport au textile végétal est un phénomène impliquant le collectif via la société, le regard qu’elle renvoie, les codes qu’elle impose et le goût individuel.

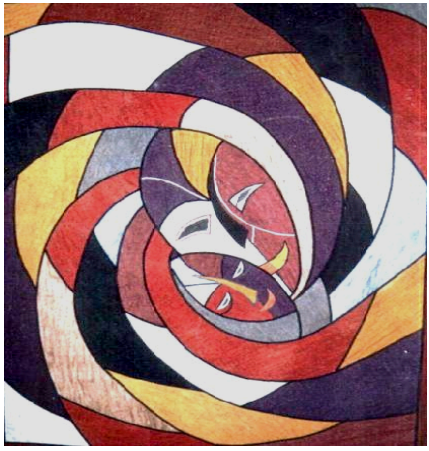

Figure 5 : Dorothée Efang, Sans titre, 75cm x 50cm, collage sur *obom*. Yaoundé-Cameroun

N’est-ce pas la meilleure preuve qu’en Afrique, globalement et au Cameroun singulièrement, il existe des

valeurs vivantes qui ne sont d'autres que nos cultures ? Nous pouvons proposer des choses en matière artistique, esthétique aux autres, si et seulement si nous rentrons dans nos « habitus ». Cet *obom* se veut une identité rayonnante, une référence. Comme aime à le dire Martien Towa (1985, 38), « en tant que valeur, le culturel ne se replie pas sur soi, le culturel s'affirme ». Ainsi, on doit leur vanter l'*obom,* le leur expliquer ; c'est –à-dire, donner une plus-value à cet ethno-produit. Qu'en est-il du mécanisme d'obtention de ce textile végétal *obom* ?

Figure 6 : Fleurs et vase en obom.
Création : Honorine Polbot
Source : Nga Ondigui, 2010

Figure 7 : Mannequin vêtu *d'obom*
Création 3D : Bibi Kent's, 2023

Du milieu d'extraction au tissu d'obom

Des essences spécifiques de Moracées sont fréquemment usitées au plateau Sud Camerounais, pour leur excellente qualité à donner des étoffes flexibles, leur couleur, parfois blanche, orangée, roux ; et pour leur abondance dans le milieu d'extraction.

Une fois que l'arbre est choisi dans le site d'extraction, l'artiste ou l'artisan l'abat. D'autres en revanche prélevaient directement l'écorce de l'arbre, pour en faire une étoffe d'*obom*. Ce second cas privilégie la protection environnementale, la réduction des effets de serre, conformément aux objectifs de développement durable. L'arbre peut ainsi prolonger sa durée de vie et son écorce peut se régénérer après une certaine période.

Figure 8 : Étages d'obtention du tissu *obom.* Source : Nga Ondigui, 2010

L'arbre choisi est d'un diamètre allant de 8 à 10 cm et doté d'un tronc éventuellement régulier. Ce dernier est ensuite découpé en tranches, selon la longueur que l'on veut concéder au tissu. L'écorce, à l'aide d'une machette,

est adroitement dégagée pour ne laisser montrer que le liber. Celui-ci est entaillé sur toute sa longueur et assouplit à coups de battoirs sur un support réservé à cet effet.

Le liber est plié, battu sur l'autre face ; plié une nouvelle fois, battu avant de le retravailler plier en diagonale. Cette façon de procéder a pour résultat de doubler la longueur du textile en conservant sa largeur. À la fin, l'étoffe est dépliée et passée plusieurs fois dans de l'eau, avant d'être séchée au soleil.

Pour ne pas Conclure[17]

Au terme de cette réflexion qui se proposait de présenter l'impact de l'*obom* sur l'environnement socioculturel au Cameroun, il en ressort que ce tissu végétal a été un vecteur de dignité, de prestige et de noblesse. Il a également été usité dans les rites, en occurrence le *So*. Associé à la poudre de padouk, *baa, Pterocarpus soyauxii* il était le symbole de la beauté, de la vie. De même, son association aux écailles de pangolin et de poudre blanche de kaolin, mettait en présence d'un habillement magique. C'est ainsi que le port de l'écorce battue communique les caractéristiques de l'arbre dont le tissu est tiré à son porteur, ceci dans le but de lui communiquer les caractéristiques de l'arbre. C'est enfin un vecteur de justice et de paix entre les Hommes.

Une évidence demeure en ceci que, les sociétés « traditionnelles » ne sont pas restées inchangées,

[17]Nous utilisons cette expression pour montrer que l'impact socioculturel du tissu d'écorce battue est une thématique très vaste. Nous avons dans le cas de cet article, juste présenté un bref panorama. Beaucoup reste encore à dire.

elles se sont dynamisées. L'*obom,* lien représentatif du génie de l'Homme de la forêt et de son environnement immédiat, s'inscrit dans la magie et l'essence même de la vie au Cameroun méridional. Dans un contexte postcolonial, l'*obom* connait de nouveaux usages et réappropriations qui permettent sa pérennisation. Ce dernier est un héritage social qui est lié à ce à quoi les Ekang pensent, croient et aspirent. N'y a-t-il pas lieu de valider cette assertion de Pie-Claude Ngumu (1985, 329) ?

> La culture est l'héritage collectif d'une société. C'est un ensemble homogène de réactions psychiques d'objets matériels et de faits sociaux qui permettent au groupe d'assurer sa subsistance et sa vie quotidienne. C'est également un ensemble d'institutions qui coordonnent les activités des membres du groupe. La culture est donc ce par quoi un certain nombre d'hommes se ressemblent entre eux parce qu'ils ont part au même héritage social.

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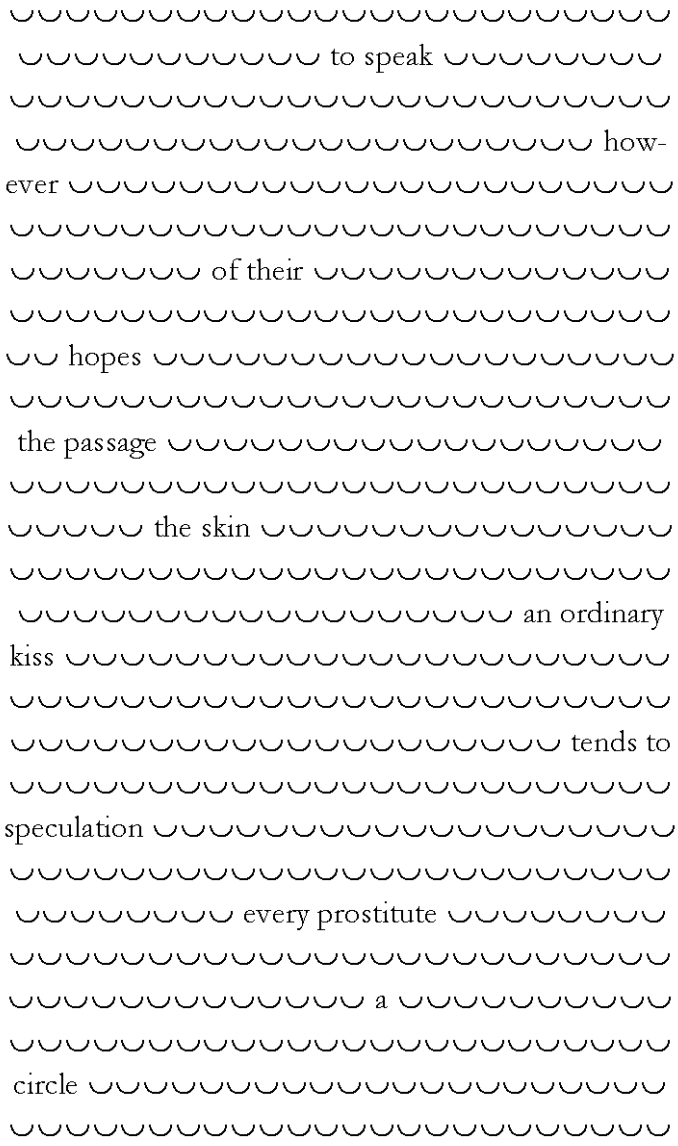
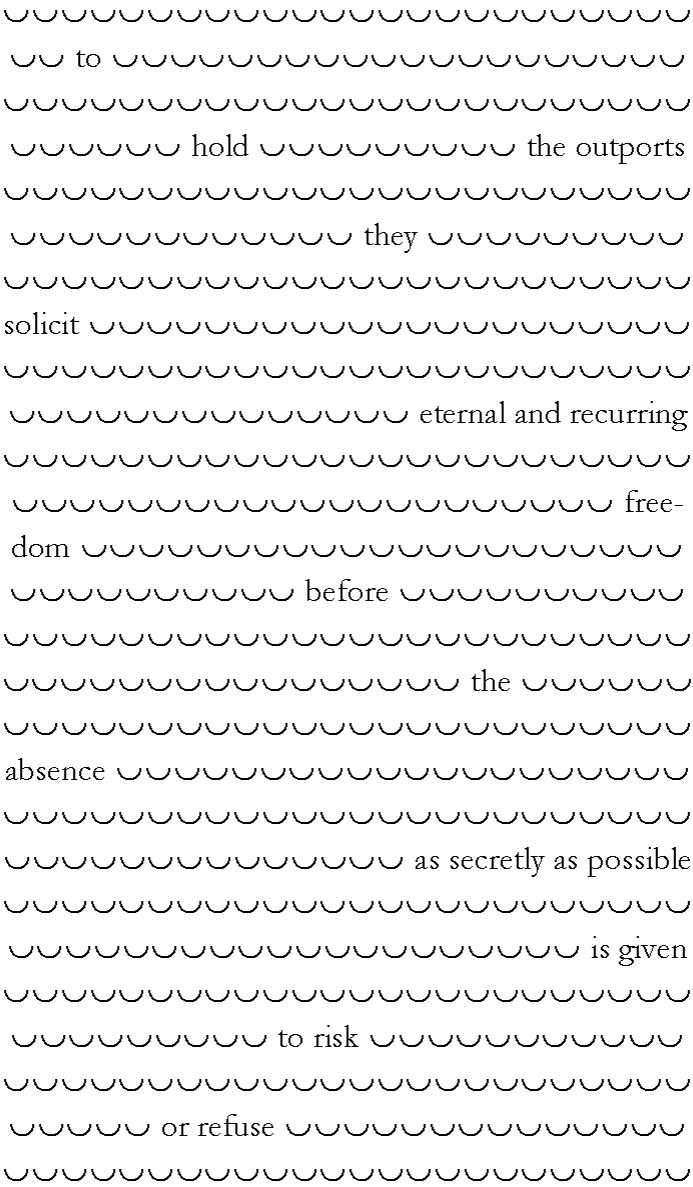
an ordinary kiss

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poème d'effacement
2024

an ordinary kiss
erasure poem
2024

Ce poème répond à un article de journal publié en 1944 dans The Western Star (Corner Brook) intitulé « Venereal Disease in Newfoundland ». Cet article est composé d'extraits d'un discours médical prononcé par le Dr James McGrath, qui dénigrait les communautés des travailleuses sexuelles à St. John's et a provoqué une panique morale dans toute la province au sujet de la santé sexuelle. Reconnaissant la ténacité des ancètres des travailleuses sexuelles, et recherchent des liens intimes au sein et contre le récit historique, la forme du poème effacé, en tant que contre-récit, répond à la surveillance, à l'abjection et l'examen invisibilisant des vies et corps des travailleuses sexuelles, reécrivant l'article pour offrir une pratique alternative de reconnaissance à travers le temps.

*

This poem responds to a 1944 newspaper article, titled "Venereal Disease in Newfoundland," published in *The Western Star* (Corner Brook). The article is made up of extracts from a medical address given by Dr. James McGrath that disparaged sex worker communities in St. John's and facilitated a province-wide moral panic over sexual health. Acknowledging the tenacity of sex worker foremothers and seeking intimate connections within and against the historical record, the form of the erasure poem as counter-narrative responds to the surveillance, abjection, and invisibilizing scrutiny of sex worker lives and bodies, re-storying the article to offer an alternative practice of recognition across time.

HEATHER TOUGH

Battles in the Cemetery: Power Structures Acting Upon African-American Mortuary Landscapes in the United States.

Walking down a sandy lane in the southern United States on the outskirts of the local community, your footsteps kick up clouds of dirt that make the hot, dry air difficult to breathe. The light breeze does little to relieve the heat, and through the thick drone of cicadas, you hear the sound of a slow-moving river. Following the sound in hopes of taking a quick swim, you discover a wild-grown field of rolling mounds. Trees litter the area, growing twisted and knobbed around boulders, tall grasses sway in the light breeze, and native wildflowers provide homes to buzzing insects. When walking through the forgotten landscape, you find non-native flowers and trees such as periwinkle, yuccas, daylilies, and cedar trees are clustered about, and you start to notice pieces of broken glass, shards of ceramics and tobacco pipes (Baugher and Veit 2014 169-170; Brooks 2011, 180-181; Burg 2023, 549).

Near the back of the field, a concrete gravestone has fallen over, its inscription rendered illegible by lichen. You realize that you are in a forgotten burial ground, and in trying to figure out the identity of these nameless people laid to rest underneath your feet, you find a curious metal star-shaped spoke that says "USCT."

This marker is a government-issued military grave marker from the Civil War for the United States Colored Troops (Baugher and Veit 2014 175-176; Burg 2023, 563; King 2010, 133). You have stumbled your way into a decomposing African-American historic cemetery, now only remembered by a few older community members whose families and friends were buried here long ago. What remains of this once active resting ground of the dead tells whispers of a time of hard colour lines, political segregation, denied freedoms. Most importantly, however, it also speaks of bonded community and strong resilience. Although African-American life in the United States has always been, and continues to be, a fight for equality and freedom, the years between the American Revolutionary War of 1775 to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 was a significant period of political, social, and economic marginalization, struggle, and change.

By analyzing and comparing African-American Antebellum and post-emancipation cemeteries through a Foucauldian and post-processualist understanding and representation of power, I will illustrate how African-Americans pushed against enslavement and marginalization and expressed their form of unique power. This resistance will be unveiled by looking at the political and economic structures enacted upon the cemeteries, their physical layout, and the symbolic expressions of identity to illustrate these communities' struggle and resilience.

Theoretical Background

Power is an unbounded, multi-dimensional concept used in the social sciences to discuss sets of relations between

all elements of social life, including the agency of people, socio-political-economic structures, and environments. Philosopher and social historian Michel Foucault's theory of power is one of the most prevalent theory and definition of power, which was introduced in his work *Discipline and Punish* (1975):

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (Lynch 2014, 19).

Foucault identifies three empirical modes of power: sovereignty power, disciplinary power, and biopower. Sovereignty power is the earliest form of power enacted through a central dominating entity, whether a sovereign ruler, a tribunal, or a government (Lynch 2014, 13). This power is represented through the ability to seize or take away rather than through direct control. Sovereign power can end a life, but also enslave or impoverish it. What it cannot take, however, it cannot control. This is often illustrated through legal systems that follow an execution-based punishment system based on revenge rather than rehabilitation (Taylor 2014, 44-46). Within a sovereign dominant society, death is heavily ritualized as it

is the ultimate expression of the ruler's power, whether through the taking of life through executions, or the gaudy funeral mourning of those in power. Disciplinary power, which emerged in the 18th century, is concerned with the control of individuals through surveillance-based correctional systems and is the most common expression of power in modern organization of societies. Discipline is focused on individuals' psychological and material conditions for deviance and maintains and enforces order through institutional facilities such as prisons, psychiatric wards, and education systems (Lynch 2014, 13-14; Taylor 2014, 44). Biopower emerged slightly after disciplinary power. These two are heavily intertwined and use the same control methods. Disciplinary power is focused on the individual and micro-technology; biopower, in contrast, is understood as the power over the body and is concerned with populations and macro-technology (Taylor 2014, 44-46). Biopower focuses on systematic reasons for social behaviour, is concerned with demographics, and can give and improve life. It is expressed through a population's accessibility to health care, housing, and migration. Since biopower is enforced through giving life, death becomes a muted, hidden aspect of life compared to the highly visible, pompous displays of executions and mourning under sovereignty power (Lynch 2014, 14; Taylor 2014, 44-46). Cemeteries and other mortuary settings have been, and always will be, a political landscape where mortuary rites reflect conflict and power structures. Strict protocol, rules and expectations of representation following the death of a loved one are enforced through varying governing bodies. Individuals are boiled down to basic societal identity markers, whether those be gender, religion, class, or race.

Theory and methods for interpreting these basic societal identity markers through grave goods, cemetery organization, and burial type are constantly being refined and negotiated within archaeology. This is due to their importance as multi-faceted signifiers of deeply entangled, heavily ritualized, and complex elements of social life. Early structural functionalists, such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, interpreted the funerary rite both as evidence of social bonds between mourners and as a strengthening of political authority (Parker Pearson 2000, 22-23). New Archaeologists, such as Binford, Saxe, and Goldstein, tried following middle-range theory to create axioms of funerary customs based on ethnographic databases rooted within a historical evolutionary model of societies and social stratification (Binford 1971; Brown 1993, 3-5; Carr 1995; Parker Pearson 2000, 72-78). The post-processualist school of thought discarded the New Archaeological notion of middle-range theory and instead viewed funerals as contested events in which social roles are constructed, negotiated, or discarded, aligning with the theory of practice. In this model, social roles are not predefined, but are instead constantly affirmed through social action and practice. Status is considered to be formed based on inextricably interwoven elements of one's gender, political, and kinship positionality, lifestyle, and economic class. This status is also heavily influenced by agency over structural functionalism (Cipolla 2014; Parker Pearson 2000, 72-94).

These post-processual reconceptualizations on how rank and status are created and maintained within societies allowed for new understandings of the inner workings of power and ideology within funerary archaeology. This in turn changed the understanding of mortuary landscapes to not simply be a direct reflection of the living, but a moment where power can be radically reordered and indicate people's understanding of social relationships and the meaning of existence through tangible and intangible means (Parker Pearson 2000, 83-85). This idealized reflection and contestation of power are why Foucault considers cemeteries as a strange but powerful heterotopia, or places of "simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live " (Foucault 1986, 23). They are locations outside the everyday aspects of life and are heavily ritualized spaces. They are, however, simultaneously connected to and representative of an idealized, organized, and simplified form of all aspects of society (Foucault 1986, 23-24).

Mortuary landscapes are a form of resilience and identity building, reflecting the unspoken political struggles within the communities while also redefining them.

Historical Background

The transatlantic slave trade, originating in the 16th century, was a terrible, extensive, and lucrative trading network whose purpose was the mass, forced migration of African populations by colonial powers such as Britain, the US, France, Denmark, and Spain to the New World in order to provide labour for the exploitation of natural

resources (Gates 2011, 3-11). The slave trade started in the American Colonies in August of 1619, one year before the Mayflower landed. During the slave trade period, over 12 million Africans were shipped to the United States, with 15 percent of them never reaching their destination, but perishing en route (Gates 2011, 3-4). Forty-five percent of people came from West Central Africa but represented diverse cultures, languages, and customs.

The use of slave labour allowed plantations to produce large cash crops, such as cotton, tobacco, and rice, at low costs (Brooks 2011, 176; King 2010, 125). As the relocated Africans were viewed as property and not fully human, plantation owners treated them as expendable commodities that were valued only for the outputs of their labor. Such dehumanization resulted in massively inhuman working and living conditions, little to no access to health care, and severely restricted freedoms of mobility, social life, and identity expression. Families were often purposely separated, and mortality rates were incredibly high; only 10% of children survived past the age of 16 (Gates 2011, 4).

In many agricultural and labour-intensive regions, enslaved populations often outnumbered free individuals, leading plantation owners and city officials to be fearful of an uprising and highly suspicious of African traditions (Smith 2020, 49-50). This fear led to many places passing legal restrictions against enslaved individuals' free movement and gathering. In 1680, The House of Burgess, Virginia passed a law preventing gatherings on the basis that "the frequent meeting of considerable numbers of negroe slaves under pretence of feasts and burials is judged of dangerous consequence" (Smith 2020, 49).

Starting in the later 1700s and into the 1800s, views in the north, especially among Quaker communities, started changing about slavery. Multiple petitions and calls for the dismantling of the system were raised. By the late 1700s, growing challenges to the institution of slavery began to grow that were rooted in protests and literary works of freed African Americans in the north, most notably Jean Baptiste Point du Sable (Gates 2011, 27-28).

During this same time, the American Revolution occurred, where the original 13 colonies declared independence from Britain and established the United States of America. The Declaration of Independence was penned, in part, by Thomas Jefferson, who spoke about the freedom and liberty of man. Although slavery was not abolished then, these words and sentiments would form the basis of later petitions. The period between the end of the Revolutionary War and the start of the Civil War is called the Antebellum period, where slavery was enshrined, especially in the South's cash crop and heavy labour industries, as part of the United States legal system. In 1807, legislation prohibiting external participation in the transatlantic slave trade was passed in the hope of a gradual abolition of the institution of slavery, but this did nothing to prevent state legislation, nor internal trading in the South. The 19th century saw growing political traction of the abolitionist movement, and many states in the North and West passed legislation that slowly demolished the institution of slavery. This movement, however, was opposed by the growing financial and political power held by the Southern anti-abolitionists (Gates 2011, 49-69).

On April 12th, 1861, the Civil War between the

abolitionist Northern states, known colloquially as the Union, and the anti-abolitionist Southern states, the Confederacy, broke out. This developed into an incredibly bloody and gruesome struggle. African Americans fought on both sides, either voluntarily or by forced participation (Gates 2011, 122-123). The high mortality rates resulted in significant changes to burial practices, predominantly driven through the invention, perfection, and rising popularity of embalming (Redman 2023, 28-34). The Civil War ended with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which abolished slavery federally throughout the United States and ushered in the post-Emancipation period, also known as the Reconstruction period, which continued until the recognized start of the Jim Crow era of segregation in 1877 (Gates 2011, 132-134).

The Antebellum Period

The political structure of the institution of slavery within the United States followed a sovereignty-dominated power system, in which the much smaller white population dominated enslaved African Americans by limiting movements and control over freedom and labour (Lynch, 2011). A byproduct of this was significant restrictions and regulations in burials and the expression of identity in death. During the Antebellum Period, African Americans were denied membership to the church, despite the general enforcement of Western Christian ideals, including some plantation owners forcing them to attend church services. Without membership in the church, African Americans were forbidden burial on consecrated grounds, even if they

were professed Christians (Cook 2019, 78-79: Smith 2020, 45-47).

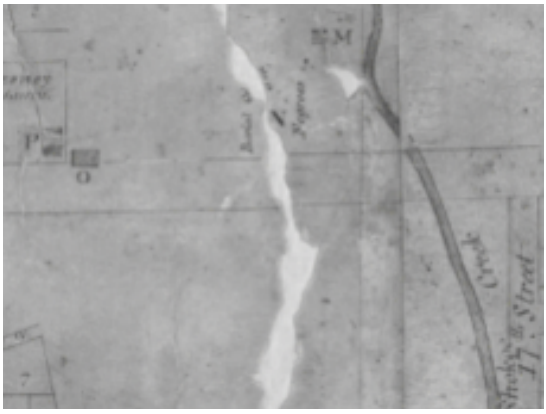

Figure 1: “Plan of the City of Richmond” by Richard Young, circa 1809. ‘Burial Ground for Negroes’ is indicated, ‘N’ is the Gallows, ‘M’ is the powder magazine, ‘O’ and ‘P’ on top of the hill is the Baptist meeting house and theatre. From Smith 2014:47.

In some places, separate or segregated cemeteries were established (although rarely legally recognized or protected), often on the city's fringes (King 2010, 127: Rainville 2009, 196-197; Smith 2020, 45-47). In the City of Richmond, the western bank of Shockoe Creek was one such site. Located at the bottom of the hill where the White cemetery and Baptist church were situated, the site was chosen because it was undesirable to the development of the white community (Smith 2020, 46-53). This is a direct reflection, rooted within the physical landscape, on the status and place of African Americans within White American society. Due to the common practice of splitting up families, cemeteries were often organized based on clusters of loose relational connections that

blended cultural affiliation, friends, and kinship, which reflects how the ersatz, replacement kinship of the displaced slaves, was organized (Bougher and Veit 2014, 168-169; Parker Pearson 2000, 12-17). Most African American headstones from this time were purchased by either the current, or a former, enslaver. "Faithful slave," "loyal slave," and "of African Descent" were common parts of the epigraphy associating the deceased in a paternalistic relationship with their enslaver, and rarely with family, friends, or community (Baugher and Veit 2014, 169-171). At the time, erecting gravemarkers of slaves was a way of asserting power and affirming ownership of the individual, with the other option being buried in an unmarked grave on the fringes of society (Baugher and Veit 2014, 171).

Funerals were usually held at night when people were free from their daytime labour obligations and free from the watchful eye of the plantation owners. Little is known about the ceremonies, but analyses of the grave offerings and burial practices indicate a strong influence from West African burial traditions and beliefs creolized with enforced Western Christianity beliefs (King 2010, 128). The orientation of the coffin varies, but most often seen is an east-west orientation, either following the sun, as is tradition in West African Burials, or following the Christian tradition of being positioned to rise facing Jesus on Judgement day (Brooks 2011, 182). Most burials also featured some form of shrouding, or Western style, simple wood coffins (Baugher and Veit 2014, 52-58). Although the specific burial traditions varied between cultures, most believed in some form of the spirit or soul existing beyond life. The funeral and burial were important elements in guiding the soul to the next life alongside all the things

they might need, such as tobacco or food offerings (Baugher and Veit 2014, 170). Broken glass, ceramics and other damaged household goods are typical grave offerings. It is impossible to tell for sure whether they were intentionally broken or not. There is a strong case for this to be either an interaction of the West African burial tradition to leave broken objects on top of burial to prevent the spirit from returning to the world of the living, or a metaphorical symbol from breaking the enslavement through the broken object so that the deceased may be free in the afterlife (Baugher and Veit 2014, 169-171; Brooks 2011, 181-182; King 2010, 127-128). Later on, broken clocks and pocket watches became standard grave offerings and symbols, which could hold a similar meaning and be used in cases of more significant expendable economic resources (King 2010, 128). Sunbleached seashells are also commonly found and could be connected with the frequent representation of the afterlife as an ocean, with the bleached white possibly symbolically representing purity (Brooks 2011, 181-182; King 2010, 127-128). Old West African traditions and symbols were adapted to the new situations and took on new meanings to reflect the treatment and enslavement that the community faced.

In the face of dehumanizing policies that relegated the deceased to the outskirts of town on unprotected land without documentation, these creolized traditions were a way of acknowledging individual identity and the unique cultural community which was never allowed to be expressed in living society. Although not every individual was West African, or even understood the tradition's origins, the continued use was a way of fighting against

enslavement, assimilation, and political restrictions against African traditions (Smith 2020, 48-51).

Post-Emancipation Period

The Post-Emancipation period created a significant political change in the lives of enslaved African Americans, shifting the dominant form of power from sovereignty to biopower. Hard colour lines were very present within communities, and African Americans were still marginalized, just not through direct means of total control over movement and physical punishment. Biopower manifesting in the communities is indicated through the lower education status, higher incarceration rates, and higher mortality rates in African American populations (Smith 2020, 22-214).

Many communities still faced significant political and economic barriers in establishing burial grounds, along with racial backlash and violent desecration of graves (Davidson 2007; Smith 2020, 211-216; Rainville 2009, 196-197). Especially in the South, there was a major movement toward the commemoration of the *Lost Cause*, where monuments and memorials were commissioned to remember those who lost their lives during the Civil War protecting the institution of slavery. In opposition to this, the establishment and commemoration of Freed individuals became a meaningful political action and was often the target of desecration or other acts of violence and disrespect (Stringfield 2021, 1061-1062). In general, African American cemeteries were also targets for grave robbing, medical experiments, and general vandalism

because higher society which controlled medical institutions and enforced legal policies continued to view African Americans as an educational curiosity and undeserving of peaceful and respectful burials. This is a direct reflection of how the legal system continuously treated African Americans and their placement within society (see Davidson 2007 analysis of body snatching in Freedman's Cemetery, TX).

Despite this repression, many African American communities developed their own mortuary economic business, and their members could be buried with loved ones utilizing established traditions of permanent monumentality (Smith 2020, 216-220; Stringfield 2021, 1061). The Beautification of Death movement heavily influenced the large monuments and park-like layout of the post-emancipation uplift cemeteries (Smith 2020, 212-220). People created their social support systems and institutions by establishing their own churches, organizing community political rallies, holding workshops, and establishing organizations to financially support other social services, such as health care (Smith 2020, 216-220).

Part of this effort was establishing Black-owned and operated funerary businesses, and fraternities to help fund funerals. Headstones and other identity markers, culturally appropriate names, and community and career associations were important elements of burials post-emancipation (Burg 2023 549-562; Cook 2019, 81-84; Smith 2020, 220-225; Stringfield 202, 1062-1068). A significant goal of the enslavement system was to take away someone's identity and personhood.This included tactics such as anglicized name changes, including the forced adoption of the enslaver's last name, the identity of

someone based on gender for official documents, and anonymously burying individuals, or else identifying them as slaves. So the importance of being buried with a marked grave using your own name connected to your family can not be understated. Having a respectable funeral, including all of the furnishings and trimmings, became a symbol of upward mobility and respectability within the community.

This symbol was critical, as African American communities were denied many of the freedoms of expression and financial control (Smith 2020, 211-241). Many individuals used African American businesses or artisans in the construction of mortuary accoutrements, as this brought and kept economic revenue within, creating a tight-knit community of mourning. It also allowed for cheaper alternatives with specific African American traditions represented, such as African American spellings and linguistic variations on epigraphs, as well as headstone symbols like suns or stopped clocks (Burg 2023 549-462; Cook 2019, 84-87; Smith 2020, 220-225; Stringfield 2021, 1063-1068).

Figure 2: Image of a Headstone featuring Baptist and African iconography imprinted into concrete (Stringfield 2021).

Commonly seen would be headstones made of alternative, cheaper materials such as concrete, plaster, and brick, where the inscription could be written on the wet material rather than needing to be chiselled (Baugher and Veit 2014, 175; Burg 2023 549-462; Cook 2019, 87-89; Smith 2020, 220-225; Stringfield 2021, 1059). Not only was this more personal and cheaper, but it also allowed for symbolic material goods such as broken glass and seashells to be embedded within the marker rather than scattered on top of the burial (Baugher and Veit 2014 175; Smith 2020, 220-225; Stringfield 2021, 1058). One example is a coffin-shaped marker made from concrete in Pensacola with seashells embedded in the abstract form of a crucifix (Stringfield 2021, 1067). After such a long period of control and dehumanization, the ability to have the freedom to be buried by your loved ones and have a permanent marker that friends and family could visit was a significant expression of power. This expression was

significant, especially since Civil War monuments and other political backlash from the white community tried to continue to erase African American culture and lives.

Conclusion

The complex, multi-factored expression of power resulting from systems of relations echoes within the overgrown remains of a long-forgotten cemetery. A battle of freedom is told: freedom of movement, financial independence, belonging, and expression of identity. The cemetery's symbol and expression of power are not limited to reflecting the past, however; they are also a window on a modern political and social struggle (Burg 2023 570-573; Rainville 2009 Smith 2020, 235-241; Stringfield 2021). Many African American cemeteries lie forgotten, vandalized, and in ruin compared to the clean, vibrant, and imposing Victorian park-like cemeteries of White communities.

Since Antebellum cemeteries were rarely legally acknowledged or marked on maps, these spaces are more likely to be developed without any archaeological or historical investigation destroying the burials and the history within them (MacLeod-Leslie 2012, 29). Many times there are still living descendants of the deceased that are directly affected by the destruction of cemeteries, especially if their location was known through oral histories but was denied recognition and protection by legal authorities. Cemetery preservation, or lack thereof, affects collective public memory and the establishment of long-term habitation and history in the region, which is often downplayed or outright ignored (Burg 2023

570-573; Rainville 2009). Without tangible, recognized spaces, African American communities lose physical connection to the land and are denied any historical relationship to any particular area. In recent years, there has been a great call for marginalized communities' historical cemeteries to be preserved and respected like those of the dominant community. Influential work by Dr. Lynn Rainville (2009) in establishing proper recording and preservation protocols for historic cemeteries in Virginia, and Dr. Blakey's work with the New York Burial Ground, has rallied community support and awareness towards protecting and cleaning these historic landscapes (Baugher and Veit 2014, 52-54; Blakey 2010; Lans et al. 2023). In a monumental political victory, the African American Burial Grounds Preservation Act was passed in 2023, following the highlighting of general issues surrounding systematic racism faced by African American communities today. This act provides a legal grounding and financial program to protect and maintain historic African American cemeteries from vandalism and developmental encroachment (Lans et al, 2023). The historic cemeteries are a proud and powerful symbol of the struggle and resilience of these communities, as well as a reminder of the marginalization they still face.

This is not just an American issue. Black cemeteries in Canada are at risk for being forgotten, and local communities are fighting for their spaces to be recognized and protected as heritage spaces (MacLeod-Leslie 2012). When these cemeteries are allowed to disappear into the background and crumble back to the earth, their story goes with them, to the detriment of all (Burg 2023 573-74; Rainville 2009).

So next time you go for a walk, notice the inhabitant spaces and wonder whose wander feet had trend on the ground before you, whose grandmother's stories spoke of the trees and boulders you now see, whose loved ones might sleep in the earth knowing they were cared for even if their name is now lost to history. Look for the signs of resilience, cultures, and ways of life that refuse to be forgotten and lost despite all the hardships and pain. Do not let these spaces become forgotten, bulldozed over for a new office building—rather, learn from the whispers that can be heard on the wind, through the stories from your neighbours, and in writings tucked away in boxes and attic.

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KYRA HELENA

The Hall of Very Important People: Why Representation Matters

Le salon des personnes très importantes: Pourquoi la répresentation est importante
(Aquarelle/Médias numériques)
2025
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The Hall of Very Important People: Why Representation Matters
Watercolor, Digital media
2025

L'illustration pour ce journal réfléchit à la politique de la visibilité, en s'interrogeant sur qui est reconnu et qui reste invisible dans les institutions qui façonnent les discours publics. Utilisant une esthétique apparemment ludique, l'œuvre soulève des questions plus profondes sur l'absence, la reconnaissance et les pratiques de visionnage dans ces espaces. Partant du principe que, sans représentation significative, les musées et les galeries risquent de devenir des instruments d'effacement culturel plutôt que des sites d'engagement et d'apprentissage, l'œuvre examine la responsabilité des institutions financées par le gouvernement de donner la priorité à la visibilité.

Le salon des personnes très importantes explore la tension entre reconnaissance et l'effacement au sein des institutions publiques, illustrant comment les histoires coloniales continuent de déterminer qui est visible et qui est rendu invisible. Grâce à une approche simple mais conceptuellement complexe, l'artiste cherche à rendre visuellement engageants (attirants) ses critiques complexes.

Dans cette illustration, ceux dont les ombres sont projetées représentent les personnes qui peuvent se voir dans l'espace, tandis que la personne au bout du salon ne le peut pas. La plaque portant l'inscription "The Hall of Very Important People (Le salon des personnes très importantes)" invite le spectateur à réfléchir aux implications auxquelles certaines perspectives sont privilégiées par rapport aux autres. Les silhouettes encadrées dans « Le salon des personnes très importantes » ressemblent à des portraits coloniaux formels , ce qui est un clin d'œil à la façon dont les institutions canadiennes ont longtemps perpétué une histoire élitiste. Le spectateur est alors invité à réfléchir à la personne qui ne peut pas voir son ombre/elle-même dans l'espace.

Le pouvoir que les espaces institutionnalisés exercent sur les visiteurs, qui se sentent soit valorisés, soit invisibles, est représenté. La personne au bout du salon ne peut pas se voir elle-même, et sans aucun moyen d'identification dans l'espace, elle est considérée comme « sans importance ». C'est là la question cruciale abordée dans la présente soumission. L'artiste est excitée d'offrir cette soumission et espère avoir l'opportunité de participer à une revue (journale) qui souligne le discours critique sur ce qui est invisible ou sous-représenté dans le monde universitaire.

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The illustration for this journal reflects on the politics of visibility, questioning who is recognized and who remains invisible in institutions that shape public narratives. Using a seemingly playful aesthetic, the work poses deeper questions about absence, recognition, and viewing practices

in these spaces. Based on the artist's belief that, without meaningful representation, museums and galleries risk becoming tools of cultural erasure rather than sites of learning and engagement, the work critically considers the responsibility of government-funded institutions to prioritize visibility.

The Hall of Very Important People explores the tension between recognition and erasure within public institutions, illustrating how colonial histories continue to shape who is seen and who is rendered invisible. Through a simple yet conceptually layered approach, the artist seeks to make complex critiques visually engaging.

In the illustration, those whose shadows are cast into the frame represent people who can see themselves within the space, while the person at the end of the hall cannot. The plaque reading, "The Hall of Very Important People," calls the viewer to consider the implications of certain perspectives being privileged over others. The silhouettes framed in *The Hall of Very Important People* resemble formal colonial portraits, which is a nod to how Canadian institutions have long upheld elitist history. The viewer is then called to consider the person who cannot see their shadow/themselves in the space.

The power that institutionalized spaces possess over visitors feeling either validated or invisible is depicted. The person at the end of the hall cannot see themself, and without any site of identification in the space is rendered *unimportant*—that is the critical issue that this piece is addressing.

R. Caroline Stampliaka

Seen and Unseen: The Persistence of the Evil Eye in Greek Culture

In her home's living room in Evros, yiayia Zoe sat beside me. The lace curtains fluttered gently in the summer breeze, and the room was fragrant with herbs laid out to dry. To investigate and potentially remove the evil eye, yiayia Zoe, one of the village healers in my mother's village, performed a ritual using three dried cloves and sewing needles. She began by tracing the sign of the cross on the table with each clove and then securing them onto the needles. According to yiayia Zoe, the cloves symbolize different sources: male, female, and those linked to divine forces or illness, and the sequence in which they are arranged is crucial—God created Adam first, and consequently, any suspicion regarding the source of the evil eye should begin with a male figure. She lit a match and held the flame to the first clove, waiting for a popping sound. There was no discernible sound as the dry bud blackened and curled inward. She then moved on to the second, followed by the third, but still nothing. "You're fine," she told me. "No evil eye." Since yiayia Zoe had concluded that I had not been affected by the evil eye, she would not need to recite the incantation.

For generations, stories, beliefs, and practices related to the evil eye have been integral to my family's lore. The evil eye is a folk belief complex that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries and is present in numerous

societies worldwide. For many, it remains a widespread belief and an essential aspect of cultural identity. In Greek, the evil eye translates to *kako mati* (κακό μάτι); however, most often it is only referred to as *mati* (μάτι), and the accompanying affliction is known as *matiasma* (μάτιασμα). In the following paper, I examine and re-evaluate the persistence of the evil eye in contemporary and transnational spaces by critically engaging with anthropological and folkloric scholarship in combination with autoethnographic insights to emphasize its adaptability as an invisible yet potent force influencing behaviour, health, and social interactions.

While earlier theories of folklorists and anthropologists emphasize its function of social control, I want to demonstrate how the invisible aspects of the evil eye—its emotional, affective, and symbolic dimensions—allow it to adapt to contemporary urbanized, capitalistic and globalized contexts and highlight its purpose in rationalizing misfortune and tragedy. Understanding the evil eye as a narrative framework for making sense of the inexplicable is one of those elements that remained unseen as long as scholars analyzed the belief system only through the lens of social control. An exploration of both the visible and invisible dimensions of *mati* reveals how social norms and folk beliefs are dynamic and context-dependent, co-evolving with the complexities of modern life rather than remaining static and repressive. Hence, I argue that understanding why the belief in the evil eye is still widespread in contemporary Greek culture can offer valuable insights into how cultural and vernacular practices function as sources of resilience, agency,

empowerment, and security throughout socio-cultural and transnational contexts.

This paper begins by outlining my methodological approach and positionality to explain how my personal experiences, memories, and my family's narratives inform this paper. I then analyze everyday experiences and cultural practices associated with the evil eye in Greece as well as its modern iterations, tracing both its visible symptoms and invisible dimensions and examining symptomatology, prevention, and the role of ritual healing, emotions, and intergenerational transmission. From there, I engage the dominant theoretical perspective of social control in the context of the limited good paradigm, questioning its capacity to account for the persistence of *mati* in contemporary, urbanized, and globalized settings. In response, I highlight the adaptability of the folk belief in various contemporary socio-cultural contexts, examining its intersections with the Greek Orthodox Church, vernacular religiosity, and spiritual pluralism. Building on this, I propose an alternative explanation and nuanced framework to expand on the social control theory that acknowledges and foregrounds the importance of the evil eye's invisible, emotional, and affective dimensions, and conclude by reflecting on the implications of these findings that open new pathways for future ethnographic research.

Positionality and Methodology

To clarify my positionality, I grew up in a Greek-Canadian family with an Austrian grandmother and an immigration background alternating between Greece, Germany, and Canada. Thus, the folk belief of the evil eye has played a

prominent and impactful role throughout my life and remains integral to my Greek heritage, familiarizing my family members and me with the various manifestations of it in different socio-cultural contexts, rural and urban, as well as in Greece and the Greek diaspora.
Methodologically, I am combining a thorough review of the literature about the evil eye folk belief complex in Greek culture with autoethnography to bridge the gap between traditional interpretations and contemporary perspectives and practices. The autoethnographic data presented here are based on my memory and conversations with family members and include various intriguing experiences, beliefs, customs, and case examples surrounding the evil eye. These narratives reach back generations and document the lived experiences of *matiasma,* revealing how these manifest in daily life while slowly but surely adapting to modernity and still affirming its existence as a folk belief. Having established the methodological approach, I will explain the everyday experiences and practices surrounding *mati* that sustain its relevance to the present.

The Ever-Present Threat: Experiencing and Preventing Mati

In Greece, the evil eye plays a significant role in cultural practices and influences behaviour and social interactions daily (Dallas et al. 2020, 724). Various factors can trigger *matiasma*, the most considerable being envy, spite, excessive flattery, admiration, or praise (Georges 1962, 69). According to Chryssanthopoulou (2008), *mati* can be understood as a "psychic power" that emanates from an individual's eyes (109). Roussou (2011) also argues that the

widespread public discourse is that the transmission of *mati* follows “through the exchange of electromagnetic energy” (95). Interestingly, the understanding that vision is a “form of energy” was first developed by ancient Greek philosophers to legitimize and support the belief and function of *mati* scientifically (Gifford 1958, 7). On a similar note, in the present, my parents both agree that “everything is energy” and believe that if someone has an intense gaze, it can negatively penetrate one's energetic field. This energy transmission occurs through “everyday sensory communication” (Roussou 2021, 53). Hence, the “energetic interplay of senses and emotions” afflicts a person with the evil eye (Roussou 2021, 53). Gossiping or even only thinking about a person is just as capable of inducing *matiasma* since the force of the “spiritual energy” can impact another person’s body remotely (Roussou 2014, 426; Roussou 2021, 56), reflecting how the evil eye is not limited to a “physical gaze” but can also expand into an invisible “metaphorical gaze” (Souvlakis 2021, 216). Although *mati* is most often considered to be cast due to jealousy, it is an even more prevalent belief that individuals can affect others with *matiasma* unconsciously and unintentionally, even between family members who express pride and admiration (Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 109). Thus, anyone can be a carrier of *mati* (Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 109). *Matiasma* impacts people but can likewise affect their belongings, particularly “domestic animals, fruit trees, and field crops”(Gravel 1995, 5). I remember my grandfather would share a tale of his father’s magnificent white horse, admired by everyone who saw it, until one day, without warning, the horse collapsed, and mysterious black spots marked its body. The death of the horse could

only be explained by concluding it was afflicted with the evil eye.

However, individuals most at risk of the evil eye are usually in transitional or liminal states, defined by Turner (1969) as betwixt and between social categories (95)— for example, newly married or pregnant women, unbaptized newborns, and young children (Gravel 1995, 5; Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 111). The following family stories illustrate this principle. My Austrian grandmother, who married my Greek grandfather, shared that she remembered experiencing *matiasma* for the first time. She was only five months pregnant with her third child. Although her pregnancy went well up to that moment, she said, "I received compliments for my growing belly from a woman who I later heard was known for casting the evil eye on others, so I prematurely delivered my daughter the same night. The doctors had no explanation why I went into labour far too soon." Over forty years later, she still recalls how a joyful moment turned into a night of unexpected agony, and even though her reasoning defied medical explanations, it helped her rationalize this challenging experience. Another story in the collective memory of my family is the premature death of my grandfather's youngest sister at only eleven months, which was a mystery but also explained through invisible forces at play, as it is said her beauty drew adoration from everyone who saw her. Because the person afflicted with *matiasma* risks losing enjoyment and good fortune in all of these areas in their life, the conclusion is that the evil eye typically often relates to themes of sexuality, productivity, luck, prosperity, and fertility (Gravel 1995, 35). Any unfortunate events, especially sudden or unexplainable ones, might be

attributed to exposure to “ocular fascination” (Gifford 1958, 9). Hence, the evil eye constantly moves between invisibility and visibility, as its transmission may be invisible, but the physical and mental symptoms are felt, and misfortunes are experienced.

According to my father, “There are several ways *mati* can affect someone.” The most commonly reported symptoms by my family members are headache, digestive issues, sleeplessness, and a bad mood. Similarly, the scholarly literature supports that typical symptoms include discomfort, headaches, irritability, difficulties sleeping, crankiness, inability to focus and stand, pervasive fatigue, weakness, and, in severe cases, even fainting (Dundes 1992, 110; Dallas et al. 2020, 724; Roussou 2021, 55). Continuous yawning and hiccups are also symptomatic (Gifford 1958, 9). My father said: “These symptoms are supposed to get worse over days. They do not get better with medication. Your body stops working properly until someone performs and completes the *xematiasma* ritual.” Hence, affected individuals are faced with “socio-somatic disconnection and isolation” (Roussou 2021, 55) and symptoms that are characterized as psychosomatic (Souvlakis 2021, 29). Biomedical approaches, like painkillers, are ineffective in alleviating these symptoms (Dallas et al. 2020, 725). As a result, believers do not link these symptoms to physical or biological factors, but rather to “emotional, energetic, and/or spiritual” origins (Roussou 2021, 54). Typically, these signs subside quickly following the performance of a healing ritual to cure the person’s affliction, elaborated upon below. However, in extreme cases where no cure is sought out, some believe it can even lead to “death within forty days” (Dundes 1992, 110).

Various ways to prevent and protect oneself from the evil eye impact peoples' everyday interactions and behaviour (Dallas et al. 2020, 724). For instance, my memories are filled with relatives and friends repeating "*ftou ftou ftou*" when complimenting me or others around me. It is supposed to imitate spitting to ward off *mati*. This gesture is so ingrained and visible in daily life that it often goes unnoticed or is taken for granted, which makes the evil eye a constant cultural presence. The practice of spitting three times on one's chest is an ancient tradition and the most common defence against the evil eye from the time of the ancient Greeks up to contemporary Greeks and Greek-Americans today, primarily to protect from any potential harm when someone cannot hold back their admiration (Georges 1962, 70). In general, prevention and protection are favoured over seeking a cure. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on imitating spitting three times after complimenting anyone, as well as on wearing prophylactic and protective blue amulets and jewellery featuring an iris in the centre, also referred to as *matakia* (ματάκια), which are meant to ward off evil since the colour blue possesses "preventive power" (Georges 1962, 69-70; Dundes 1992, 110; Roussou 2021, 3). My late grandfather also suggested internally repeating, "*Koutsovelona sta matia sou*" (Κουτσοβέλονα στα μάτια σου) three times, which can be loosely translated to "nails to your eyes" and is supposed to return the malevolent energy to the transmitter of the *mati* so that their eyes are metaphorically "blinded." This protective spell, which mentions nails, is also widespread among immigrant communities in Australia, as exemplified in Chryssanthopoulou's work (2008, 115). According to my

late grandfather, one could also wear underwear inside out or carry an amulet or *philachto'(φυλαχτό)* for protection. Together, these practices illustrate how the power of *mati* is actively reinforced by all these protective and preventive symbolic and cultural practices, and whether material or immaterial, seen or unseen, they serve as a barrier against the constant invisible threat. Nevertheless, my father complained, "I still get the evil eye, no matter what I try to prevent it." Despite all of these preventive measures that aim to avert the influence of *mati*, its pervasive nature means that affliction is often unavoidable and requires intervention. In such cases, individuals turn to the healing ritual of *xematiasma.*

Xematiasma Ritual: Making the Invisible Tangible

Xematiasma (ξεμάτιασμα) means to "take one's eyes out" and is a ritual healing cure that relieves a person from any symptoms related to *mati* in a short amount of time (Seremetakis 2009, 343). According to my family members, it takes only about five to fifteen minutes for the individual to feel better and for all symptoms of *matiasma* to dissipate. The most widespread of these rituals is relatively simple, as it only involves three drops of oil in a water bowl. If the oil vanishes and mingles with the water, which is not possible under normal circumstances as the two substances are immiscible, it is confirmed that the person is afflicted with *mati* (Dallas et al. 2020, 724; Seremetakis 2009, 343). Although the ritual of *xematiasma* performed by lay healers differs from region to region, the most popular one remains the cure with water and oil (Dallas et al. 2020, 724). Despite local differences, beliefs

surrounding the evil eye, including methods of diagnosing and treating it, remain remarkably consistent even for diasporic Greek communities (Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 107-108).

In a world marked by change, the persistence of *mati* offers a sense of comfort, stability, connection, and meaning through collective memory. A secret prayer, including the affected individual's name, is repeated during the ritual. However, it is inappropriate for the healer to ask for monetary compensation, and thanking the healer is unacceptable. Although almost everyone can claim familiarity with the practice, the most accomplished healers have developed expertise in their approaches and practices (Roussou 2014, 433).

Nevertheless, the cultural practices around *xematiasma* are not static. Over time, rituals evolve in response to urbanization, migration, and globalization, and the healing rituals associated with *mati* adapt accordingly, incorporating new technologies while remaining grounded in a shared cultural logic. For instance, my family members maintain a strong belief in the efficacy of ritual healing of *xematiasma*, whether performed in person or at a distance, which proves the ritual's capacity to transcend spatial boundaries. On a similar note, Seremetakis (2009) reveals that "telephonic exorcisms" are commonplace in every Greek city, even if not commercialized, and they reflect and "mediate the loss or fragmentation of social networks," in contrast to rural villages where villagers are more connected and in closer proximity (Seremetakis 2009, 340). Most memories I have of my grandfather healing family members from the evil eye were from a distance. Immediately after receiving such a phone call, he would

internally recite the secret prayer at least three times, but in worse cases of *matiasma*, even seven times.

I remember watching my grandfather perform the ritual countless times. He would yawn repeatedly, with tears streaming from his eyes, which is a clear sign that the afflicted person was indeed experiencing *matiasma*. Simultaneously, the person receiving the cure often began to yawn, as if the symptoms briefly transferred during the healing process. The general belief is that the healer also temporarily takes on the bodily symptoms. Hence, they have to perform the ritual for themselves immediately afterwards, too. Only if these symptoms were severe and noticeable enough would my grandfather do the most common healing ritual with water and oil. However, this approach is relatively intuitive, as it is most likely different for healers who may emphasize performing the ritual action to increase the effectiveness of the cure. Bubant et al. (2017), analyzing an Arab concept referred to as *al-ghayh,* which refers to hidden and invisible phenomena such as the evil eye, argue that rituals are "means of accessing the unseen" (1, 11). The successful ritualistic healing practiced by my grandfather, whether conducted from a distance or in proximity, demonstrates how ritual makes the invisible forces behind mati perceptible. While the symptoms may already be felt, the act of healing renders them culturally intelligible, affirming their cause and initiating a process of relief.

As the evidential support and narratives have shown, folk belief shapes human experience, including "the illusory appearance of experience," and thus acts like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Hufford 1995, 20, 13). Belief remains key to culture. Individuals who already believe in

mati, whether through cultural transmission or acculturation, experience more intense symptoms if they are convinced they have been afflicted with it. Thus, personal belief and conviction shape an individual's susceptibility to *mati*, influencing how symptoms are experienced and interpreted. Analogously, individuals affected by the evil eye will feel relief when they know someone is performing the *xematiasma* for them. Recovery necessitates the protection and "ritual reintegration" of the affected individual into society (Veikou 2008, 95). Seremetakis (2009) shows how the evil eye is about individual affliction and physical bodies mediating unseen social tensions (338). Thus, the cure results from the ritual's words and actions and the social validation and approval given to the afflicted individual (Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 111).

Beyond the act of healing itself, the knowledge and power to perform these rituals are carefully safeguarded and passed down through generations. Secret prayers, referred to as *ta loyia* (τα λόγια), meaning "the words" in Greek, are passed intergenerationally, strictly in written form. The healing power can be lost if the secret prayer is transmitted orally. Thus, this sacred knowledge is concealed and revealed selectively to avoid commodification. Transferring this knowledge from a male to a female and vice versa, usually between close relatives, adds another layer of invisible cultural rules governing the belief. I am grateful that my late grandfather passed the sacred words accompanying *xematiasma* to me, even though I cannot share them in this paper. However, this limitation proves how the intergenerational transmission of the folk belief is an invisible legacy that ensures its

continuity through cultural practices that remain embedded in families, even if they are not visible to the public. Hence, invisibility also characterizes the transmission of the healing power. While these cultural practices prove the belief's persistence, understanding their broader implications requires engaging with dominant theoretical frameworks. The social control theory provides one such perspective, although its limitations in modern contexts need closer examination.

Social Control, Limited Good, and Greek Orthodoxy

Traditionally, anthropological and folkloric studies were limited to rural communities and have interpreted the belief in *mati* as a form of social regulation (Roussou 2021, 13). Dionisopoulos-Mass (1976), investigating the evil eye in Greek villages, concludes that scholars have most often assumed it to be "a means of social control" and associated it with individuals, frequently labelled as witches, who possess the power to "bewitch people" (4, 2). The idea behind social control is that individuals are punished for their transgression of uniformity and established communal values and ways of being (Chryssanthopoulou 2008, 111). In the past, Mediterranean societies have been described as having a limited good worldview in which any desired goods "such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honour, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety…exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply" (Foster 1964, 296). Foster (1964) also argues that there is a notable lack of praise in village communities, since complimenting is seen as an act of aggression (67). However, seen as exclusively a form of

ocular aggression, the evil eye reduces the visual to status suppression, suggesting that it functions to constrain individual expressions of prosperity or beauty, especially when such traits provoke envy, thereby reinforcing social norms around humility and limiting perceived inequality within the community (Seremetakis 2009, 341). While its role in social control is plausible in small-scale, pastoral, and rural societies, it remains questionable whether the evil eye can be broadly used in modern urbanized and capitalist contexts (Roussou 2021, 13).

Although Gravel (1995) argues that the evil eye has an essential social control function, he also stresses the importance of examining folk belief within the specific social structures and "social sanctions" from which it emerged (3). One of the most significant contexts is the Greek Orthodox Church, Greece's dominant state religion, whose influence profoundly shapes public discourse as well as cultural and national identity (Roussou 2021, 31). The Greek Orthodox Church recognizes the evil eye as the devil's work, and thus, priests are officially the only ones allowed to heal *vaskania* (βάσκανια), which is the Church's terminology for it and means to "kill with the eye" (Roussou 2021, 172; Dallas et al. 2020, 723-725). Distinctions are drawn between *mati* and *vaskania*, as the former is caused unknowingly, and the latter is considered more dangerous and intentional (Dallas et al. 2020, 724). As the dominant religious authority in Greece, the Church's acceptance of the existence of the evil eye reaffirms the persistence of folk belief among Greek people (Roussou 2011, 101). It remains essential to note that the Greek Orthodox Church does not endorse the practice of ritual healing for the evil eye conducted by non-clergy lay

healers, nor does it officially approve of the use of amulets for personal protection (Roussou 2021, 172; Dallas et al. 2020, 725).

In contemporary times characterized by globalization and capitalism, the belief in *mati* endures not just because of its prominent role as a form of ocular aggression or social control, but precisely because of its subtle, often invisible presence in everyday life and its ability to adapt to changing sociocultural contexts (Seremetakis 2009, 341). The invisibility of *mati* complicates efforts to understand its role in regulating behaviour, particularly in urbanized and cosmopolitan contexts where social norms are neither uniformly enforced nor consistently interpreted. Oversimplifying these complexities risks missing the nuanced ways *mati* operates across different social settings. Explaining the folk belief exclusively through a social control framework seems to be a result of the "secularization thesis" that was popular among social scientists in the mid-19th century who envisioned that secularization is an inevitable process and will result in the world's complete disenchantment and ultimately, the disappearance of folk beliefs and traditions (Hufford 1995, 17). Despite all odds, folk beliefs and traditions have survived and are still successfully thriving and adapting in the present (Hufford 1995, 26). Hence, the division between the scientific and the supernatural must also be challenged, as the evil eye operates within both invisible and visible physical realms, reflecting how the material world continuously interacts with the supernatural world (Roussou 2014, 436). Although the social control framework provides valuable insights, it overlooks the

profoundly affective and emotional dimensions of *mati*, which allow for rationalizing misfortune.

The Affective Dimensions of Mati

If capitalism allows everybody to access goods, why do narratives about the evil eye persist even in highly capitalized societies? Since the social control theory is no longer broadly applicable, a possible answer to this question is that the affective dimension of loss persists despite globalization and consumer capitalism as a limited good. Thus, I want to complement social control by addressing the invisible and affective dimensions that allow individuals and even whole families to navigate uncertainty. From the personal data and anthropological documentation I have gathered and investigated, it becomes evident that the belief in the evil eye provides a narrative framework to rationalize and make sense of unexplainable, chaotic, and difficult life experiences, such as the loss of a child, as well as hardships associated to losing livestock, as illustrated in my family's case examples above. This rationalization can be beneficial and happens regardless of people's beliefs, upbringing, or shared cultural background. For instance, my grandmother, originally Austrian, was unfamiliar with the pervasive belief in comparison to her Greek husband. Hence, she stated she did not believe in it until it affected her for the first time during her third pregnancy. Although my grandmother was not a believer at first, her agonizing preterm birth experience led to her belief in the power of *mati* to this day. Here, belief in *mati* offers her a narrative framework to make sense of her challenging life experience while helping to process it.

The emotional and affective dimensions of the evil eye have been largely overlooked in anthropological and folkloric scholarship. Interestingly, the only academic source that supports a similar conclusion is anthropologist and psychoanalyst Kilborne's (2011) work on *The Evil Eye, Envy and Shame*. Kilborne (2011) states that popular sources on "magic, divination and healing" fail to position the role of beliefs in the evil eye within an explanatory framework that addresses "human suffering, uncertainty and illness" as an effective means of recognizing human emotions (132). According to Kilborne (2011), such narratives and explanations for the evil eye's existence mainly address the question: "Why am I experiencing sickness, unhappiness, or distress" (138)? Framing these questions in this way suggests that the nature of the inquiry validates these feelings, even though these questions generally belong to the realm of religion rather than that of science (Kilborne 2011, 138). Feelings of shame are directly tied to feelings of failure, as shame arises from failure and is rooted in self-judgment (Kilborne 2011, 139). Those complex emotions can be better processed if the blame for an inexplicable event is projected outside of oneself (Kilborne 2011, 139). Hence, people can externalize blame and make sense of chaotic or traumatic events by attributing misfortune to the evil eye, turning the folk belief into an invisible coping mechanism essential to individual and collective resilience that provides a meaningful way to navigate uncertainty and adversity. This understanding is also relevant when considering how evaluations of "efficacy in biomedicine" are ignorant towards essential components such as "personal narratives of patients and their subjective experiences," overlooking

phenomenological and affective experiences of ritual healing in the process (Dallas et al. 2020, 729). Hence, I argue that to understand the belief's persistence and its role in social empowerment elaborated upon below, it is crucial to recognize the role of these invisible emotional dimensions that offer support for rationalizing misfortune and navigating complex emotions like guilt, shame, and envy. Building on the affective dimensions of *mati*, I will now examine how the belief empowers individuals and communities socially in urban, transnational, vernacular, and digital contexts.

From Social Control to Social Empowerment

At this point, it is essential to consider that social science has always revolved around invisible realms and the "poetics and politics of the unseen" (Bubant et al. 2011, 11-13). For qualitative scientists to comprehend the present state of the world sufficiently, direct engagement with the invisible realms of daily social life must be re-animated with the understanding that visibility and invisibility define each other (Bubant et al. 2011, 11, 13, 3). Performing *xematiasma* remains invisible and is contained in the private and domestic spheres among family members and close friends. Lay healers still employ Orthodox Christian symbolism and prayers, but their interpretations of Orthodox doctrine look different and are often amalgamated with various forms of spirituality as necessary (Roussou 2011, 101). Consequently, the line between "lay and doctrinal interpretations" blurs in vernacular practice (Roussou 2011, 101). Although the Greek Orthodox Church's recognition of the existence of *mati* legitimizes

the belief, their rejection of lay healing practices reflects their ongoing effort for spiritual authority. Lay healers continue to practice and thrive, showing the general public's conviction in the power of known and preferred cultural practices over institutional, dogmatic teachings that restrict individual agency and creativity.

Building on this dynamic pressure between tradition and authority, belief in the evil eye persists in modern urban settings and adapts to contemporary life while gradually diverging from traditional practices. This adaptability also suggests it serves functions beyond social regulation. Unlike faith, belief is more dynamic, fluid, and context-dependent, shifting across an individual's lifetime, and emerges within various socio-cultural, political, historical, and individual circumstances (Magliocco 2012, 7, 10, 14). In modern Greece, younger generations are increasingly moving to urban centers or even immigrating for better educational and occupational opportunities (Roussou 2021, 14). Despite his demographic shift, the folk belief of the evil eye is not forgotten or left behind (Roussou 2021, 14). Instead, the belief is adapted to new contexts and remains widespread among various spheres, including Greek Orthodox believers and non-believers (Roussou 2014, 427). Thus, Roussou (2021) suggests challenging the divide between the folk and the urban, along with the associated prevailing stereotypes, while recognizing that rural and urbanized spaces are more intertwined than separate (13-14).

The evil eye has become an entrenched part of vernacular religiosity (Roussou 2021, 3, 112). As the cultural contexts and spiritual plurality increase, the beliefs and practices change, and "pluralistic therapeutic paths"

emerge that need to become more visible (Roussou 2021, 3, 112). My Austrian grandmother, who never received the secret words and prayer as it was not part of her heritage, told me one could also recite three to seven times the Greek version of the 'the Lord's Prayer,' also known as 'Our Father' (*Πάτερ ἡμῶν*), and that it works just as well. Interestingly, Seremetakis (2009) made a similar observation where an interlocutor's mother claimed to recite the "Lord's Prayer" seven times (344). Here, it becomes evident how laypeople often become independent agents in themselves, integrating elements of magic and religion, articulating prayers as incantations to develop creative techniques to counteract the influence of the evil eye (Gifford 1958, 53). Another interesting development reflecting contemporary spiritual plurality occurred after the passing of my grandfather, who was the most skilled healer in my family. My father now regularly listens to a Greek Orthodox priest on *YouTube* who recites a prayer to cure *vaskania* (Vima Orthodoxias 2021). Although my father appreciates Greek Orthodox priests and their wisdom as a devout believer, he does not visit a priest in person to be cured regularly because, as he jokingly said, "I would need to visit the priest every day!" The video of the priest reciting a blessing against *vaskania* to the camera has over one million views and, reportedly, is almost as effective for my father as any other cure (Vima Orthodoxias 2021). Such new, creative, and convenient approaches also tie back to my parents' belief that, "Everything is energy," a concept that is simultaneously accepted by the Greek Orthodox religion but also emphasized in the New Age movement and Eastern spirituality (Roussou 2021, 112). This idea is becoming increasingly popular and syncretized in Greece,

despite the Church's strong opposition in order to preserve their traditions (Roussou 2021, 112). With the rise of "telephonic exorcisms" and YouTube prayers, folk belief has transformed along with modern communication technologies (Seremetakis 2009, 340). Although such vernacular cultural practices are situated outside institutional frameworks, they are both accessible and visible online while simultaneously remaining private and invisible in one's home.

Finally, Roussou (2021), who has done fieldwork in both rural and urban environments in Greece, argues that approaching the folk belief of *mati* solely as a form of social control is limiting as it implies that people lack "social power and agency," leaving people subordinate to their community's absolute authority (12). In today's individualized, globalized and late-stage capitalist societies, most Greek people, whether they remained in their homeland or became part of the diaspora, live in urban environments characterized by anonymity and wealth (Roussou 2021, 60). Treating the persistent folk belief as mere superstition or "survival from the past" fails to recognize its active role in contemporary Greece, where it continues to shape cultural practices and social interactions, retaining an "active social position" (Roussou 2021, 60, 12). Instead of implying human beings are "passive and inactive," the belief can be understood as a form of social empowerment (Roussou 2021, 12). Roussou (2021) shows that it represents people who actively engage, instigate change, and transform from mere observers into "dynamic participants in their socio-cultural environment," gaining social empowerment precisely through practicing creatively without constraints (12). Hence, the inherent invisibility of

the folk belief introduces complexities regarding individual agency. While historically useful, the social control theory does not adequately address how individuals navigate or resist its influence. Concentrating on the agency of people shows how actions and beliefs still operate beneath mainstream societal norms and how *mati* still retains a powerful presence in the cultural and social imagination. This enduring presence of the evil eye among contemporary Greeks indicates that it can adapt and endure precisely because of its invisibility across different sociocultural landscapes and geographical locations.

Conclusion

Understanding the visible and invisible elements of the evil eye can explain how this folk belief evolves and persists. As the autoethnographic and scholarly data show, the folk belief in *mati* syncretizes traditional and modern forms of official and vernacular religiosity, which allows it to continue in diverse manifestations. This adaptability also challenges the static social control framework, which, while relevant in a rural context, fails to account for the dynamic, context-dependent nature of folk beliefs in a globalized and spiritually pluralistic world. The persistence of the evil eye across time, space and digital landscapes suggests that elements which remain unseen, whether in scholarship or broader culture, are often just as influential as what is visible and material. In addition, recognizing the invisible affective aspects of *mati* enriches our understanding of its emotional and psychological dimensions. A closer examination of this folk belief shows how it empowers individuals and their families to navigate adversity, resist

social norms, and redefine cultural identity in an ever-changing world. It also contributes insights into how cultural practices relate to social determinants of health. Still, more ethnographic research needs to be conducted to observe how increasing spiritual pluralism affects engagement with the folk belief and how it allows for resisting behavioural and social norms in Greece and beyond. Future research could further explore the evil eye's affective dimensions, how spiritual plurality and digital technologies continue to shape the practice, and compare diasporic and transnational contexts to examine the intersections of belief, modernity, and agency. What is clear is that the folk belief in the evil eye provides narrative frameworks for making sense of unexplainable life events and helps manage complex emotions, such as guilt and shame. At the same time, creative engagement with associated cultural practices promotes personal and collective social empowerment and integration. As long as individuals and families continue transmitting and employing these cultural practices amid sociocultural transformations and transnational settings in the present and future, belief in the evil eye will remain a source of resilience and meaning-making as it enables people to reimagine their place in the world.

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AMELIA SMITH

Stretch

Étirer - étirement
61 x 122 cm
Huile sur toile
2023

Stretch
24” x 48”
Oil on canvas
2023

« Stretch (étirer) » s’inspire du rituel matinal de se réveiller et s’étirer, la première activité de la journée pour le corps.

*

Stretch is inspired by the morning ritual of waking up and stretching out as the first activity of the day the body goes through.

KELSEY YANDURA

Swamp Girl

There are three things I need you to understand about wetness.

First: It slides along a spectrum. This is the way that God intended.

The second—it precludes the creation of light.

> *"Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."*

Do you know a more powerful threat than division?

The third I've forgotten. I hope you'll forgive me.

***

Raidine was not born. She was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean.

There is something you must understand about the things that collect on the ocean floor. They are not what they once were. The ocean is vast; the floor is its memory and its future. "You are very, very young," becomes, "You are very, very old." Time and its vast collection of impressions dissolve and diffuse, gaining the sentient and

mysterious quality of presence—then, without warning, absence.

Lost becomes found; shipwrecks become reefs; microbes megafauna. Sea stars lose their legs and wonder why *reaching* ever mattered to anyone. Love becomes hatred and then once again love, this time edged with the threat of inversion. The things that collect on the ocean floor know that the tail ends of all things circle themselves and one another, drifting down, down, down, indefinitely. And God said that it was good.

But sometimes, on a rare and moonless night, fingers of unknown origin reach into that salty, primordial soup and drag something out. Exposed to light—oh!—the spirals tighten and relax like the vagus nerve—fainting, shitting, orgasm. Have you ever been born? Then you cannot understand. And also, you know exactly what I am talking about.

Raidine was not born. She was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean.

***

Unfortunately, neither *"fever"* nor *"heart of the ocean"* are palatable answers to the question, "Where are you from, honey?" So when attendants in the carpool line or out-of-towners at the diner asked, Raidine just said, "Right here, smack dab in the middle of the Everglades." It wasn't a problem. Florida has a way of forgiving the past.

If you caught her swimming, she might tell you something different.

“Ma always told me I was from the front porch,” she once told a landscaper between backstrokes. “They found me out there on a warm sunny day.” *Push, glide.* “Back when things were better than they are right now.” *Glide, push*. “Back when they still taught kids how to behave.”

He chuckled and shook his head, pushing metal through thick grass. He was a stranger to gliding. “There are stories about you, girl.”

The closest Raidine ever got to telling the truth was in the oversized ear of Johnny Reed, the first boy she ever kissed. “One night, Pa was out on the boat because he couldn't sleep,” she told him. Her tongue was still salty from the sweat of his upper lip. “I think he’d drank one too many.”

Johnny was all ears. She told him about Ma and Pa’s other daughter—the one with dark hair and blue eyes who had gone missing the week before. “Pa said he was crying over the edge of the boat, saying her name over and over, when he heard something crying. He thought surely it was her, so he jumped right in and started swimming.”

She ran her fingers down Johnny’s purple, pimply cheek. “There I was—lying there on a big ol’ lily pad, naked and fussing. I was blonde as a toad, barely any hair on my head at all. The only time I stopped crying was when they put me in the bath. Said I fell right asleep. So, I guess you could say I’m from Florida. But all I know is, I’m from the water.”

Johnny never did tell anyone. He didn't hear anything she said after "naked."

***

Ma and Pa sent Raidine to church on Sundays. "You need saving, girl," Ma was always muttering. But to be very perfectly clear, Raidine liked it: the way everybody sat still, the silence that spilled out of the organ pipes after the homily.

She always went alone. "Did my time," Pa said when he shooed her out the door. He packed her a mayonnaise sandwich and kissed her on the forehead. "Say hi to The Big Guy for me, froggie." Seemed like Pa missed The Big Guy, but maybe too much to say hello himself.

When Raidine called him "The Big Guy" in Sunday school, the teacher's forehead wrinkled. "Oh dear," she said nervously. "Best to call him 'God.'"

For 45 minutes on Sunday mornings, Raidine learned everything there was to know about everything: the age of the earth, for one—young and inexperienced. That snakes and apples were bad news, and gardens should always have gates. She learned that the earth could be annihilated by floodwaters—that people could make God angry, even if it wasn't on purpose. That kings retained special privileges, and that women should never, under any circumstances, bathe on rooftops. The semiotics of rainbows. The sound of fire.

She learned that *really living* required sacrifice; that sacrifice was just a kindled word for death. That death can

be splintered into tiny pieces. That it can get into the water and live in your bones, if you aren't careful. That the devil was God's most beautiful creature.

But above all, Raidine learned that the most important thing you could do in this life was take a careful and vigilant interest in the contractual obligations of the soul.

"What is a soul?" Raidine asked.

The teacher shook her head and thought for a minute. A thin gray hair stuck to the underside of her jaw. "It's the part of you that belongs to God," she finally said. "And when you ask Jesus to come into your heart, He saves it." Raidine nodded. That settled it. The Jesus part shouldn't be too hard. She had always liked him, the way he was always dipping his hand into wells. Finding a soul was the thing.

Raidine's favorite part of the service was after it was over. She hid in a brown bathroom stall, white stockings and black shoes making telltale marks on the porcelain seat. When everyone left and they turned the big light off, she crept out into the sanctuary, through the hallway, down the stairs, into The Big Guy's back of house.

This is where Raidine learned the most about Jesus—so many things she could have never guessed he'd need. Paperclips, for one. Gin, for another. A pair of women's black loafers. A big plastic gallon jug of distilled water labeled, "HOLY." Worth a shot. She crossed herself and drank it all down. She never felt particularly different after this private ceremony, but when things started to go

sideways, she took to wondering if that was why. Maybe The Big Guy was dehydrated.

***

On the sixth day, The Big Guy created man, and he created woman.

> *"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky…"*

It is easy to miss. The image of God is not a thing with two legs. It is union with an edge of domination—

> *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*

And God saw that it was good.

***

When Raidine was sixteen, Ma conducted the ceremony of *the talk.*

"But under NO circumstances, Raidine, is this to take place before you are good and married," warned Ma. "This is a holy thing, meant for a man and his bride."

"Why not?" Raidine asked. It didn't sound much different from swimming.

Ma's body trembled like it did when she was angry. "Your souls get glued together," she said quietly. "And then you're stuck that way, whether you like it or not."

Raidine nodded, an understanding finally clicking into place because, finally, after all this time, there it was. Directions for a soul.

***

It was the Year of our Lord 1968. South Florida. Once upon a time. We begin the way fairy tales do—the horizon, a cloud of smoke, and a handsome prince on a noble steed.

Ma, Pa, and Raidine felt the rumble of that red-striped Camaro over kitchen table bills. Ma was squabbling about somebody's extravagant use of e-lec-tricity when the table began to shiver. "Quick!" Pa said. "It's the rapture!" He reached up and snatched the pull chain, plunging the room into darkness. "Get on your knees!"

When Henry knocked on the door, he found them reverent. "Jesus?" whispered Raidine. She looked up at him with green eyes, gleaming wet, and for a moment he could have sworn he saw her baring her teeth. The sun cooled to an aqua blue. Her beauty was the kind that belonged in the dark.

"Fell in love with her right then and there," he would later grin.

Henry didn't take them up to heaven, but he did stay for dinner. Pa promised him a gumbo as soon as they could

catch a chicken. When Ma offered him her best chair and footstool, he said "yes" without taking off his shoes.

Outside, the clouds turned black and Raidine's dress pockets bled red, stuffed with mayhaw berries for a pie. She was wading in the water.

This is your chance, girl, said the swamp. In a place where the water is still, things grow uneasy. Things grow restless. She opened her mouth to sing. She called down the rain.

A peal of thunder cracked across the porch—no lightning in its eyes, but yes, laughter. The door burst open. "By golly! I didn't think a storm was brewin'!" said Henry, like he was on a stage. "Quick, help me cover the car!"

They were no match for the water. It dragged across the land in torrents, its only friend the wind. The things that could fly flew, and the things that could float floated. The rest drowned. The flood came up to the doorstep, but no further. The Camaro drifted away. Henry wept into Raidine's shoulder. She smiled and kissed him on the forehead and told him it would be alright. A miracle was on its way.

A week later, there was another knock at the door—a priest in a green steel canoe. A mysterious urging of the Lord had pushed him eastward. When the family asked him to marry the two young lovers, how could he refuse? They held the ceremony on the roof. Raidine wore Ma's whitest nightgown with a lace tablecloth carefully pinned to her wet hair. When she said, "I do," a ripple

spread out from the house as far as the eye could see. The bride's heart leapt. She had been clearing out a space in the middle of herself, and it was almost time to be whole.

For the wedding feast, they opened every last can in the house—baked beans and peas and carrots and beets and those tiny baby corns. Ma even cracked open the tin of biscuits and the jar of raspberry jam she had been hiding under the bed. Everybody beamed.

The couple borrowed the priest's canoe as a marriage bed. For once, even Henry was quiet. The only sound was a hum behind the lips of everything that lived. Raidine lifted the white nightgown over her head. It caught on her nipples like fishhooks.

"Flesh of my flesh," she whispered into his ear.

"Bone of my boner," grinned Henry. He was not afraid to take what was his. He pushed his fingers into her until he was afraid that they would break. Her body split open, and water that smelled like old apples gushed out of her like she was being drained. She gasped and fell back into his arms, rocking the boat. For the first time, she was afraid of falling in.

That night, Raidine dreamed the inside of her opened up like a churchyard. Something small and insignificant tapped her on the shoulder. A raven landed at her feet. On her right side, the smallest breeze kissed her on the cheek and whispered, "Goodbye." Something in the middle of her dropped out, and her mouth took on the taste of blood. A thousand questions hit her eye from the inside.

The first: “What have I done?” The second: the ache of girlhood, the pain of womanhood.

Henry slept soundly. He woke up scratching his armpits. They smelled like his woman’s sticky rotten apple juice. “What happened last night?” he asked, his grin impish. “Was I good?”

She was sitting up straighter and quieter than he had ever seen her. “You gave me a soul,” she said. He laughed and tweaked her nipple. His new wife was really something else.

“Let’s go home,” Henry said, handing her the oars. “I can’t wait to see the Leons’ faces when they get a load of this.”

***

You know what happened on the seventh day, don’t you?

> *“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”*

One week into the whole thing, and God said: “Leave me alone. I am already tired of your shit.”

***

The first time Raidine walked into Paradise Springs, Henry pulled her along like a dog on a leash.

“You live in an amusement park?” she asked. Baby blue slides snaked through the sky, wrapping around each

other like a set of polyurethane intestines that were poorly reconstructed after a knife fight. Screams dwarfed the sun. The smell of chlorine hung thick.

"Baby baby baby," he said, thrusting his hands into the air. "You may be amused, but this is no park." He grinned. "It's a lifestyle."

He handed her a business card: *General Manager, Paradise Springs*. In tiny print at the bottom: *Keeping You Young Since 1513*. His hand drifted across her hip. "What's the wife of a General called? First General Lady? Generalady? Something like that?"

They settled on the edge of the lazy river, a gaggle of geckos darting back and forth between them. Swimmers floated by, perched on bright blue inner tubes. An ancient, leathery creature in a red bikini spun in slow, clumsy circles. A dumb smile held her mouth down as though by force. *See what I can do?* the water leered at Raidine, and she shuddered to think that she had ever been made of that mojo.

"Let's get in," Henry grinned. "You've gotta taste this stuff." He stood up tall and peeled off his clothes like a self-possessed banana. A cannonball was his entrance of choice. Raidine backed away from the concrete edge, shaking her head.

Later, the newlyweds copulated in a pink-tiled shower hut. The water that sputtered out was metallic and green, shimmering across their bodies in shallow currents. When they made love, Raidine was obedient. She let Henry

permeate and pioneer the newly forged caverns of her body. He didn't seem to mind that she closed her eyes tight. When she did, she saw the face of Mother Mary leaning in to kiss her on the cheek.

"Where is Jesus?" Raidine wanted to ask. "I thought I'd be with Jesus." But Mary always seemed to anticipate her question, like, *I get that a lot.* She put a finger up to her lips and winked.

***

On the happy couple's third day in town, they finally ran into Henry's ex-girlfriend.

"Ex-fiancée," Birdie corrected him, her smile red and bloodless. "I've still got the ring, see?" All Raidine saw was dark hair, sapphire eyes, and a mouth like Ma's.

"Anyway." Birdie ran her hands through Henry's hair. "Daddy needs to see you, baby. There's been another…incident."

They walked up the hill to the family mansion, where Mr. Leon poured unevenly distributed portions of Kentucky rye. "My, well aren't you a treat," he said to Raidine, handing her the biggest glass. His body seemed to be composed of parts—willow tree, yellow teeth, handlebar mustache, gold rush.

Raidine and Birdie made themselves useful in the kitchen.

“I love him, you know,” Birdie said. They were buttering bread. The words slipped into the air like little mosquitoes. Raidine turned towards her, but Birdie’s eyes were closed as in death, as in prayer.

“I don’t,” Raidine finally said. The butter had gone soft. “But I need him.”

For a moment, their futures fluttered in the air, like a kite that has yet to learn of its tether. Then, Birdie threw her arms around Raidine. “In that case, we’re sisters.” From that day forward, never did anyone see a better pair of friends. They exchanged recipe cards for milk-based gravies. Birdie taught Raidine how to paint her nails teriyaki red and file them into little points. They shared secrets, and sex tips, and some might say potions for survival.

But when Birdie laughed or cried or slept or sang, Raidine found herself licking her lips, thinking how the body is made up of so much water, wondering just how saved her soul could be.

***

The trouble started as trouble often does—expired milk, bad timing, and a woman with a notion.

Raidine, Birdie, and Henry were stretched out across the beams of a dock in the mangrove swamp, a brackish hunger buried in their bones. It was late August: old heat, honey-colored light.

“If you knew it was going to take us so long to get here, then why didn’t you pack ice?” Birdie hissed. “I’m sooo thirsty.”

Henry groaned. “Suck a tit, Birdie.”

While they bickered, Raidine lay belly-down on the smooth, gray slats, pressing her ear to the swamp. Yearning is a master who deals in memories, and by golly that girl remembered the water. The cicadas swelled. A kingfisher spit strident, mechanical rattles.

The way you understand God depends on the way you understand time. The way you understand time depends on the way you understand its movements. *Raidine was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean*. The fever had broken, split into pieces large enough to hold the sharp and concrete edges of a human soul. But fevers do not deal in contracts, and swamps have a way of leaking.

“Y’all hear that?” Raidine lifted her cheek, rough and splintered from the wood.

“Not unless you’re talking about this senseless boy’s blabbering,” said Birdie, fire in her eyes.

“What’d ya hear, Rai?” asked Henry.

She looked towards the mangroves. “Over there,” she said. “Y’all ever sing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ in church?”

They listened. “I hear it,” said Birdie, her eyes dreamlike.

“It’s beautiful,” said Henry, quiet for once. Serene. Because it was. In a world where every sure-fire path leads towards destitution—towards unkempt, towards rot—the cool drink of comfort takes on the air of salvation. The sound was third-dimension coca-cola syrup communion, piney woods in summer, the cure to what ails ya. Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. Aloe root for the eyes. Peace for the dead. *Jesus loves me. This I know.*

There’s almost no telling what happened next, but someone needs to tell it: Birdie, getting in the water. Quiet. Too quiet. A hum behind the mouth of everything that lives. Then, splashing. So much splashing. Like skin crawling. Like shedding.

Whoever tells you alligators are green is lying. They’re brown as mud.

Later, when they dragged Birdie’s body out of the mangrove roots, tangled, tattered, and ratchet, somebody asked: “Did she scream? She must have screamed.”

On the car ride back to town, Henry’s teeth began to chatter. “She must have screamed,” said Raidine. Henry shook his head, his face a costly shade of porcelain.

“You know what they say about souls that get stuck in the mangroves,” he said, not really to her. Raidine said nothing. She didn't have to. He blew out all his breath. “They get stuck there. Like purgatory.”

***

Birdie Leon's funeral was on a Tuesday afternoon, and afterwards the Leons hosted a lunch—paper doilies, potato salad, peanut butter pudding, and bright green grapes the size of golf balls. Raidine crossed her legs neatly under the blue tablecloth so nothing could get in and nothing could get out.

Raidine noticed the way everyone swished water around in their mouths, trying to get the peanut butter goo out from between their teeth. She tried it, but it only made the water taste like peanut butter. Instead, she flattened her tongue and opened her throat as wide as it would go so that she could drink without swallowing.

Mr. Leon clinked two knives together, a dull and tinny din.

"We're here to celebrate the life of our daughter, Birdie," he said between sobs, gesturing to her toothy senior portrait. "She's with Jesus now, past the pearly gates."

Henry's shoulders shook, like: *I know the truth.*

Mr. Leon continued. "Knowing her, she's eating french toast with the King of Kings and feeling altogether sorry for us poor folks down here." No one said anything, but Henry let out a wail that pierced the veil between the front and the back of Raidine's chest.

"Now listen," said Mr. Leon, his face slick with tears, "I said nobody cry!"

Try as she might, Raidine couldn't. Instead, she splashed some water on her face, uncrossed her legs, and wondered why, after all she had been through to get there, Birdie Leon got to see Jesus before she did.

***

Autumn crept by without anyone noticing, and the Florida air only grew hotter, stiller. The swamp took on the air of rot, which meant it was brewing something generous and thick. Paradise Springs closed for the season. Algae congealed around the corners of the pools. The peacocks would have starved if not for an unending supply of stale ice cream cones. Henry stopped sleeping at home.

"Haven't seen him around here," Mr. Leon shrugged to Raidine. He was scrubbing the stubborn stains off a silver spoon with his fingernails. "He blames you, you know," he said, turning towards her. "But I don't." The air smelled like grapefruit soap. "Say, what have you been doing all this time without your husband?"

"Praying," Raidine answered. It was true. It was the only thing she could think to do. She prayed standing up and sitting down. She prayed "I'm sorry," and "Forgive me," and "I'll do anything." She turned the fan on so that the prayer could widen out and fill the room, then turned it off in case it could be blown out like a flame. She prayed with her eyes closed and her eyes open. She prayed while eating buttered toast, promising "amen" with every swallow. She tried fasting so that her hunger would give the prayers an edge of desperation. She prayed at night and in the morning. She prayed naked, and she prayed afraid.

Mr. Leon grabbed the sides of her head with his soapy hands. “And?” A dollop rolled down her white neck and onto her collarbone, making her look like something sketched on vellum. She said nothing.

“Well, he’s a good boy,” Mr. Leon said. “He’ll come back. Pray harder.”

***

The night Raidine gave up on Jesus, she went down to the mangroves. A spider web of CAUTION tape ribboned in the wind. The water and the sky dissolved into one single shade of deep and Persian blue. A small current came from nowhere, quietly zipping.

Girl, said the water. *Get in.*

There was nowhere else to go. Raidine closed her eyes and slipped beneath the surface. A hunger opened up in the pit of her belly and coolness spread around her lips without the farce of forgiveness. She let her body go completely slack. She did not say goodbye to her soul. It had never been her friend.

There you are, said the water, and kindness came from everywhere. It bent around her body in waves, washing away the idea of *pieces*. A hand slipped into hers and squeezed. She opened her eyes, but there was no one there. When she opened the palm of her hand, she found a sharp little gray seashell. It had pricked her skin, and she was bleeding. A miracle was on its way.

The next day, Birdie and Raidine walked back into town, hand in hand. If death is the state of a body gone cold, Birdie's blood was piping hot. A cherry-red blush burned her cheeks, and dirt hung off her dress like ornamentation. "A saint!" Henry screamed. "My baby's a saint!" He held her in his arms. No one said anything about her eyes, newly green, or about the wife Henry already had. No one said anything at all.

***

Years can pass without anyone noticing. The following spring, Birdie and Henry got married and moved into Henry's one-bedroom bungalow. They still let Raidine sleep in the bed. She took to making handmade seashell jewelry while the happy couple had husband-and-wife time in the bathroom. What people did with their souls was no longer any of her business.

Idle hands are the devil's playthings, so Raidine's backstock was extravagant—chokers carefully threaded with lightning whelk and mother-of-pearl, earrings made of sand dollars dipped in forest green enamel, broaches dripping with sea glass, cowries, cockles, and conches, garnet and chameleon opal and vials of black sand and seaweed. She sold them in the Paradise Springs gift shop for dirt cheap.

The people who wore Raidine's jewelry claimed it gave them good fortune. A fisherman's wife finally learned to tie the knots. The lawyer's daughter's deadbeat boyfriend started wearing condoms. Ticket sales for Paradise Springs soared through the roof. Raidine never

wore her own jewelry, just a little gray seashell on a thread around her neck.

Birdie made heart-shaped pancakes for Raidine every Sunday morning. It was a gesture that lived somewhere in the tension between “Thank you,” and “I’m sorry.” When Henry fell asleep, Birdie would turn and drape her arm across Raidine’s body. When Birdie fell asleep, Raidine slipped out and headed for the water.

When things started to go south, no one really saw it coming. The fisherman’s wife tied the wrong knot, and the boat capsized. The lawyer’s daughter birthed a stillborn. The rate and scale of “incidents” in Paradise Springs tripled by the quarter. The people started to whisper.

“What’s going on, Raidine?” Birdie asked nervously. But Raidine just kept on threading seashells and humming a wordless tune.

When that swamp girl disappeared, Henry and Birdie breathed a sigh of relief. The way they saw it, they had done what they could. But no one should be expected to be all things to all people. Rumors spread about Raidine living in the mangroves, chewing on cattails and making small talk with the cottonmouths. The janitor was the only one who knew the truth, but he couldn’t bring himself to tattle. She gave him leaves to soothe his aching back.

Before long, people forgot about the strange girl with the cool, wet beauty. But once in a while, on a foggy morning, the dew would thicken the starchy grass, and

Henry would remember his first wife with fondness—the way she brought him to life.

***

Raidine came home on Easter. The pageant was scheduled for six o'clock. Mr. Leon was sick with scarlet fever, but the nieces made a halfhearted attempt at potato salad anyway because tradition is important. The whole town packed up their best sherry in tin thermoses and headed in a throng to the water's edge. Birdie sat in the front row, balancing a bag of freshly washed grapes on her ripening belly. They planned to name the child Elvis.

Henry was the man of the hour, and it was nearly time to shine. He was backstage, applying clumps of mascara to his eyebrows because, "Jesus was Mediterranean." He was draped in long, white robes. He had practiced the part of dying all week long—sticking his tongue out and bulging out his eyes like a goldfish. It was the role of a lifetime.

Raidine walked in, naked as sin.

"Jesus?" she gasped, and her eyes looked like clouds brewing heat.

Henry froze in place, jaw gaping. He stuttered a string of words that meant nothing at all. They never had.

"Jesus," she said tenderly. She pressed a hand to his cheek. It smelled like heaven, smelled like a womb. "Jesus," she said again, remembering everything. Leaving

nothing out. “Oh, I’ve been waiting for you for so, so long.”

She leaned in for a kiss and gave him everything she had.

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The dead don’t rest easy in the marsh, so they buried that man on a worn-down hill. Henry always said he wanted to be buried with his horse, but the thing about Henry was he didn’t have a horse. So Birdie cut off her ponytail and laid it on his chest.

On the day of the funeral, someone snapped a picture. “For the paper,” they said. But no paper would print about a dead Jesus. Bad for business.

After everybody left, Birdie lay down on the side of the hill and waited. Sweat soaked through her black satin dress. The gold on her finger grew slippery. Hours may have passed, but time does not move in the swamp like it does elsewhere. The cicadas hummed, the bullfrogs croaked, and the kingfisher lulled Birdie into a fitful sleep.

It was there, somewhere in the space between dreams and waking, that Birdie heard the sound of singing.

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

“Raidine?” she whispered, and a tear rolled down her cheek. So strange how saltwater is made by the body. So strange we pretend to understand why.

She knew what was next. This time, she did not struggle. She did not scream. The sound of splashing came from everywhere. A small, delicate hand pressed into her chest.

Birdie closed her eyes, opened her mouth, and prayed for a drink.

Swamp Girl
Nouvelle
2024

Swamp Girl
Short Story
2024

Cette oeuvre est une nouvelle fictive inspirée du conte de fée *Undine* publié en 1811 par l'écrivain romantique allemand Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. Dans le conte original, *Undine* (Ondine), un esprit aquatique, épouse un chevalier afin d'obtenir une âme. Hans Christian Anderson a déclaré que ce conte a été l'inspiration pour écrire *La petite sirène*. Ma libre adaptation du conte original se déroule dans la Floride du milieu de 20e siècle et examine les thèmes de la passitivité féminine, de la sexualité, de la réligion et de la spiritualité.

*

This piece is a fictional short story based on the fairy tale novella *Undine* published by German romantic writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué in 1811. In the original story, a water spirit marries a knight in order to gain a soul. Hans Christian Anderson credited the tale as his inspiration for writing *The Little Mermaid*. My loose rendition set in mid-20th century Florida, explores the murky intersection of gender, sexuality, religion, and spirituality.

AINJEL STEPHENS

"They Do Things Other People Don't Like": A Folkloristic Approach to Extreme Metal Music

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I first met my partner, Paul, while working together at a restaurant in Ontario. At the end of my first shift, Paul told me that the staff had a little tradition: once all the customers left, each employee would select a music album, and we would shuffle them together in a playlist, blasting it through the speakers as we cleaned down. "You can pick anything you want," Paul explained; since no customers were around, we were not limited to family-friendly music. With a glance to ensure my attention, Paul shrugged nonchalantly and returned to building the playlist. "I usually listen to heavy metal," he confided. Sure enough, moments later, distorted guitars and coarsely screamed vocals filled the restaurant.

I was surprised by this admission: with shortly cropped hair under a Scottish flat cap and well-groomed facial hair, Paul did not look like my assumption of a heavy metal fan (loud, aggressive, long haired, cloaked in black). Paul is excitable, kind, and a leader in the kitchen—certainly a far cry from the angered screams and harsh chords of the music pulsing through the speakers. In both scholarship and the popular imagination, there are some generalized assumptions about "who" listens to heavy metal. Typically, fans of the genre are viewed as a subculture, meaning that style plays a significant role in their subcultural identification (Hebdige 1979). With heavy

metal, fans often convey their identity as "metalheads" by sporting long hair, jeans, and iconic black t-shirts with band logos (Peechatka 2014, 359). Metal style is also evoked through language, with slang such as "poseur" (meaning disingenuous metal music or fans) used to indicate insider and outsider status. Cultural images and subcultural scholarship frequently stereotype metal fans as adolescent male teenagers from lower-class backgrounds living in urban areas (Gross 1990, 122), with a perchance for rebellion, anger, and violence as expressed through their heavy metal music. While there may be some truth to this, it does not capture the full picture: these rebellious teenagers have grown into adults, but they are *still* metal fans. For people like Paul, who no longer fit this stereotypical image, listening to heavy metal is less about demonstrating communal belonging through a subcultural style and more about using music to explore the self. Heavy metal music, then, is embedded with personal meanings and significance outside of "subculture" and "fandom" that dominate our perception of what constitutes a fan.

There have been multiple studies on heavy metal music and its fans dating from the 1990s, most taking a musicological or sociological approach. Robert Walser (1993) and Deena Weinstein (1991) are early scholars of heavy metal, and their sociological methodologies have influenced the academic work of those such as Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) and Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, and Paul D. Greene (2011). Metal scholarship has explored issues of gender—including female metal fans (Vasan 2011) and metal as a performance of masculinity (Spracklen 2020) — issues of class and race (Spracklen 2020), and metal within global context (Wallach, Berger,

Greene 2011). Few scholars, however, have taken a folkloric approach to heavy metal and its fans. According to Dan Ben-Amos, folklore is "artistic communication in small groups" (1971, 13). Important to folklore is not artistic *creation* but rather artistic *communication*, the continued transmission of a work of creation to express something significant among those sharing it. This definition highlights how the sharing, listening, and communicating through engagement with metal music can constitute folklore as an artistic mode created by and for "heavy metal fans." A folkloristic approach focuses on the affect evoked by metal music, and how this affect is shared to communicate mutual feelings and understandings among both listeners and performers. While Harris Berger has taken an ethnomusicological approach to death metal, exploring the emotional significance of this genre, his work has focused primarily on metal musicians rather than casual listeners and fans (1997; 1999). I seek to fill this gap by examining an emic description of metal music according to a long-time fan — Paul — who engages with this music daily, yet on the fringes of what we might call "fandom." While Paul is a fervent listener of metal, he does not view himself as a member of a fandom, yet he is a fan in the sense that he emotionally engages with the genre to express himself and a sense of belonging. My focus, then, is not upon fans who sport heavy metal style and keep up to date with their favourite band's performances and music releases, but rather on everyday audiences who incorporate this musical genre into their daily lives in subtle and overlooked, yet incredibly intimate, ways. Through Paul's discussion of heavy metal music, this paper explores how individual and collective meanings of this genre are

negotiated, and how extreme metal music is an important facet in the folklife of individuals as a means of community formation, self-expression, and emotional release.

Transgression: Defining Extreme Metal

Although we might refer to fans of metal music collectively as "metalheads," heavy metal is not one singular genre but an umbrella term for a vast arrangement of musical performances. As musicologist Robert Walser puts it in his ground-breaking study on heavy metal, the genre is "not monolithic," but rather, it "embraces many different musical and visual styles, many kinds of lyrics and [performative] behaviors" (1993, 3-4). Originating in the 1970s,[18] heavy metal soon exploded in popularity, resulting in the fragmentation of the genre into multiple subgenres, each with its own style of performance, lyrical themes, and musical motifs (Walser 1993, 13). The only true signifier of heavy metal, and what creates the "heavy" sound, is a distorted electric guitar (41). Indeed, "any element of musical sound can be heavy if it evokes power or any of the grimmer emotions" (Berger 1999, 59). Although Paul listens to a variety of heavy metal subgenres, the ones he prefers fit under the subcategory "extreme metal." As the name suggests, extreme metal takes heavy metal motifs and pushes them to the extreme, resulting in a very intense sound. This category of heavy metal features subgenres such as death metal, grindcore, doom metal, and black metal (Kahn-Harris 2007, 3-4). Generally, these subgenres

[18] Harris Berger's ethnographic participants identify Black Sabbath's first album, *Black Sabbath* (1970), as the first metal record, but this is a contested claim among many fans (1999, 57).

perform songs with "heavily distorted guitars, high volume, driving heavy rhythms" and "screaming vocals" which distort the lyrics (Morris 2015, 292). Often, lyrical content contains dark themes, Satanic imagery, and anti-modern ideologies, such as a call for the return to paganism (292). Of these subgenres, Paul's favourite is black metal, distinguished by its high-pitched screams, rapid tempos, and "tremolo" picking (alternating continuously between upwards and downwards strokes) (Kahn-Harris 2007, 4). Whereas heavy metal bands like Metallica or Kiss are mainstream and popular, extreme metal exists in the "underground," on the fringes of society, and offers a "transgressive" alternative to Western music practices (Kahn-Harris 2007, 5, 31). This transgression purposely subverts what is "the acceptable" in Western art (36), making extreme metal intentionally countercultural. While heavy metal broadly has become a successful commercialized genre, extreme metal is its antithesis, pushing the boundaries of sonically pleasing music to offer a transgressive alternative to the mainstream.

Although I am inclined to call Paul's musical preference that of extreme metal, he is not so hasty to use this descriptor himself. When I asked him if he would classify his music library under any genre(s), he said no, but that there is "always a base type of music you listen to" and that his base type is "heavy metal."[19] Paul refuses to define himself under any particular subgenre because he does not "want to get stuck listening to the same things." Throughout our interview, Paul lists a lot of metal

[19] Unless indicated otherwise, all citations are from an interview I conducted with Paul on November 15, 2021 in our home in Newfoundland.

subgenres: from “pirate metal,” which he dismisses as a joke, to “deathcore” to his current favourite, “black metal.” Paul also enjoys a variety of music outside of metal, such as bagpipe music, popular and local folk music, and some indie artists and bands. For Paul, it is “technical skill” above all else that he likes in his music, and he finds that in abundance in extreme metal. Paul likes that extreme metal is so complex that amateur guitar players like himself are not “capable of playing this stuff,” explaining that “there’s nobody on YouTube” who can accurately cover the songs, unlike the “nine million covers” of popular artists like Lana del Ray. In Paul’s opinion, music is only “interesting” if artists are experimenting with sound and working in an anti-commercial framework: “You should be pushing to have your album [out] because producers don’t want it the way you want it.” This mentality aligns best with extreme metal, which is counter-mainstream and spreads through small, independent networks rather than commercial means (Kahn-Harris 2007, 5). Often, this music is considered “too harsh for mainstream audiences” and “unbearable to all but the sturdiest fans” (Peechatka 2014, 358). Paul’s music preference, then, is not about using music as a means of defining his identity or allegiance to any particular subgenre: he is not a “metalhead.” Metal is not a lifestyle nor a community for Paul. It is a means of seeking out music that impresses and amazes through technical skill that can only be achieved in a genre that defies expectations and does not seek to please.

Even though Paul does not define himself as a member of metal subculture, community is still significant to his engagement with heavy metal music. When taking me through his music collection, I found it interesting that Paul remembers every single CD or LP that was gifted to him, and by whom. Pulling out his Windir *Arntor* LP—a black metal band—he mentions that, "You got it for me for my birthday last year. It's spectacular." With the next LP, *Periphery III* by the progressive metal band Periphery,[20] he says, "I think you also got this for me for my birthday, for the year before." Paul and I are quite intimate, so it is not a surprise that he remembers gifts we have exchanged, but Paul also remembers which CDs have been given to him by friends and family. Although he had trouble recalling the artist of one of his CDs, Paul remembers that "someone had bought that [CD] for me." Later, he indicates that his Silverchair CD was also a gift from the same person, and although he has never listened to Silverchair, "they thought" that he would "like it" and he finds it "kind of cool" that someone would purchase a CD for him based on their perception of him. Here, physical CDs are not simply objects but mementos of past relationships (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 331). Paul does not disclose

[20] As with most generic classification systems, some bands do not easily fit into a singular subgenre. Periphery is a band considered "progressive metal," a designation for bands that push genre boundaries, combining techniques and sounds from other genres with metal. Recently, the band's genre and style has been called "djent" by fans, due to the *djent, djent, djent* sound of their guitar playing. Periphery has toyed with this desire for generic classification: their most recent album is cheekily called *Djent Is Not a Genre* (2023).

who this person is to me, but he seemingly remembers, turning music-sharing into a way of creating and maintaining bonds with specific people. These CDs and LPs also reflect relationship boundaries: while I was able to purchase an LP for Paul that he describes as "spectacular," he was given CDs he does not often listen to, signifying levels of intimacy through music sharing. Though Paul does not frequently listen to these CDs, indicating they are outside of his personal tastes, he still values them as a reminder of a bond between individuals expressed through music. Metal music sharing, then, is a method of both creating and expressing a sense of community.

Dorothy Noyes states that for folklorists, groups are the "locus of culture" and the "focus of identity" (2003, 11). She elects to use the term "group" rather than "community" to combine "the empirical networks of interaction in which culture is created and moves" with the "community of the social imaginary that occasionally emerges in performance" (11). Noyes argues that groups comprise of bodies interacting and doing things, along with a performance of group together-ness that we define as "community." Communities, then, are performed and created through a performance that demonstrates similarity, rather than difference. Paul may listen to metal music within a "group"—at the restaurant, for example— but this group only becomes community through the performance of *music sharing.* Outside of physical CDs and LPs, Paul shares digital MP3s with both of his brothers, as well as his friend Matt, all of whom live in Ontario while Paul resides in Newfoundland. Through exchanging music, Paul communicates and relates to his friends and family across geographic distance. For Paul, Matt is the only person he

can freely share music with because Matt does not simply put music "on"; he "sits down and listens." There are some especially heavy songs that Paul feels he can only share with Matt because Matt is "open" to all music genres and will not judge Paul for his preferences. Through the act of listening to Paul's music, Matt does not merely consume music: he connects with Paul. Music sharing is important to Paul, who feels you should always be "open" when someone shares music with you because they are "sharing something that means something to them." By sharing extreme metal, Paul engages in artistic communication, where a musical art form is used to express one's inner self and create a sense of community through music exchange.

On a larger scale, sharing music is incredibly important to the extreme metal genre. As an "underground" genre that opposes mainstream music labels, extreme metal relies on its fans and listeners to "disseminate […] across the globe" (Kahn-Harries 2007, 5). Black metal in particular is described as "decentered" as it spread through "'zines and tape-trading" in the 1990s, and through Internet chat groups today (Hagen 2011, 183). This music sharing is informal, shared through listeners rather than corporations, but it is also organized, with fans creating magazines, webpages and groups to facilitate large-scale music trading. Paul participates in one such group, r/BlackMetal on popular forum website Reddit, where individuals share any new or favourite black metal music via hyperlinks. Furthermore, when Paul was younger and just beginning to listen to heavy metal music, he and his friends would "put all the music we had" onto USBs which they would frequently trade to expand their music libraries. This sharing method was how Paul acquired the majority of his

current MP3 collection. Through participating in music sharing, individuals like Paul are connected to a global web of artists and fans, where music is created by the artist and then shared locally among friends and acquaintances. The sharing creates a group network, or a community, equating the artist with the fans, and letting individuals connect with each other on a personal level through the direct exchange of music.

What is significant to this sense of community formed via music sharing is that there are limits to with whom this music is shared. As stated earlier, much extreme metal is considered too "harsh" for the average listener (Peechatka 2014, 358). This statement is a form of gatekeeping, of creating and maintaining the barriers of belonging within a community. Extreme metal is not intended to be accessible, both in terms of acquiring this music and wide-spread enjoyment. Unlike pop music, which aims to have the widest mass appeal, extreme metal purposely limits itself to only the most dedicated of listeners. When speaking of the popular heavy metal band Ghost, Paul dismisses their music, saying he used to really like the band until he realized, "It's just pop." What Paul means by this is that the band has catchy tunes and is performed well, but the music relies on typical four-chord melodies. Although performed heavy, Ghost employs popular music techniques, making them accessible and, according to Paul, *not* metal. Throughout his discussion of music, Paul sets barriers to what extreme metal is, implying that there are distinct boundaries that so-called true metal listeners must surpass. On the opposite end of the metal spectrum, Paul identifies the band Cattle Decapitation as the "heaviest band in the American death metal genre

ever." I am inclined to agree, since I find much of this band too extreme and harsh to enjoy myself. As Paul explains, the band is "anti-human," with their lyrics bashing humanity as destructive and corrupt. Even Paul agrees that he can "only take a little bit of them at a time," but he gets "really into" the band every once and awhile. Bands like Metallica and Ghost are a part of the heavy metal genre, but these bands are "easy to listen to" as "everyone knows a Metallica song" and do not quite compare to more genuine metal bands, like "Napalm Death" and "Cattle Decapitation," which are bands that "nobody is listening to." Real extreme metal is to be unknown and countercultural, distinctively against the sounds of the mainstream and working not to be popular, but to stand out as sonically different. To be an extreme metal listener is to not only know, but to listen to and enjoy these unlistenable bands, even if only in small doses. The way Paul positions some bands as popular, albeit heavy, and other bands as unlistenable to most implies that there are boundaries that he places around certain bands, and only those who know and listen to these bands can consider themselves true heavy metal fans. The community then, is open in terms of anyone who listens to these bands can be a part of it but closed in that it requires a test of knowledge to prove yourself as a listener of extreme metal.

In a sense, it can be argued that one's extreme metal preferences work as a musical shibboleth, or as a test to prove one's membership to a group. When discussing the Norwegian black metal band, Gorgoroth, Paul conveys that this band and Cattle Decapitation "have their place" in his musical library for "whenever someone thinks that they have the heaviest music, because they don't." Here, Paul

implies that what most people consider heavy metal is *not heavy enough*. He continues, saying that "most people who think they listen to heavy metal music then throw on a Killswitch Engage song and are like [imitating], 'Listen to this breakdown!' Like [mockingly] *good for you*." The music that most would consider heavy is dismissed by Paul as easy listening, not worthy of the title heavy metal. Some songs on Paul's playlist are there not necessarily because he enjoys listening to them, but because he wants to prove that he listens to the heaviest of metal—music that the average listener is *unable to listen to.* As a shibboleth, extreme metal music can be used to prove one's belonging to the extreme metal community, as people who truly enjoy this genre would be able to identify the bands or at least be able to consume them. Although Paul does not consider himself a part of a widespread extreme metal community or "fandom," community still plays a significant part in his engagement with extreme metal, as he creates this community himself through sharing music with others, and he gatekeeps and defines the boundaries of extreme metal listeners by creating a musical test to prove one's participation in the extreme metal scene—or, to prove they are not a "poseur."

Legends: The Folklore of Extreme Metal

What Paul demonstrates through his listening to extreme metal is that smaller folk groups emerge within a larger community of fans. Instead of considering himself part of a fandom, Paul creates intimate networks where music is shared, and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are defined through one's ability to enjoy and engage with

extreme metal songs and artists. Once we begin to dig a little deeper into these folk groups and their networks, we see other types of artistic communication happening outside of music sharing, such as legend-telling. Legends proliferate around Norwegian black metal bands—a notably brutal subgenre of extreme metal and Paul's absolute favourite. Although many of these narratives are based on real events, I refer to them as "legends" because of their expressed negotiation of belief. As folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi argue, belief is an "indispensable ingredient of legend narration" (1976, 94). How belief is represented within legend telling is complicated, as often the teller might "believe unconditionally" while also believing "with some second thoughts, with a trace of doubt or with mixed feelings" (99). Furthermore, legend telling sessions often begin or end with an "inconclusive discussion of its truth," demonstrating that legends are not simply expressions of belief, but *social negotiations* of belief (109). While colloquially, we might refer to the stories surrounding black metal bands as "rumours," they are better referred to as "legends" because they are full narratives that open discussion of not only these bands and of the Satanic belief system they supposedly support, but also of the beliefs, values, and opinions of their fans and followers.

Many of the legends about Norwegian black metal have been sensationalized, such as with the journalistic book *Lords of Chaos* (Moynihan and Soderlind 2003) and its fictionalized film version of the same name (2018). *Lords of Chaos* (2003) traces the history of the band Mayhem, considered to be the originators of Norwegian black metal. This band is notorious among metal fans, as

one of their members (Euronymous)[21] was murdered by fellow artist, Varg Vikernes, of the solo-band Burzum. While *Lords of Chaos* claims to be true, it also casts doubt on its narratives: the authors imply that much of Maythem founder Euronymous's "evil image" was a performance, rather than part of his genuine belief system (Hagen 2011, 183). As well, there are rumours that "allegedly," as Keith Kahn-Harris points out, members of Mayhem consumed the brain of one of their fellow band members after he had committed suicide but there is no evidence beyond the hearsay of the band and its fans (2007, 45). These rumours bleed into the film version of *Lords of Chaos* (2018), which opens with a disclaimer: "based on truth… lies… and what actually happened" [sic]. Statements such as this contribute to the legendary aspect of the band, where narratives emerge and are spread through rumours, or "lies," of the folk, representing the band as at once beyond the scope of the everyday *and* as belonging *to* the folk. While many of these incidents have real-life police reports, providing so-called tangible proof of the narrative, many are less verifiable, emerging as part of the legend-cycle surrounding the band and the wider black metal genre.

These legendary narratives greatly contribute to the band's image both among extreme metal fans and in wider social contexts. When discussing my research for this paper with my peers, individuals who do not listen to the genre often mentioned off-hand that they know of the notoriety of Varg Vikernes and the band Mayhem. Legends surrounding Mayhem are part of the wider legend-cycle of "Satanic

[21] Many black metal performers use stage names and personas; keeping with the spirit of black metal and its subculture, I will refer to these musicians by their stage names.

Panic," which feared that heavy metal music was "brainwashing" youths into violence and suicide (Victor 1993, 163). As folklorist Bill Ellis notes, legends emerge in "clusters" of various forms of narration and information that reflect and reveal "an anxiety specific to a particular place and time" (2000, 4). Surrounding black metal, and heavy metal more widely, is the fear of the loss of control: of rebellious teenagers breaking away from normative behaviour and enacting violence using the folklore that surrounds Satanism and the bands that sing about it. Paul himself is not immune: he mentions that his mother bought him an album by the Christian-metal band Haste the Day because, "She thought I was going to hell. Because of the music I was listening to." While Paul does not believe in the evilness of music, others in his life do, requiring him to think about his own relationship to religion and belief through music. Ultimately, Paul determined that this music matters to him more than the fear of hell, valuing musical expression above religious doctrine. Through black metal, both listeners and artists explore—and contest—their own belief and value systems. Many extreme metal musicians report being "committed Satanists" (Kahn-Harris 2007, 38), but the question becomes is this religiosity genuine or part of the band's performance? Black metal, then, expresses not only beliefs, but the negotiation and questioning of belief, and this is exemplified through the legendry that surrounds the music both within and outside of the black metal scene.

Other than a brief mention of "church burnings," something which Varg Vikernes actively promoted that resulted worldwide copy-cat arson (Kahn-Harris 2007, 45-46), Paul does not discuss the infamous legends about

Mayhem. Rather, he discusses the legends that surround the band Gorgoroth, a more contemporary Norwegian black metal band. This band is one of the aforementioned bands that Paul listens to demonstrate that his taste in heavy music is more intense than the average listener. Paul states that the band leader, Gaahl, "literally almost killed someone in his basement." This statement does have a factual basis, as Gaahl was convicted of battery (Kahn-Harris 2007, 46). Paul expands on this conviction, stating that Gorgoroth performed a "quote-un-quote Satanic ritual" onstage that resulted in the video performance of that concert being banned and confiscated by "the EU" [European Union]. Years later, when the footage was released, Paul tells me that it was then converted into a new music video and that "in the midst" of this, Gaahl was imprisoned "for trying to kill a fan who had tried to murder him because he was a Satanist." Paul then laughed and proclaimed, "you can't make this stuff up!" This exclamation expresses a negotiation of belief, where Paul is aware at how outrageous this narrative sounds, but the extremeness of it only proves, rather than denies, that it must be real. When I pushed Paul further, asking if this narrative was "metal," he complicated this sense of belief, stating that, "It's really good promotion for the band, and I mean—the stories are probably for the most part true […] we'll just assume all that's true." Like any good legend, belief is up for debate for both the listener and teller, blurring the lines of truth and fiction. Paul's ambiguity surrounding the truth of the narrative demonstrates that verifiable "truth" is not necessarily the crux of this legend. Rather, its importance is in how this legend contributes to the image of the band and black metal: a transgressive tale for a transgressive genre.

As legends, these narratives contribute to the quasi-mythical status of the band, interpreting the band leaders not as people, but as legendary folkloric figures in the scene. Many times, Paul laughingly exclaimed "he's fucked!" when discussing Gaahl, or Varg, or any other prolific black metal performer. Through his laughter, Paul shows his pleasure at the transgression of these individuals, while simultaneously rejecting their violent actions with his words. By legend-telling, Paul demonstrates knowledge of these bands and contributes to the "brutal" image of black metal, while simultaneously rejecting these actions as permissible. We can argue, then, that legend-telling allows listeners like Paul to express the value of transgression, while also condoning real-life violence outside of the fictional space of performance.

Darkness Within: Understanding Black Metal Lyrics

What black metal legends demonstrate is the performative nature of transgression and belief within the black metal genre and the pleasures it derives from its fans. As a form of "good promotion," these acts of violence are ubiquitous in the genre, and violence becomes a key aspect of how the genre performs and defines itself. Scholars and critics alike are quick to point out that much of the perceived darkness of black metal comes from its lyrical content. Heavy metal and extreme metal have a "fascination with the dark side of life" and seek to represent "perverse deviance" within a "successfully functioning society" (Walser 1993, xvii, 144). Much of this darkness is represented through its use of distortion, both in terms of guitars and vocals, but meaning is also derived through its lyrics (42, 26). Lyrically, most

extreme metal songs are heavily pessimistic, dealing with the "desperate and desolate conditions" of modern society without offering any "real solutions" (Morris 2015, 293). Like the name suggests, black metal music is dark music, made to reflect the harsher sides of life and oppose the bright tones and joyous lyrics of pop music. I cannot argue that the lyrics are not violent—because they are, some uncomfortably so—but this violence does not mean that there are not other values and meanings to be found within these songs. I turn now to Paul's favourite black metal songs to explore how black metal lyrics, while aggressive, can be used as an interpretive folk framework, allowing listeners to engage with personal emotions collectively, and to represent the beliefs and values of a wider folk culture.

Two of the three metal songs Paul calls his favourites are by the band Windir. Windir is a Norwegian band, originally consisting of one member, Valfar.[22] What sets Windir apart from nearly all black metal bands is the fact that they draw heavily upon local folklore and culture, describing "local sagas" using "traditional folktunes" and singing in an "archaic rural dialect" (Hagan 2011, 194), resulting in this band being a hybrid of what Paul refers to as Pagan folk metal and black metal. Indeed, the dialect is specifically the dialect of the hometown of Valfar, the founder, songwriter, and lead performer of the band (Spracklen 2020, 109). One of Paul's favourite songs is "Fagning" which roughly translates to "Fawning." This song is folk-historical, describing the legend of Sverre, one of the kings of Norway who, according to the song, the

[22] Valfar himself is a bit of a legendary figure within black metal, as he tragically died during a snowstorm at a young age. His music is well-loved, and many lament the loss of such a talented musician.

Devil believes in to burn down the Christianity in Norway.[23] These lyrics advocate for Norwegians to "rule their own land" by returning to folk culture and paganism before Christianity—even if that entails violence. When discussing Newfoundland treason songs, Kenneth S. Goldstein states that he predicts that songs that explain historical events are likely to disappear in time as formal instruction overtakes folk memory (1991, 138). Windir actively opposes this disappearing of historical-folk music, using "Fagning" as a way of preserving folk culture through a distinctively Norwegian musical form that reflects the opinions and beliefs of not only individuals, but potentially entire folk groups.

Paul's other favourite Windir song is "Svartesmeden og lundamystrollet," or "The Blacksmith and the Troll of Lundamyri." Like "Fagning," "Svartesmeden" draws heavily upon local folklore, using a folktale of a blacksmith who kills a troll as its lyrical base. The lyrics also localize the tale, naming specific landscape features of Valfar's home region, Sogndal, Norway. Both "Svartesmeden" and "Fagning" present themselves as natural, reflective, and belonging *to* a place and folk group. Because the songs are performed in the dialect of Valfar's hometown, they are nearly untranslated-able: Google Translate does not detect the language, and there are very few individuals online who have taken to translating the lyrics.[24] The few who have use

[23] All lyrics have been provided by Paul, sourced from various Internet sources he has compiled.

[24] The lyrics Paul has provided me are sourced from these translations. I am unable to verify how accurate they are, but for Paul, they best represent the song and are the ones he uses to understand the lyrics. I have used these lyrics to contextualize and analyze these songs, as it is

footnotes to apologize that they are unable to figure out what certain words or expressions mean. Lyrics, then, are not the primary means of communication within these songs *except* for those of Valfar's hometown—of his folk group. C.K. Szego has documented a similar incomprehensibility with endangered languages in traditional Hawaiian music, noting that non-native speakers use "interpretative moves" based on musical features to develop personal interpretations of a song outside of textual understanding (2003, 312-3). With Windir, the nostalgic feeling of the music results in an interpretation of the song representing the theme of loss of culture and folklore for listeners outside of Valfar's folk group, echoing lyrical content that calls for a return to paganism and laments cultural disappearance. Lyrically, these themes are specific, but musically, they are universal, allowing individuals like Paul to feel emotions of loss and revival despite lyric incomprehensibility. Windir's music, then, is highly personal, speaking to and for a hyper-specific folk group, while simultaneously speaking to the wider values of black metal music, including the return to nature and the importance of preservation of folklife and culture, even if that renders the lyrical content inaccessible to most.

What we see with Windir is how lyrics are only a very small part of the black metal experience. Paul explicitly states that when he listens to music, "lyrics are the last thing" he thinks about, and that he doesn't "really think about the lyrics much." This means that for black metal music, there is *something else going on* besides the

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the only way non-Norwegian listeners such as Paul can engage with the lyrical content of the songs, but I do not claim their accuracy.

lyrics where value is expressed and conveyed. The violent lyrics that so many critics and scholars focus upon are not necessarily how meaning is made nor expressed in black metal. We see this negotiation between lyrical content and found meaning with Paul's other favourite song, "Längtar bort från itt hjärta" ("far away from your heart") by the Swedish black metal band, Shining. Once again, Paul does not speak the language the lyrics are in, yet he finds this song to be incredibly personal — so much so that he doesn't "think anybody else knows I listen to Shining. That band's sort of an 'only-for-me' thing." Shining's lyrics, when translated, are incredibly violent, so I can understand not wanting to share in case one be misjudged. "Längtar bort från itt hjärta" repeatedly states that the singer wishes to "kill you" and that they will "destroy," "shatter," and "kill" "your world," "your dreams," and "your sources of joy." When I mentioned to Paul that I found these lyrics extremely violent, he shrugged and said, "yeah but if you actually looked into it, you'd know that she's singing about killing herself," with "her" referring to the "pussy" the song mentions. I do not know where Paul encountered this interpretation, as there is nothing in the song that indicates this to be true, but there is also nothing in it that indicates it *not* to be true. Although violent, the lyrics are clearly interpretive, something Dee Snider of Twisted Sister echoed in a court appearance against the censorship of "violent" heavy metal music: "Songs allow a person to put their own imagination, experiences and dreams into the lyrics. People can interpret [it] in many ways" (Dunn et al. 2005, 45:18-45:26).

What Paul's favourite songs suggest, then, is that lyrics are not the crux of meaning in these black metal

songs: the songs are used as platforms of interpretation where personal meanings and expressions can be explored within a cultural artistic mode of communication. Paul does not "care what they're talking about" when he listens to music, joking that the lyrics could be talking about "killing doves or goats or whatever all you want." This lack of lyrical concern does not mean that Paul does not find emotional expression in extreme metal. When I asked what he listens for in music if not lyrics, Paul replied "metal makes you feel something." Elaborating, Paul says that while listening to this music, you are able to "feel a wide range of emotions" and sometimes this results in a visceral reaction, where "certain chords played together will make your hair stand on end." Paul admits that extreme metal sometimes "doesn't sound very pleasing," but rather than turning off the music, he enjoys it more, as "you have to go through all this y'know hard work to get to the part you want to listen to […] it's like walking up a mountain so you can see the view at the end." This metaphor implies a physical reaction to the music, where it is demanding and unpleasant but ultimately worth the effort one puts into listening. For Paul, listening to extreme metal is not meant to be enjoyable but rather *cathartic.* With Shining, it took Paul over "ten years" to get through the album because it is "scary" and "depressive," but more importantly, because Shining was what he listened to as an outlet against his aggressive "hyper-Catholic-Roman upbringing." This music "scared" him because he thought it would "bring [him] to hell," but listening to it now is a "relief." Like his metaphor, working through this music is difficult but ultimately rewarding, resulting in a sense of catharsis due to the way it permitted him to work through and understand

his own beliefs and values—no matter how difficult these internal conflicts may have been. Through its unpleasing sound and ultimate beauty found in the "little parts" that follow, black metal offers a pathway for working through difficult emotions, promising the listener that although things are rough and difficult to deal with, ultimately, relief will be found so long as you keep with it—even if that takes time.

This is not to say that violence is not a significant part of black metal. All three of Paul's favourite songs deal with violence to some degree, but Paul denies that this representation of violence is meant to promote or provoke real-life action: "it's not music for you to kill yourself or to kill someone else or something, but people are like, 'aw that's brutal, that's metal.' No, that's not metal, that's a bad decision." The violence the music presents, then, is not a call to action for further violence, but rather a metaphoric representation of one's own aggressive feelings and emotions. This comment asserts that anyone who uses black metal as an excuse for violence does not actually understand black metal. For Paul, black metal does no more to promote violence than pop artist "Justin Bieber" does. When discussing an incident at a Lamb of God concert where a fan was accidentally killed when the lead singer kicked him off stage, Paul says soberly that while "everyone was like 'woah, that's so metal,'" the band leader, Randy Blythe, was "devastated" because he "just wants to go up on stage, scream, have fun, and make music, just like everyone else." Physical violence, for Paul, does not have its place in extreme metal; instead, this music allows for a release of violent feelings through screaming, which ultimately makes it feel "fun." Violence may

surround this genre, but this violence is more metaphorical than literal, allowing for a collective emotional release through the high-pitched screams and distorted chords of black metal.

Black metal music, then, offers an alternative means of exploring one's most personal and difficult emotions. Paul describes black metal as both "simple" and "raw." While Paul clarifies that by "simple" he does not mean "simply played," he never states what he does mean by it. I propose that black metal music is simple *because* it is raw: it is simply a form of emotional expression, including dark emotions that are oftentimes ignored, dismissed, or unspoken, requiring one to work through them on their own. For some, this makes the music nothing more than "angry music"; however, people who view music this way are inherently misreading the music, according to Paul, because the music is not meant to evoke anger but rather to work *through* anger. Instead of masking darkness, black metal music confronts it, forcing listeners to be guided through what remains unspoken in society or in their own lives, and offering a path to the other side. Important to this journey is that through the form of song, one is not guided on this journey alone. As stated before, Paul does not often share his favourite black metal songs because he perceives them as too personal; community is *still formed* through his listening. Paul says that black metal does not put someone into a bad mental state but works as "a way to escape bad places" because it is a "place where you can find a community of people who come from the same place." Through encountering and then working through dark emotions while listening to black metal, Paul is able to escape any bad emotions because he feels other listeners

working through it alongside him. Even if Paul perceives black metal as highly personal and a very individual experience, he also sees it as a way of creating an imaginary community of others who all feel the same way. Black metal, then, is a means of expressing unspeakable emotions and beliefs collectively, through sharing and listening among small groups of people who feel the same, making black metal a significant form of folkloric expression among its listeners.

Conclusion

By discussing extreme metal with fans like Paul, we can see how violent, harsh, and transgressive music such as black metal is an important mode of individual and collective expression of complex, and often unspoken, emotions and beliefs. My hope is that this paper has demonstrated how folklore emerges from, informs, and has become a significant part of black metal and extreme metal more broadly. While there is still much to say about extreme metal from a folkloric perspective, this paper serves as an important framework for considering how negative or violent expressions in folk culture can still be cathartic, meaningful, and incredibly important modes of artistic communication for individuals and their folk groups.

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Israt Jahan Lipa

Invisible Complexes of Death: A Preliminary Review and Personal Reflections on Researching Deathlore

Beliefs about life as predictable, subject to our control, and destined to continue indeterminately are incompatible with the experience of death. It is this contradiction that first drew my attention to folkloristic works on death and sparked my attempt to discover the different themes that folklorists have explored in their death-related research. Here, I reach across folklore genres and draw on different time periods in the discipline's history to trace the story of folkloristic approaches to death. Folklorists' explorations of grief culture extend from historical and contemporary death customs and rituals to belief and vernacular spontaneous memorials. In exploring the themes that emerge, I ask how this body of work on death and grief differs from that of other disciplines, including psychology, health professions, and sociology. Finally, I draw attention to the challenges of doing ethnographic research on death customs and beliefs. Because individuals mourning the death of a loved one negotiate complex fields of emotion, folklorists have struggled with the responsibilities of eliciting, recording, and reporting extremely sensitive, personal information and emotions of grief and loss. They have faced challenges of representation as they attempt to convey family members' re/creation of memories of the deceased person. In this

regard, I explore how folklore researchers have positioned themselves in their works on death. What is particularly challenging for them in sharing their fieldwork experiences when dealing with others' mourning and grief?

To explore these questions and concerns, this paper focuses on three topics. First, I begin by briefly introducing folklore themes that emerge in interdisciplinary research on death, grief, and death rituals. These include death rituals, funeral customs, roadside memorials and cemeteries as material culture, and finally, folk beliefs on death. This overview reveals that for many decades, folklorists have analyzed death, but whereas earlier works deal with the folklore of death beliefs and death customs (Halpert 1952), more recent works focus on the evolution of contemporary death customs (Ellis 2019). Lastly, I explore the often-challenging fieldwork experiences of folklorists who do ethnographic research on death and reflect on the diverse fieldwork dilemmas they face when transforming others' personal grief experiences into research "data."

In this literature review, I draw mostly on folklore research; however, in a few places, I include some reflections from anthropological works on death. There are many published sources about folklore and death, and out of this enormous literature, I review selected representative sources. As this paper is mostly focused on folklore scholarship on death, I discuss themes following a chronological analysis of the folkloristic work. This chronological consideration of each theme helps the reader to appreciate the connections between contemporary folklore works and earlier works on death. It also helps to expose temporal shifts concerning different notions of death in folk culture. My discussion starts with death as a

rite of passage, where I examine death rituals and customs. Then, I analyze death in terms of humour and folklore, where I consider folkloristic works on the traditional Newfoundland wake. Next, I turn to intersections of death and material culture, reviewing folklore studies on cemeteries, decoration of cemeteries, and roadside memorials. I end my thematic analysis of death studies with a discussion of folk beliefs about death, moving from Violetta Halpert's work on death beliefs to the contemporary notion of "good" or "bad" death as embraced by folk groups in different communities. Finally, I point to some accounts of fieldwork experiences shared by folklorists where they speak of the emotional challenges of researching death. Given the large amount of folkloristic literature on death, I consider this paper to be only a partial review. My goal here is not to offer an exhaustive analysis of all published scholarship but rather to discuss representative examples to identify general themes that may help open up new possibilities for future folkloristic research on death. By exploring some of the fieldwork challenges folklorists face when researching death, I raise this as a topic that I think deserves more scholarly attention and consideration.

Researching Death: Inter-Disciplinary Approach

An extensive body of folkloristic work raises important questions about death through examinations of beliefs concerning death, death taboos, death rituals, and the role of death customs and beliefs across cultural groups and different historical backgrounds. In highlighting intersections of cultural and personal expressions of grief,

folklorists have contributed to larger international and interdisciplinary conversations about death. It is worth stating that folkloristic work on death is wide-ranging, examining many different aspects of death, from methods for the disposal of the corpse to expressions of grief to beliefs about death's existential dimensions. For example, following the seminal contribution of Robert Hertz (2013), a large body of literature examines death as a process rather than an event; one in which the boundaries between life and death are culturally ambiguous.

Folklorists have contended that the multitude of varieties of eschatological beliefs about death and rituals related to disposal can culturally be understood as a communal social response that represents the experience of death as interpretable and replete with narratives (Butler 1982). Because folklorists have a long history of engaging in the study of death as a cultural phenomenon, it is important to note that current ethnographic interest in death is less a new direction of study than it is an exciting extension of earlier work. While reviewing folklore scholarship on death, I found that folklorists have emphasized the relationship of the deceased to the culture and community to which they belonged. For example, in the case of burial ceremonies, community members in many cultures focus their efforts on preserving a deceased's physical remains (Kiong and Schiller 1993). A thread running through folklore scholarship is the effort to understand the deeper social and cultural implications of death; it is the most private and, at the same time, most public of human experiences.

Human deaths have long commanded a prominent place in folklore theory-making on belief, religion, rituals,

customs, personal experiences, and memorial culture. Since the nineteenth century, folklorists have published extensively on the topic of death and some have accorded death and the treatment of the dead an extremely prominent place in their theoretical enterprises (Clark and Cheshire 2004; Everett 2002; Frisby 2015; Halliday 2010; Hertz 2013; Petersson 2009). The majority of these works focused on emotional aspects of death and bereavement, but folklorists also studied death in humour, especially as part of "sick," "cruel," and disastrous event joke cycles (Dundes 2017). Interestingly, some of the best-known folklore studies are the psychological analyses of Alan Dundes (2017), such as his writing on "The Dead Baby Joke Cycle" of the 1960s and 1970s, which he interpreted as reflective of the rapid social changes that took place in American culture during these decades. Dundes emphasizes the social effects of genocide and the psychological function of such inhumane activities within this joke cycle.

Folklorists have also dealt with vernacular understandings of death as cosmological design; here, the premise is that there is an otherworld of magico-religious significance that can be reified through ritual (Frisby 2015). In folkloristic work, many traditional conceptualizations of death emerge, including death considered as a divine or semi-divine being possessing extraordinary magico-religious powers; death as a restless soul, sometimes trapped in a liminal area; death as a sociable cadaver who interacts with the living; and death as spatial-temporal, with calendar events and physical spaces concerning death, tragedy, and history. Helen Frisby's analysis of vernacular death portents and divinatory customs in early twentieth-century folklore collections

reveals the complexities of contemporary, subjective experiences of mortality (Frisby 2015). Drawing on calendar and seasonal death portents, as well as spiritual beliefs about death, she argues that contemporary views of death are more complex than can be accounted for with a simplistic dichotomy between modernity and magical thinking.

These contributions of folklorists to the larger body of interdisciplinary research on death sometimes contrast and/or complement other disciplinary approaches. For example, based on my reading, the work of healthcare professionals on death seems to be mostly devoted to the clinical setting of death, where they examine death as a lived experience of physicians dealing with patients; offer a rational model for coping with bereavement and the grieving process; and present a phenomenological investigation of death (Angoff 2001; Kasket 2006, Papadatou 2000; Wilson and Kirshbaum 2011). Relevant to this clinical emphasis in death research, I note that psychologists' works are mostly focused on death anxiety, the emotional stress of grief, aging and death, suicidal mortality, and the management of the terror of death: these publications talked about psychological aspects of dealing with death and trauma (Lyke 2013, Steger and Frazier 2005, Wong 2007). Interestingly, I found that this literature dealing with clinical and rational understandings of death and grief did not consider socio-cultural experiences of death related to folk lives, overlooking folk narratives and experiences. This is an area where I think folklorists could make valuable contributions. It is my observation that, compared to other disciplines, folkloristic work more closely links death to the broader context of folk groups

and cultures through analyzing beliefs, performances, and material cultures. I see this folkloristic approach as a strength, and it has the potential to shed light on areas not often discussed, such as people's beliefs about the afterlife. I could imagine folklore research, based on conversation and interviews, as part of a therapeutic process of managing grief and pain. Hypothetically, a respectful environment of fieldwork might allow people to share their pain and trauma of loss with the folklorist when they may not have other outlets. I feel that folklorists can use their strength in researching experiences of death on the micro level as an asset. This disciplinary scholarship might help to open some new therapeutic areas for bereavement and grief management, and it represents a possible direction for further research.

Rites of Passage: Death Customs and Rituals

Death always bears upon the living. Its observances and rituals represent a form of expressing sociability. This is seen, for example, when community members join family members of the deceased to participate in death customs and rituals. It reflects the social nature of human beings when a community takes part in death rituals and even in the grief process. As such, death rituals can be viewed as culturally heightened activities: these rituals conflate, refract, and highlight a culture's most important social and religious values, even though these values are not always immediately apparent, explicit, or understood by others as symbolic statements about the social order (Leach 2021). For folklorists, much of what is interesting about death rituals is how they help us understand the social

organization and institutions of the living. Death rituals not only reveal social relationships but also the attachment to the community, mediate the dynamics of group relations, and allow members to define and redefine their associations within the social group.

In my Bangladeshi socio-cultural setting, I have observed that people view dead souls as undesirable entities that need to be removed from the living world by ritual cleansing, marking boundaries, and discarding objects following respective religious views. Across different religious groups, I see that normally, when a person dies, some family members—mostly adults and others from the community—busily prepare for the final burial process. The final ritual varies from religion to religion, but the goal is the same: to perform the last rites as soon as possible. Here, I observe death ritual as an effective way of uniting social groups by bringing them together for a common purpose: to bury the dead. The rituals thus invoke the conventions of exclusivity and delineate the group from outsiders. I witnessed that, even those who had a difficult or uncomfortable relationship with the deceased person for any familial or other reasons, came together to take part in the burial process. This commonality creates a communal feeling as everyone who knew the deceased tries to see them off for the last time. When all the close relatives arrive, the final burial rituals begin with the aim of burying the dead body within the shortest period of time because of the theological belief that it is important to bury the deceased person as soon as it is possible in order to free their soul from this living world. In Islam, it is believed that a delay in the burial ritual brings sin to the deceased person,

whereas in Hinduism, death is believed to be the release of a soul, which is then reincarnated into a new life.

Whereas these death rituals mark the completion of the dead person's existence, folkloristic studies of death in Christian communities in places like Newfoundland and Labrador interpret ritual as an attempt to create an ongoing relationship with the deceased. For example, Gary Butler contended that death used to be considered an integral part of life that united home and community, and he argued that this communal approach to death rituals changed with modernization (1982). In his study on the traditional Newfoundland house wake, Butler demonstrated how "a structured deployment of interior spaces" abetted in resolving the sacred-profane tensions and a movement from worldly to otherworldly status (1982, 31). His analysis details the material and social transformation of the "front room" or "parlour" from a formal space for entertaining guests to a sacred wake room, and he observes that the Newfoundland wake serves to remove the imbalance between the profane and sacred domains, which death has created (Butler 1982, 31). Butler also notes the differences between Protestant and Catholic modes of decorating the wake room, and their differing explanations of customary practices. Linking to Butler's work, Venetia Newall also asserts that death represents the last transition and change in the life cycle of a human being. In "Folklore and Cremation," Newall comments that ritual actions concerned with life-cycle events are helpful to participants and assist them, in the case of death, to accept what has happened and to adjust emotionally (1985). Thus, funeral customs can be regarded as a means of helping the deceased's soul to achieve eternal rest, but are also full of dramatic activity

surrounding the corpse; family members/relatives cleanse and dress the body, arrange the home to create an appropriate mood for mourning, and observe other rituals as symbolic acts that help to control the entire experience of grief.

Death is a supremely significant occasion, and the deceased is, in a peculiarly real and moving sense, the central actor. Although dead, the corpse remains alive as the central figure of the funeral ceremonies. Careful cleansing and dressing of the corpse, followed by religious rituals, express the affection and sorrow of the living for the dead, where the emotional crisis of burial is met with heightened drama by honouring the dead and showing gestures of farewell (Charles 1948). Over the years, folklorists have analyzed death rituals from various perspectives. Whereas earlier works focused on documenting different death customs and rituals, more recently, folklorists have focused on the changes in death customs over time. For example, Peter Narváez stressed that while in the first half of this century in Newfoundland and Labrador the traditional house wake was an important social context for the enactment of forms of mediation and magical agency, with modernization, dying persons were no longer cared for by their community (2003). Rather, the dying were routinely sequestered from the living in specialized hospital wards and tended to by professionally trained morticians who prepare cadavers to be “lifelike” for public display in funeral homes (Narváez 2003, 113). Narváez notes that domestic funerary customs and rituals, community mechanisms of consolation, and collective support for the bereaving no longer appear to be as

prevalent as they once were in the province, even if people still perform these rituals in some places (1994).

Death must be consistent with the larger socio-cultural value system of a society, whether in kinship, marriage, or economic networks. It is within this context that the elaborate and often very expensive rituals make sense. Similarly, in a study of wakes in the community of Calvert, Gerald L. Pocius describes death "as a sombre community occasion" (1991, 181). To extract oneself from performing these ceremonies is not just to serve a relationship with the dead but, more importantly, to risk excommunicating oneself from the community. For example, in Bangladesh, I have observed that there is an economic class dimension to the performance of death rituals. Those who are economically better off usually arrange a grand feast in the name of the deceased person, after both four days and forty days following the burial. This is an expression of one's social status as well as their affection for the deceased person who was close to them. The grand feast ultimately symbolizes the family's social and economic status, even though the family members refer to it as "charity" in the name of the deceased person. This example highlights that death rituals must be understood within the context of the total transactions in a society and not merely as isolated events. It also reveals that these transactions occur at two levels: first, between the living and the dead, and second, between living individuals and groups within a society.

These examples show how folkloric works on death customs and rituals, in general, demonstrate the link between the deceased and their community. They highlight the very social fact of ritual, which is considered a social

process of communally bidding farewell to the dead. Importantly, they also reflect a shift in folkloristics away from examinations of particular death customs to analyses of changing death rituals due to the influences of modernity. This discussion also marks the influences of bureaucratization, specialization, and compartmentalization of "modern" death, which largely removes dying from community context. Today, the bereaved person can suffer from a paucity of ritualistic conventions during the mourning period since his emotional involvements are not diffused over an entire community but are usually concentrated on a few people. I think changing death customs and rituals and their impact on bereavement represents a rich topic for future folkloristic examination.

Death and Memorial Culture

Along with death rituals, folklorists also analyze death in terms of material culture, focusing on death memorials, cemetery traditions, roadside crosses, and even floral customs in funerals. Gravestones and grave sites are material statements of how family members believe a loved one should be remembered. Internment in a remote, anonymous grave without a funeral would be a casting-out; it would be an indication that the person no longer belonged to society. While it has been a longstanding tradition to commemorate the dead by the roadside (numerous war memorials and statues of prominent figures stand on or beside public highways), not all roadside memorials necessarily honour the dead.

Recently, it has become popular to memorialize accident victims in England and other countries through the

construction of roadside memorials (Everett 2002; Monger 1997; Petersson 2009; Smith 1999). For example, in the article "RIP by the Roadside: A Comparative Study of Roadside Memorials in New South Wales, Australia, and Texas, United States," Jennifer Clark and Ashley Cheshire critically examine roadside memorials. This comparative study raises questions about the consistency in memorial form and practice between societies with diverse ethnic and religious profiles and different historical backgrounds (2004). Clark and Cheshire suggest that in the United States of America, ethnic and sub-group affiliation accounts for local and individual differences in mourning culture. The authors note that "the roadside memorial reclaims public space for the celebration of the individual in a period and place of overwhelming technological and cultural change" (2004, 203).

Another important folkloristic work on memorial culture is Holly Everett's *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture* (2002). In her field research on roadside cross memorials in and around the city of Austin, Texas, she thoroughly analyzes these memorials as material culture. Everett considers memorial issues as an important folkloristic phenomenon in belief and folklore studies. Her research provides the historical and current context for the appearance of vernacular memorials and discusses a number of culturally important memorials. Everett illustrates dominant patterns in the construction and assembly of spontaneous memorials and roadside crosses, demonstrating that different items placed at road crosses reflect an ongoing dialogue with the deceased (notes, inscriptions on bridge railings) and the continuation of missed celebrations (toys, homecoming mums, graduation

tassels). These memorials are communal responses in terms of vernacular, religious expression as well as political activism and the grief processes of a community that represent the deceased and contain elements which allow bereaved individuals to incorporate the dead into the world of the living and vice versa.

Like Everett, Jack Santino also discusses the concept of "spontaneous shrines," along with other examples of public memorialization of death in his edited work *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (2006). Santino explores the social dynamics and political repercussions of spontaneous shrines and suggests that, by combining the personal with the public, they can be seen as a metaphor for folklore itself. He notes that the motivations leading to public acts of memorialization are complex because they have to do with sickness, belief, personal devotion, attempts to influence that which is beyond human control, and also a need to demonstrate to an audience. Like memorials, cemeteries also act as a unique form of material culture which reflects a communal setting as well as different forms of memorialization of death. Gerald Pocius's work on Newfoundland gravestones reflects this idea of a material culture marked by "the rock" used as a gravestone in the Newfoundland region (Pocius 1981). Pocius's study depicts how local crafts and material culture combine with communal belief in gravestones.

Overall, folklore work on memorials emphasizes the idea that whereas contemporary funeral custom and landscape highlight the difference between the deceased and those who mourn, roadside cross memorials present a cross-cultural affective threshold. Individuals mourning the sudden death of a loved one negotiate a complex field of

emotion, often dealing not only with their own grief but also with other relatives and friends of the deceased. Robert Halliday writes that as an effort to incorporate an unexpected loss in grief culture, spontaneous memorials should be understood as places of intimacy and community, sacred spaces in which death may be contemplated, and life celebrated (2010).

Along with the studies of memorials, I found Michael Owen Jones' article on "Dining on Death Row: Last Meals and the Crutch of Ritual" very fascinating in terms of relating foodways as a material culture related to death. Jones narrates the preparation of last meals for the prisoners who are sentenced to death as an important folkloristic work to explain foodways beyond traditional meals (2014). He analyzes why the public desires information about the food requested by those facing death, and how the condemned's meals are politicized, feeding arguments by both those for and those against the death penalty. This article also examines the origin of the last meal ritual and why this custom with varied meanings for different participants in the drama of execution perpetuates. Jones argues that the ceremonial last meal is one of the most powerful symbolic elements within a larger phenomenon laden with rituals and symbols in terms of the death penalty.

Lastly, another folkloristic article concerns floral traditions as material culture in funerals. Written by Susan Drury, "Funeral Plants and Flowers in England: Some Examples" examines the custom of crowning the dead, carrying garlands at funerals, and strewing coffins and graves with flowers, herbs and evergreens prevailed in England from early times to today (1994). Drury found that

in “earlier times, aromatic herbs and strongly scented flowers were used to hide the odour of decay when the dead were laid out, often for several days, in private houses before burial” (1994, 101). Other flowers and plants were used for their color or their symbolism. This paper presents a preliminary survey using a regional or county approach regarding funeral flowers and plants.

In brief, work on memorials and cemetery culture in folklore studies reflects changing trends, from a focus on beliefs to one on contemporary roadside crosses and changes in cemetery decorations. These discussions indicate how people try to stay connected with the dead through forms of material culture; these material expressions demonstrate communal behaviour in terms of cemetery traditions. All of these activities are closely connected with personal and community-shared beliefs.

Folk Beliefs about Death

In earlier periods of folklore scholarship, folklorists paid most attention to folk beliefs, legends, and myths about death. They tried to figure out peoples’ perceptions of death according to their communal beliefs about death, death taboos, and even death omens like, “If one stood on the church porch on the last night of the year, he would see the shadows of those who were doomed to die in the coming year” (Law 1900). The appearance of the face of the dead was considered to be an indication of the state of the departed soul. A calm, peaceful expression was considered a hopeful sign that the deceased person would go to heaven, whilst those who had died in a state of sin had a look of pain or an evil sneer.

In “Death Beliefs from Indiana,” Violetta Maloney Halpert wrote about death beliefs that she classifies as either omens or taboos. Death omens, which informants often call “signs” or “tokens,” are simply notices of impending death (Halpert 1952, 205). Halpert shares beliefs about death that are usually manifestations of the external world, although there are occasional exceptions by way of extra-sensory perceptions; thereby, death taboos can be regarded as warnings against committing actions which are or were once believed to cause death. From the evidence of this collection, death taboos seem to inspire less intense belief and testimony than omens (Halpert 1952). She describes two notions of death taboos in her collection: if you do so-and-so, someone will die; and never (variants: don't, you shouldn't) do such-and-such, or someone will die. Her collection is a great source for folklore researchers because she includes many personal narratives collected from Indiana about death, death omens, and death beliefs. Halpert notes other examples of various incidents at the time of death or during a funeral that are said to predict another death. Many of the beliefs Halpert records in Indiana are cross-cultural, and interestingly, I heard some of the same taboos in my Bangladeshi community, especially in rural settings. This idea of finding the same beliefs in different cultures in different characters is similar to Claude Levi-Strauss’ arguments in his work *Myth and Meaning* (2017).

Likewise, in his work on Chinese residents of Singapore, Bloch Parry notes that birth rituals seem to follow similar patterns to death rituals: just as corpses are buried, so too are placentae during birth (1982). He asserts that the notion of death related to rebirth is not unique to

Southeast Asian societies because, of course, many people who believe in Hinduism and Buddhism believe in an afterlife that one can enter after death. As Parry suggests, the promise of rebirth is used in many cultures to negate the finality of death, whereas fertility symbols are prominent in death rituals because of the conception of death as a source of life. Through a manipulation of the ambiguous concept of time, death can be successfully harnessed to ensure regeneration (Parry 1982).

Because what happens to us after our bodies die is an important question for many people, it is arguably one of the most important issues folklorists address. Who among us has not at some point in his lifetime wondered, "What will happen to me when I die?" or, "What happens to the people we love when they die?" These questions impact our daily lives, and a better understanding of how individuals and cultures answer them can be seen as integral to our understanding of the structure of our civilization and our theological beliefs. I would argue that whatever we believe happens to our sense of self or personhood at the end of our days also strongly affects our outlook on life while we are alive: it can determine our sense of social ethics and profoundly affect our cultural values.

Some scholars have emphasized the connection of death practices to underlying cultural beliefs. For example, Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington argue that death cannot merely be understood as an event marked by a haphazard assemblage of ceremonies and activities (1991). Beyond being a natural fact, death is a culturally constructed idea to which people connect their worldly experiences. As life becomes transparent against the

background of death, fundamental social and cultural values are revealed (Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Role of Culture in Framing Expressions of Grief: "Good" or "Bad" Death

Processes of meaning-making, social narratives, and cultural norms regarding death are mutually constituted. Rituals of mourning and remembering are not only shaped by cultural discourses, but also, in turn, shape communal narratives. Likewise, folkloristic works document the ongoing transformation of rituals, traditions, and emotions, as well as of the verbal, embodied, and material expressions of loss. Folklorists show how the response to death becomes a site of negotiation between personal identity and social and familial relationships, while also reflecting and refracting larger issues of trauma and emotional grief. Rather than a solely individual process, extensive research shows that the response to loss is always intersubjective.

The work of Diane Tye and Diane Goldstein also illustrates the emotional stress caused to the family members after the sudden tragic death of three young boys (2006). The authors narrate the story of the drowning of three teenagers from the small coastal Newfoundland community of Pouch Cove and the grief of their close ones after the accident. This sudden death of such young people brings a great deal of pain and shock to family and community members. Their expressions of grief reflect the belief that it is tragic and unnatural to lose someone at a very young age. In contrast, if someone dies at an advanced age, or after suffering from a chronic disease, their family

members are often mentally prepared for their death and view it as more natural.

The manner of dying and the meaning given to death have great implications for the grieving process. If one person dies of old age and another dies by accident at a young age, very likely there would be a significant distinction in the grieving process. For example, in my community in Bangladesh, where peoples' lives are shaped by diverse social norms and religious values, a death resulting from suicide or violence (such as sexual or physical assault) is often considered a "bad" death. On the other hand, dying at an advanced age, dying as a religiously respected person, and/or dying from natural causes, are all considered "good" deaths. When an individual takes their own life, their family members can be socially stigmatized, and the meaning-making process surrounding such a death has a great impact on the grieving process. At a time when family members remain in shock over the sudden death of their loved one, they may also have to deal with lots of questions and stigma within their community. For example, if a young girl is murdered following a rape, then her family may experience victim blaming. They may face shameful and accusatory questions such as: Why did she go there? What was her relationship with the rapist? Were there any unlawful relations between them? Did her outfit send the wrong message to the assailant? This response reveals why folklorists cannot study death as an isolated life event. It is embedded in communal narratives and social values.

The cultural construction of emotions is a multi-directional process, and community structure and tradition, in part, determine what is allowed, encouraged, or

prevented in terms of expressing grief. Personal and communal needs do not always synchronize with each other: sometimes, the individual's need to express and recognize their loss may conflict with restoring the social fabric and collective identities according to expected communal norms. Folklorists explore who gets to define what constitutes healing, the ways in which rituals reflect understandings of the nature of mourning, and the role of the collective in managing the emotions that go with it. Folklore studies also demonstrate that in many societies, some ways of dying are deemed better than others, which are considered bad, tragic, or ugly. Likewise, there are also certain times when dying is seen to be appropriate, depending on the context. The meaning that is assigned to death through shared conceptions and values predates the event, yet individuals often actively seek to shape and define deaths in particular ways that, in turn, shape the emotional response to that death. Among the many emic categories which characterize a death, the opposition between a "bad" and "good" death reflects deep social values that continue to affect survivors even after an individual has died.

Ethnographic Challenges of Researching Death

Grief researchers have long recognized the important role of culture in framing the mourning experience as processes of meaning reconstruction and relationship transformation that are inherently situated in interpretive communities and social relationships (Rosenblatt 2008). Ethnographic research on a sensitive topic such as death presents a host of personal and professional dilemmas for a fieldworker. It

calls for intense involvement of emotional capacities and raises practical and ethical challenges related to privacy, trust, and maintenance of boundaries (Watts 2008). The uneasy feeling that another person's pain is the source of the researcher's academic advancement can take an emotional toll on the researcher. It can be hard to acknowledge and record the emotions that a researcher experiences and realizes, which are also data in their own right. Grief, loss, pain, and death are all connected to our personal lives, and importantly, these feelings are shaped by our surroundings. In "Catullan Myths," Aaron Seider (2016) argues that expressing emotion for the departed soul of a family member varies based on gender. On this point, researchers need to pay attention to the culture where someone is expressing their emotions and feelings.

Even in earlier folklore works, folklorists faced the challenges of doing fieldwork on death. For example, in his 1994 article on the Merry Newfoundland Wake, Peter Narváez talks about the challenge of avoiding ethnocentrism in research on death. He notes that ethnocentrism biases thinking with regard to such an emotionally charged subject as death (Narváez 1994). Ralph LaRossa and Linda Bennett's seminal paper on the ethical dilemmas of doing qualitative research with families is relevant in this context (2018). Emphasizing the pervasiveness and inaccessibility of family life, they raise the ethical issues of informed consent and the risk-benefit equation for families. Qualitative researchers, more often than not, do not have clearly formulated research questions or strategies: the very strength of this method of research is its openness and responsiveness to contexts and subjectivities. The issue of "informed consent,"

a cornerstone of ethical practices in research, becomes challenging; while this fact is humbling, it also raises the issue of paucity of support structures and avenues available to families in difficult circumstances to talk through their troubles to an empathetic, non-judgmental listener. This situation sometimes also reflects upon the power relations that characterize the research engagement and the way that these relationships are complicated by the researcher's positionality.

For example, in the article "Researcher as Insider: Opportunities and Challenges," Shuvangi Vaidya shares her experience of doing fieldwork with parents who lost their children with disability (2010). Vaidya narrates that many parents told her that they had been interviewed or surveyed before, and they had cooperated but felt that the researchers were more interested in the information they had to offer rather than in them as persons. She stresses that when doing fieldwork on an emotionally difficult topic, it is important to carefully and sensitively approach participants. She admits that she has invested considerably with her research participants herself by sharing her own story and narrating her own pain. Vaidya finds that with every disclosure of her pain, particularly the difficult time when she lost her husband, her respondents would open up more and more and talk freely and frankly.

In such a situation, the collected "data" reveals personal and emotive stories of pain, loss, rebuilding, and acceptance. Here, I recall Judith Stacey's classic piece *Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?* (1988) where she argues that the friendship that may develop between a feminist researcher and her respondent could end up becoming more manipulative than the more usually distanced

researcher/participant relationship, which had no pretensions of aiming at empathy or solidarity. Stacey shares her own experiences of feeling that she was using and betraying her informants by transforming the extremely private and intimate information revealed to her into data. There can remain an uneasy feeling that another person's pain is the prime source of the researcher's academic advancement, and there's limited space to justify this.

To summarize the challenges of conducting folklore research on death, I would like to draw on the personal experiences of someone who did such ethnographic research. In her thesis, Holly Everett shares how emotionally challenging her fieldwork on roadside memorials could be (2002). She notes that she had to struggle with the responsibility of eliciting, recording, and reporting extremely sensitive, personal information of her informants. In addition, she felt she had a major responsibility to accurately represent the beauty and power of the memorials that her informants create, recreate and describe during their interviews. I find Everett's account emotionally moving, and the very challenging nature of her fieldwork comes through clearly. Based on her experience, I think the main challenge for a folklore researcher is to sensitively represent the voices of participants; this is perhaps especially difficult when documenting deep grief and loss. Everett's work may generate new directions for folklore research as her emotional—yet potentially therapeutic—process of managing grief and trauma may encourage folklorists to cope with emotional turmoil during their fieldwork.

Final Thoughts

To conclude, this paper weaves together earlier and current ideas on the folkloristics of death. I ground this paper in the examination of data and theoretical approaches utilized by a number of folklore scholars, and in some parts of the discussion, I reached beyond folklore scholarship to contextualize folkloristic analyses. For the most part, I presented a detailed account of the cultural practices of death across a range of religious and cultural contexts. Although I could not incorporate all published folklore sources on death in this single paper, I tried to draw on representative works from this large body of folklore scholarship. My reading prompts me to do more study on the topic. Each area of literature sparked new ideas and new ways to think of death. While death has been a focus of study for folklorists since the early days of the discipline, there still remains much to be done and many unexplored aspects for future folklorists.

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Disparition , douce Tirage photographique, environnement 2023

Disappearing, softly Photographic print, environment 2023

La culture et la tradition naissent directement de la terre qui soutient, stimule et anime ses habitants ; la terre façonne ses peuples, et nous façonnons la terre. Sur, dans et à travers l'île de Terre-Neuve, une force tout aussi distinctive des paysages mis à l'épreuve est celle des vents implacables de l'Atlantique Nord. Dans sa description de l'inspiration qui a inspiré l'œuvre du légendaire artiste terre-neuvien Gerry Squires, Michael Cook exprime parfaitement ce sentiment en affirmant que « le ciel ravagé par le vent est ce qui nous informe et nous façonne » (Cooke 1993, p. 12). Dans l'œuvre, disparaissant doucement, cette force invisible, mais non imperceptible, du vent a été canalisée pour jouer le rôle de l'artiste, donnant ainsi voix à la force formatrice de cette terre.

Cette image (ou série d'images) fait partie d'une collection de tirages photographiques exposés au rude climat terre-neuvien. Dispersées dans la ville de St. John's, ces photographies ont été laissées à l'air libre pendant de longues périodes, laissant le vent agir sans intervention humaine. Au fil du temps, ces images déchirées par le vent perdent leurs couleurs, leurs détails se perdent et de petites fractures s'élargissent tandis que la photographie retourne à l'espace vide du néant. Dans cette œuvre, le vent est l'acteur principal ; l'artiste décide du moment opportun pour interrompre ce processus continu. Le paradoxe de cet acte final – le retrait du tirage de son nouvel environnement

extérieur – interrompt le processus, mais préserve l'image ; la signification d'un tel acte doit rester un mystère.

Avec cette œuvre, *l'Invisibilité* prend forme de multiples façons. Ces images sont avant tout façonnées par la force invisible du vent. Les changements sur les tirages ne sont perceptibles qu'au fil des mois de visites répétées sur le lieu de prise de vue. Cette œuvre utilise le vent pour transformer l'invisible en visible. Le visage flou, les mains caressantes et les yeux clos de la solitude, en particulier, imprègnent une émotion forte qui amplifie l'esthétique de la disparition dans le néant.

Donner au lecteur un sens fixe serait trahir l'œuvre elle-même, mais dans le contexte de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, devenir invisible n'est pas une expérience inconnue : les petits ports isolés de Terre-Neuve, la peur de la disparition de l'identité terre-neuvienne et l'extinction du peuple béothuk. Devenir invisible est un problème bien réel pour les habitants de ce territoire, mais l'expérience du néant peut aussi procurer une certaine extase. Les rivages de galets à perte de vue qui bordent les côtes, les horizons océaniques d'un bleu éclatant qui nous attirent au-delà du vide absolu des vastes étendues arides, et bien sûr, l'étreinte des vents implacables. Terre-Neuve exige une certaine forme d'invisibilité.

> Savez-vous ce que l'on ressent lorsque l'on disparaît ? Que signifie cette invisibilité pour vous ?
>
> > Eh bien… certaines questions sont mieux murmurées au vent.

Si vous écoutez attentivement, elle vous répondra.

Ouvrage cité

Cooke, Michael. 1993. « Ciel aveugle, roche nue : Gerald Squires, quelques réflexions sur son travail dans l'espace et le temps. » *Newfoundland Landscapes 1988-1993*. St. John's (T.-N.-L.). Service des relations universitaires de la Galerie d'art de l'Université Memorial.

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Culture and tradition spring directly from the land that supports, challenges, and enlivens its inhabitants; the land shapes its peoples, and we shape the land. On, in, and throughout the island of Newfoundland, a force that is as distinctive to the landscapes being tested, are the unrelenting North Atlantic winds. In Michael Cook's description of the inspiration behind the work of fabled Newfoundland artist Gerry Squires, he perfectly captures this sentiment in his statement that, "The wind-wrecked heavens is what informs and molds us" (Cooke 1993, 12). In the work, *Disappearing softly*, this invisible, but not imperceptible, force of the wind was channeled to play the role of the artist, thus giving voice to the formative force of this land.

This image (or series of images) is part of a collection of photographic prints that have been exposed to the harsh Newfoundland climate. Scattered around the city of St. John's, these photographs were left out for extended

periods of time where the wind was allowed to work unaided by the human hand. As time passes through these wind-torn images, their colours fade, their details are lost, and little fractures expand as the photograph returns to the blank space of nothingness. In this work, the wind is the active player, and the artist decides when to stop this ongoing process. The paradox of this final act—the removal of the print from its newfound outdoor setting—kills the process but preserves the image; the significance of such an act must remain a mystery.

With this work, *in[visibility]* takes form in many ways. Foremost, these images are shaped by the invisible force of the wind. The changes in the prints are only noticed by repeated trips—over the course of months—to the photo site. This work uses the wind to transform the unseen into the seen. In particular, the blurred face, the caressing hands, and the closed eyes of solitude imbue a strong emotional feeling that further amplifies an aesthetic of disappearing into nothingness.

To tell the reader a fixed meaning would be to betray the work itself, but in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, becoming invisible is not an unfamiliar experience—Newfoundland's lost outports, the fear of a disappearing Newfoundland identity, and the extinction of the Beothuk people. Becoming invisible is a very real problem to the people of this land, but there can also be a certain ecstasy found in one's experience of nothingness. The endless pebbled shores that hug the coastal shores, the blazing blue ocean horizons that beckon us beyond the utter emptiness of the wide-open barrens, and of course, the

embraces of the unrelenting winds. Newfoundland demands a certain kind of invisibility.

Do you know what it feels like to disappear?
What does this invisibility mean to you?

Well… some questions are best whispered to the wind.
If you listen closely enough, she will respond.

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Cooke, Michael. 1993. "Blind Heaven, Naked Rock: Gerald Squires, Some Thoughts on His Work in Place and Time." *Newfoundland Landscapes 1988–1993.* St. John's, N.L. Division of University Relations for the Memorial University Art Gallery.

Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Award
2025 Undergraduate Research

The *Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Award for Folklore Field Research* was established in 1990 by the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore Society to honour the memory of Mary Griffiths (1967–1990), a student of folklore from Ship Harbour, Placentia Bay. Active in the Folklore Society and preparing to pursue graduate studies in folklore at Memorial, Mary exemplified the curiosity, dedication, and community engagement that continue to inspire students today.

At the undergraduate level, the award recognizes an outstanding paper grounded in original field research, completed as part of the requirements of an undergraduate folklore course during the previous year. In celebrating this work, the award affirms the importance of student fieldwork to the vitality of folklore scholarship and honours Mary Griffiths' commitment to advancing the discipline.

Culture & Tradition is proud to present the following essay, "Differences in Meaning Between the Grimms' and Perrault's Versions of *Sleeping Beauty*" by Jasper Harris-Kavanagh as the 2025 undergraduate recipient of the *Mary A. Griffiths Memorial Award for Folklore Field Research*, as a testament to both academic excellence and the enduring legacy of Mary Griffiths.

JASPER HARRIS- KAVANAGH

Differences in Meaning Between the Grimms' and Perrault's Versions of *Sleeping Beauty*

While many people are more familiar with Perrault's versions of popular fairy tales through Disney adaptations and see the Grimms' versions as macabre, it is the opposite with tale type 410, *Sleeping Beauty*. The two versions share many similarities—at least initially—but whereas the Grimms' version ends with a happy marriage, Perrault's continues to include another plot line that could easily be described in modern terms as a horror story. Both Perrault's and the Grimms' versions of *Sleeping Beauty* are very cathartic for the audience through their true depictions of the continual cycles of loss and gain on sensitive topics, and they have similar underlying messages about how people should live, especially regarding class and gender. However, because Perrault is careful to emphasize any moral lessons which he sees in the story and includes the ogre queen-mother plot line, his story acts also as a warning about choosing a spouse carefully and not hastily rushing into a marriage with youthful enthusiasm. Grimms' version contains no such moral. First, I will compare each tale's plot and motifs to familiarize the reader with each tale and to see how each tale's meaning differs. Next, I will search for aspects of each that are cathartic for the audience and prescriptive, teaching morals and appropriate behavior.

Differences and Similarities in the Plot and Motifs in Sleeping Beauty

According to the ATU index of folktales, there are five parts to the tale-type 410, *Sleeping Beauty*. The first four parts are shared between both tales and have similar plots, motifs, and meanings behind them. However, the Grimms' tale is lacking part five, the ogre queen-mother plotline, which greatly affects the meaning of the story. Initially, both stories are fantastical depictions of the challenges of royal family life, presented as ultimately good, but the fifth part present in Perrault's version turns that narrative on its head, de-sanctifying the family by presenting it as a potential source of danger. Interestingly, though family and marriage are presented as potentially dangerous and a mother is presented as evil, she must be dangerous to her daughter-in-law, rather than her son, preserving the mother-child relationship as one that is ultimately good.

The first part of the tale is *"[t]he wished-for child"* (Cardigos et al 2006, 92). Both tales are very similar here, and though the daughter arrives by different means in each story (one by a helpful talking frog in motif B211.7.1 and B4931.1, and the other simply with time), the meaning does not change. However, what happens next sets the tone for the rest of the story. In the Grimms' version, the King hosts a celebratory feast (motif P634) to celebrate his daughter's birth, but in Perrault's version the feast is after the Princess's christening (motif V87). This brings the audience's attention to religion and morality and grounds the tale more in reality than the nondescript fantastical fairy tale setting.

The second part of the tale, "*[t]he fairies' gifts,*" (Cardigos et al, 92), is nearly identical in the two versions. They share the same motifs: F361.1.1, *"[f]airy takes revenge for not being invited to a feast"* (Thompson 1966, 71); and F316.1, "*[f]airy's curse partially overcome by another fairy's amendment*" (61). These motifs are the driving force behind the main actions of the plot of this tale. Though the King attempts to prevent the curse from coming into fruition, it is ultimately in vain (motif M379), bringing the tale to part three, "*[t]he enchanted princess,*" (Cardigos et al, 61). Perrault's version is longer and more convoluted, though the same result is achieved and there is little difference in the meanings of each tale, save for the emphasis on morality. The Princess finds a spindle in a tower and pricks her finger, triggering magic sleep (motif D1364.17). All fall asleep in the Grimms' version, but in Perrault's version, the fairy who had altered the curse returns and puts the others to sleep so that the Princess would not be all alone in the castle when she awoke. Then, a magical hedge (motif D945) grows around the castle, protecting the sleeping Princess (motif D1967.1).

At the end of the hundred years, the curse is lifted in two different ways, starting part four of the story, "*[t]he disenchantment,*" (Cardigos et al, 92). Both are lifted at the end of the specified time (motif D791.1), but in the Grimms' this is done with a kiss from the Prince (motif D735). In Perrault's version, the curse is lifted just as the Prince enters the Princess' room and falls to his knees in awe of her beauty, (a perfect image of chivalry)—it is more chaste than the Grimms' version. All others awake, and the two get married happily. Up to this point, both tales are fairly simple, charming tales that give happy endings to

those whose fate had been unkind. Although Perrault's version does so a bit more directly, both enforce traditional roles of class and gender, emphasizing marrying and having children as central to life.

However, part five: "*[t]he jealous mother-in-law*" (Cardigos et al, 92), changes and complicates Perrault's story because it presents family and marriage as a potentially dangerous problem. Firstly, the Prince lies to his parents about finding the castle, marrying the Princess, and having two children. This is the behaviour expected of a trickster character, not a prince, making the audience question whether or not the Princess should have married him. Then it is revealed that, "He never dared to trust [his mother] with his secret; he feared her, though he loved her, for she was of the race of the ogres […] [and] had ogreish inclinations" (Perrault 1998-2023) to eat children. This statement preserves the Prince's good character by clarifying that he is choosing to fulfill his duty as a husband and father over his filial duty to his parents because of less than ideal circumstances, rather than lying for malicious reasons. Naturally, when the Queen mother finally learns about the children, she decides to eat them in secret, ordering them to be killed and prepared for her meals. The helpful cook (motif N842) deceives her by substituting their flesh with various animals (motif K1840) and hiding them away. Upon the discovery of his deception, she tries to brutally put them to death, but is surprised by the King's early return and kills herself instead in a rage. The last moral addition is that the King was saddened by her death but comforted with his wife and children, highlighting the importance of replacing one's family with another through

marriage and mitigating some—but not all—of the negative connotations associated with it at the beginning of part five.

Cathartic Aspects of Sleeping Beauty

Though Perrault's version is most clearly prescriptive, both are very cathartic. The themes of the tale are universal and pertain to what was often the most central part of life; problems are solved in ways that appeal to most people's sense of justice; and the plot line, rather than follow one greater arc, follows multiple smaller and more realistic struggles to gain what one lacks and prevent the loss experienced in everyday life. The main themes of this tale revolve around family: marriage, children, and death. These are relevant in every human era, but especially in earlier French and German societies before modern healthcare greatly reduced child death rates; when marriages had great social, political, and financial implications; and divorce was religiously impossible. Since the tale is so relevant to everyday life, it is also extremely engaging for the audience, expertly fulfilling one of the roles of folklore: entertainment (Bascom 1954, 342-343).

The initial problem at the beginning of the tale is infertility, which is miraculously solved; yet their hard-won daughter immediately faces an undeserved death curse, a fate she cheat magically through the intervention of a fairy. Just like in real life, the fact that the Queen successfully delivered her daughter did not mean that the daughter was out of danger. Instead, there were completely new deathly dangers to avoid. The oft-magical miracles in this tale would be cathartic releases of tension for the audience, who had almost certainly experienced at least one of these

problems, and offered solutions that would provide the happy ending an audience never received with the children in their lives.

The struggle against a mother-in-law (a problem caused by marriage) is relieved in a cathartic way in part five of the tale. The Princess must live with the repercussions of having not just a terrible woman for a mother-in-law, but an *ogress*, heightening the tension of the tale by adding the additional fears of losing one's children through death, murder, and cannibalism. Resolving this situation by hiding the children away and the mother-in-law's brutal death by her own designs are therefore extremely cathartic and satisfying for the audience—even if they cannot rid themselves of their terrible in-laws, they can emotionally experience something similar through relating to the young Queen when engaging with this tale.

Prescriptive Aspects of Sleeping Beauty

Both versions of *Sleeping Beauty* contain a plethora of underlying messages about how people should behave woven directly into the plot and characterization, fulfilling another role of folklore: education (Bascom 344-345). Perrault's version goes one step further, directly stating to the audience the morals he perceived in the tale at the end. Normally the audience should look to the main character as a role model. However, the Princess, like the other good female characters, actually does nothing that is not pre-ordained by fate. The good fairy, though she has agency, uses it only to help others. The evil female characters have personal agency and use it to do terrible

things to those around them for their own pleasure. The male characters are all good—save for the brief mention of the little boy in Perrault's tale misbehaving—and have personal agency. Though it is doubtful that these portrayals were purposeful, they nonetheless reflect certain ideals of female behaviour.

The Prince is noted as behaving in a certain way in both versions. In the Grimms' version during the Prince's quest to wake the Princess, he hears of the dangers of the hedge but is "not afraid of that" (1998-2023). In Perrault's version, he is "pushed on by love and honor," and it is written that "a young and amorous prince is always valiant" (1998-2023). Love, honour, and courage are the Princely ideals.

Lastly, Perrault's story contains a perplexing poetic moral, adding on new meanings to his tale. He states that, "Late or early, [it] matters not" when love comes into one's life, and the contrary, "some old folk will even say [i]t grows better by delay" (1998-2023). In the final stanza, he notes that even though it is wiser to wait (presumably to marry), "young blood must when young blood will" (Perrault 1998-2023). These statements, when considered in reference to the tale which they are about, have the effect of warning the audience not to rush into marriage, for the Princess nearly lost the lives of her children and herself by having an ogre mother-in-law.

Conclusion

Perrault and the Grimms' versions of *Sleeping Beauty* share a lot of the same plot points and motifs. The stories are cathartic, engaging, and relevant to most audiences in the

way they solve fantastical versions of common problems. Their characters and plot act as a teaching device for the audience, modeling good behaviours for upper class men and women. However, Perrault's ogre-mother plotline and poetic reflection of the morals of the tale add new meanings. Both the Grimms' and Perrault's versions of *Sleeping Beauty* emphasise the importance of marriage through its prominent role in the plot, but only Perrault's version includes a warning about the potential negative aspects of marriage, encouraging the audience to be careful when choosing a spouse.

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Biographies des contributeurs / Contributor Biographies

Kyra Helena
Kyra Helena est une artiste émergente diplômée en anglais et en histoire. Maintenant, elle termine sa maîtrise en gestion artistique et direction créative à l'université College Cork, en Irlande. Elle aspire à explorer davantage les intersections entre l'identité culturelle et la narration visuelle, motivée par son intérêt pour la manière dont l'art visuel peut remettre en question les exclusions systémiques et susciter une réflexion critique sur les structures sociales.

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Kyra Helena is an emerging artist holding a degree in English and History. She is completing her Masters in Arts Management and Creative Direction at University College Cork in Ireland. She hopes to further explore the intersections of cultural identity and visual storytelling, driven by an interest in how visual art can challenge systemic exclusions and prompt critical reflection on social structures.

Daze Jefferies
Daze Jefferies (elle) est une artiste, écrivaine et éducatrice basée à Ktaqmkuk (Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, Canada). Sa pratique multidisciplinaire de recherche-création explore les incarnations queer, trans et des travailleurs sexuels, les contre-histoires et les relations intergénérationnelles dans le Canada atlantique. Son premier recueil de poésie, *oceanleaving*, sera publié par Gordon Hill Press en 2026.

Elle est également l'auteure des recueils *water/wept* (Anstruther, 2023) et *ullagone* (antiphony, 2025), ainsi que co-auteure de *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands* (Palgrave, 2018). Elle a remporté le prix Riddle Fence Poetry Prize en 2024.

*

Daze Jefferies (she/her) is an artist, writer, and educator based in Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland, Canada). Her multidisciplinary research-creation practice explores queer, trans, and sex worker embodiments, counter-histories, and intergenerational relationships in Atlantic Canada. Her first poetry collection, *oceanleaving,* is forthcoming from Gordon Hill Press in 2026. She is also the author of the chapbooks *water/wept* (Anstruther, 2023) and *ullagone* (Antiphony, 2025), as well as co-author of *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands* (Palgrave, 2018). She won the 2024 Riddle Fence Poetry Prize.

Jasper Harris-Kavanagh

Jasper Harris-Kavanagh est étudiante de premier cycle à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Harris-Kavanagh étudie la philosophie, mais s'intéresse également à toutes les matières liées à la culture, particulièrement le folklore.

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Jasper Harris-Kavanagh is an undergraduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Harris-Kavanagh is studying Philosophy, but also has an interest in all subjects related to culture, especially Folklore.

Israt Jahan Lipa

Israt Jahan Lipa est doctorante au département du folklore à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Elle a obtenu un baccalauréat et une maîtrise en anthropologie à l'université de Comilla, à Comilla, au Bangladesh, et présentement elle est membre du corps enseignant du département d'anthropologie de l'université de Comilla. Animée par sa passion pour la réduction des accidents de la route et la sécurité routière, elle explore dans le cadre de ses recherches doctorales les facteurs humains liés aux accidents de la route. Elle a ainsi étudié les croyances populaires relatives aux accidents de la route, la culture matérielle et les comportements des usagers de la route dans les sanctuaires routiers, ainsi que les récits personnels des survivants d'accidents de la route en documentant leurs expériences vécues. Elle estime que les récits d'expériences vécues en termes de phénoménologie peuvent être un moyen important d'interpréter la recherche sociale afin de la traduire en actions efficaces.

Ses intérêts méthodologiques portent sur la recherche phénoménologique, l'approche fondée sur la valence des lieux, l'approche centrée sur l'expérience, l'étude narrative et la pratique tenant compte des traumatismes. "Deathlore (folklore lié à la mort)", la culture materielle, les lamentations, les traditions alimentaires, et les croyances populaires constituent ses intérêts spécifiques en matière de folklore.

*

Israt Jahan Lipa is a PhD Candidate in the Dept. of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. She did her BSS and MSS in Anthropology from Comilla University (Cumilla, Bangladesh), and she is currently serving as a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at Comilla University. Following her passion for limiting road accidents and ensuring road safety, in her PhD research, she is exploring the human elements of road accidents. She researches folk beliefs about road accidents, material culture and road users' performances in roadside shrines, and personal experience narratives of road accident survivors by documenting their lived experiences. She believes stories of lived experiences in terms of phenomenology can be an important medium for interpreting social research into effective actions. Her methodological interests are phenomenological research, place-valence approach, experience-centred approach, narrative study, and trauma-informed practice. Deathlore, material culture, lament, foodways, and folk beliefs are her specific folklore interests.

Bridgette Ondigui

Brigitte Nga Ondigui est Doctorante au programme interuniversitaire en histoire de l'art à l'UQAM. Spécialiste du tissu traditionnel tiré de l'écorce battue, *obom* et du *m'mouat* (costume traditionnel), éléments de la culture matérielle, elle est sensible aux enjeux du post colonialisme/ décolonialisme et de la résurgence de la culture résiduelle dans les sociétés. Sa recherche doctorale actuelle porte sur l'évolution du *m'mouat* en milieu Ekang et se penche particulièrement sur la réappropriation de ce

dernier qui, semble répondre à des besoins contemporains, liés à des questions d'expression identitaire, d'agentivité et de décolonialisme. Elle est également chercheure associée au Centre International de Recherche et de Documentation sur les Traditions et les Langues Africaines (CERDOTOLA), Chercheure au Laboratoire Camerounais d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Sociétés Contemporaines (CERESC), Membre du bureau exécutif du réseau des Experts du Patrimoine Culturel Africain Pour le Développement (REPCAD), Membre du bureau exécutif du Comité Africain d'Histoire de l'Art (CHA), Membre du CELAT-UQAM, Fondatrice de l'Association Culturelle Dans la Tête de Mon Peuple.
Ses axes de recherche sont: le postcolonialisme, le décolonialisme, l'agentivité, le PCI, les arts africains, la décolonialité muséale, IA responsable, Slow fashion.

*

Brigitte Nga Ondigui is a PhD student in the interuniversity program in art history at UQAM. A specialist in traditional fabric made from beaten bark, obom, and m'mouat (traditional costume), elements of material culture, she is sensitive to the issues of post-colonialism/decolonialism and the resurgence of residual culture in societies. Her current doctoral research focuses on the evolution of m'mouat in the Ekang community and particularly on its reappropriation, which seems to respond to contemporary needs related to questions of identity expression, agency, and decolonialism. She is also an associate researcher at the International Center for Research and Documentation on African Traditions and Languages (CERDOTOLA), a researcher at the Cameroonian Laboratory for Studies and

Research on Contemporary Societies (CERESC), a member of the executive board of the Network of Experts in African Cultural Heritage for Development (REPCAD), a member of the executive board of the African Committee for Art History (CHA), a member of CELAT-UQAM, and the founder of the Cultural Association Dans la Tête de Mon Peuple.

Her research interests include postcolonialism, decolonialism, agency, ICH, African arts, museum decoloniality, responsible AI, and slow fashion.

Amelia Smith

Amelia Smith est une artiste lesbienne « butch » et utilise tous les pronoms. Iel/Ellui/Elle a grandi à Terre-Neuve et est récemment diplômé de l'Université Concordia, à Montréal. Explorant la positivité et la neutralité corporelle, ses peintures récentes représentent une variété de corps gras et transgenres. Ses personnages ont des vergetures, de la cellulite, des poils, des cicatrices et d'autres caractéristiques qui sont souvent stigmatisées par les normes de beauté et les médias, mais sont acceptées dans les communautés queer. Son objectif est d'exprimer la joie d'être grosse et queer, et d'occuper les espaces sans réserve.

*

Amelia Smith is a butch lesbian artist and uses any pronouns. They were raised in Newfoundland and are a recent graduate from Concordia University, Montreal. Exploring body positivity and neutrality, their recent paintings depict a variety of fat, transgender, bodies. Their figures have stretch marks, cellulite, body hair, scarring,

and other features which are often stigmatized in beauty standards and media but embraced in queer communities. Their goal is to express fat and queer joy, and to take up room unapologetically.

R. Caroline Stampliaka

R. Caroline Stampliaka a grandi dans une famille gréco-canadienne et a vécu en Allemagne et en Grèce avant de s'installer au Canada en 2019 pour poursuivre ses études postsecondaires. En mai 2024, elle a obtenu un baccalauréat avec mention en anthropologie socioculturelle à l'Université de Colombie-Britannique. Ses recherches et sa thèse portaient sur la documentation des pratiques de guérison vernaculaires dans les zones rurales de Grèce, et ses travaux universitaires ont mérité plusieurs prix au Canada et aux États-Unis. Présentement, elle poursuit des études de maîtrise en anthropologie environnementale à l'Université de Colombie-Britannique. Ses intérêts de recherche incluent les connaissances écologiques traditionnelles et les pratiques culturelles qui y sont associées, les histoires orales, le folklore, les systèmes alimentaires durables et la culture expressive de la Méditerranée, avec un accent particulier sur l'Europe du Sud et la Grèce.

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R. Caroline Stampliaka was raised in a Greek-Canadian family and lived in Germany and Greece before relocating to Canada in 2019 to pursue post-secondary education. In May 2024, she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours in Socio-cultural Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Her Honours research and thesis

focused on documenting vernacular healing practices in rural Greece, and her academic work has earned her several awards in Canada and the United States. Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in environmental anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests include traditional ecological knowledge and associated cultural practices, oral histories, folklore, sustainable food systems, and the expressive culture of the Mediterranean, with a geographical focus on Southern Europe and Greece.

Ainjel Stephens
Ainjel Stephens est doctorante à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Elle a une maîtrise en anglais de l'Université de Guelph, où ses recherches ont porté sur les représentations de la masculinité dans les contes de fées du XVIIe siècle. Présentement, elle rédige sa thèse sur la manière dont les contes de fées sont perçus, réécrits et réinterpretés par un public queer afin de refléter la vie, les expériences et le folklore de cette communauté. Quand elle ne lit pas ou n'écrit pas (ou ne tricote pas!), vous pouvez la trouver en train de headbanger à des concerts de métal locaux.

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Ainjel Stephens is a PhD candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. She has a Masters of English from the University of Guelph, where her research focused on representations of masculinity in 17th-century fairy tales. Currently, she is writing her dissertation on how fairy tales are felt, retold, and reframed by queer audiences to reflect queer lives, experiences, and folklore. When she

isn't reading and writing (or knitting!), you can find her headbanging at local metal shows.

Heather Tough

Heather Tough est étudiante en première année de maîtrise au département de l'archéologie de l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Sa recherche de maîtrise analyse l'effacement de l'histoire des Noirs entre 1600 et 1900 dans le paysage monumental (?) du Canada atlantique. Plus largement, elle s'intéresse à la manière dont l'identité et la mémoire collective sont créées et négociées dans les paysages funéraires et monumentaux, avec un intérêt particulier pour les systèmes de pouvoir et la marginalisation. Heather a obtenu son diplôme de premier cycle à l'université Memorial en octobre 2024, avec une double spécialisation en archéologie et en anthropologie, ainsi qu'un certificat en études autochtones. Ce manuscrit a été complété afin de satisfaire aux exigences du cours *Arch 4411: Théorie archéologique* et a reçu le prix de vice-chancelier adjoint pour les étudiants de premier cycle en 2024.

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Heather Tough is a first-year Masters Student in the Department of Archaeology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her Master's research analyzes the erasure of Black history from 1600–1900 CE in Atlantic Canada's monumental landscape. More broadly, she focuses on how identity and public memory are created and negotiated within mortuary and monumental landscapes, with a particular interest in power systems and marginalization.

Heather graduated with her undergraduate degree at Memorial University in October 2024 with a double major in archaeology and anthropology with an Indigenous studies certificate. This manuscript was completed to meet the requirements of Arch 4411: Archaeological Theory and was awarded the Pro Vice Chancellor's Award for Undergraduate Students in 2024.

Uminoko

Nous sommes uminoko (u-mii-no-co). Uminoko est un réseau d'écrivains, de peintres, de photographes, de philosophes, etc. Nous sommes en pleine croissance et espérons avoir l'occasion de continuer à le faire. Ce que nous cherchons, c'est une nouvelle norme de collaboration, dans laquelle les identités sont soumises aux rôles et les rôles aux objectifs. Ce qui nous unit, c'est que nous partageons un espoir commun. Même s'il est encore trop tôt pour l'exprimer, nous accueillons toute occasion qui se présente pour le concrétiser et essayer de le réaliser: c'est ainsi que nous grandissons.

Aujourd'hui est pour demain; et demain peut être vu avec des yeux brillants comme l'océan.

À bientôt!

uminoko • 海の子 • enfant de l'océan

*

We are uminoko (u-me-new-co). uminoko is a network of writers, painters, photographers, philosophers, etc. We are growing, and hope for an opportunity to continue to do so.

What we seek is a new standard of collaboration, one in which identities have surrendered to roles and roles towards goals. What unites us is that we share a common hope, although it is too early to express it, we welcome any chance to take form and try and do so—its how we grow.

Today is for tomorrow; and tomorrow can be seen with shining ocean eyes.

Until then.

uminoko • 海の子 • enfant de l'océan

Kelsey Yandura
Kelsey Yandura est une journaliste, écrivaine créative et étudiante diplômée au département du folklore à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Elle a obtenu un diplôme en rédaction professionnelle à l'université Baylor en 2014 et a passé les dix années suivantes tant que rédactrice, éditrice et journaliste indépendante en Colorado et à New York, travaillant dans la presse écrite, numérique et audiovisuelle. Son travail créatif couvre différentes formes et genres, même si elle revient toujours à la fiction inspirée des contes populaires et des contes de fées. Dans ses récherches universitaires, elle explore la réligion vernaculaire et l'expression spirituel, en particulier entre les femmes qui ont quitté les communautés religieuses fondamentalistes. À ce jour, elle soutient que le meilleur repas qu'elle a jamais mangé était une tranche de pizza d'un 7/11 près de Steamboat Springs, dans le Colorado.

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Kelsey Yandura is a journalist, creative writer, and graduate student in Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. She earned a degree in Professional Writing from Baylor University in 2014 and spent the following decade as a freelance writer, editor, and journalist in Colorado and New York, working across print, digital, and broadcast media. Her creative work spans forms and genres, though she always finds herself returning to fiction rooted in folk and fairy tales. In her graduate research, she explores vernacular religion and creative spiritual expression, particularly among women who have left fundamentalist religious communities. To this day, she maintains that the best meal she's ever had was a slice of pizza from a 7/11 outside Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

“We invite you to read this issue not just as a collection of scholarship and creativity, but as an ongoing conversation about presence and absence—what is illuminated, what remains in shadow, and what becomes possible when we choose to look closer.”

La Revue et des chercheurs émergents et étudiante canadienne de folklore et d'ethnologie

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