

# THE CONTRADICTION FOUNDATION OF THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES: TRADITIONALITY AND MODERNISM, UNIFICATION AND SEGREGATION, AND BASICS OF AUTHENTICITY

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**Abstract:** The Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) has intertwined with the basis of reasoning about folk and nation in many ways. The article discusses opposing concepts that affected the foundation of the institution and the development of its collections while altering according to prevailing ideologies.

Traditionality and modernity, and unification and segregation were interlaced while constructing the Estonian nation during the period of national awakening (starting in the 1850s). In this modernist process the history of Estonians had to be (re)created. Country-wide folklore collection campaigns were organised, during which young people were gathering material from old people about culturally outdated genres and obsolete knowledge.

These large collections became the basis of the EFA in independent Estonia and, according to erstwhile principles, the collection of folklore and filling in the white spots on the Estonian map continued. However, since there was no longer any threat to nationality, folklorists also began to experiment with new methods and study the genres, or social/national groups, which so far had been regarded as marginal or insignificant.

The Soviet occupation was accompanied by major ideological changes. As a result of constant external pressure, folklorists enclosed themselves into ethno-centrist conservatism – folklore of Estonians and kindred peoples, archaic genres of peasants' tradition – were preferred to be recorded and studied once again. Authenticity – the set of qualities of texts such as archaic, traditional, oral, or reliable – became the supreme principle for collecting and publishing. Interest in ethnic minorities and contemporary topics arose only at the end of the Soviet era, experiencing an explosive success in the re-independent Estonia.

**Keywords:** Estonian Folklore Archives, ethnic, national, folklore, traditionality, authenticity, modernism

## INTRODUCTION

During the past five years, Estonia has celebrated several national anniversaries: the centennial of Estonian independence in February 2018, 150 years since the first song festival in July 2019, the centennial of the national university (University of Tartu), and also of the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore in December 2019.<sup>1</sup> Anniversaries were also celebrated by the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Folklore Archives. At the same time, critical statements about Estonian nationalism, its provinciality and segregation, even accusing national festivities of fascism and apartheid, were expressed more frequently in the Estonian media.<sup>2</sup>

For that reason, the topic of nation and nationality has been revisited yet again in speeches and discussions. Recent conferences on Estonian studies (and other humanities) as well as special editions of philological journals have centred on the topics of nationalism, with titles such as ‘We are Europeans, but let us become Estonians too! Dialogues with Estonia’, ‘To all Estonian peoples’, ‘Humanities and nation’.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for the increase in interest in the subject are not only the anniversaries, but also societal developments in Estonia and in Europe on a larger scale. Globalisation, the European immigration crisis and extreme nationalism and xenophobia that feeds on them can be mentioned among the driving forces behind this. Thus, there is a growing need to discuss and (re)interpret the concepts and categories of the Estonian nation and citizenship. Discussions about nationalism – the negative and positive connotations of this concept, the possibilities of moderate or liberate nationalism – are topics in political and cultural as well as academic forums.

The third reason – connected with the globalisation of the academic world – is the coercion on Estonian studies and humanities in general from the major trend of internationalisation of scholarly research. Estonian humanitarians, oriented to the international audience – perhaps not always quite voluntarily –, see the intensifying pressure towards research topics, methods, and even theoretical background by academic politics (and finance) and feel as if the connection to “their people” – the Estonian audience – and their field of study hung by a thread.

The motivation for this article is my long-term interest in Estonian folkloristics in the changing political environment after World War II. Soviet folkloristics – and more generally, cultural politics – has been a subject to several stereotypes. One of them is the opinion that since Soviet cultural policy preferred folk culture (folk creations, *narodnoe tvorchestvo*) to the “high” cultural phenomena, folklore and folkloristics benefited from the favoured position. This relates to the Soviet national politics that was publicly represented by

an international spirit, equality, and brotherhood of nations. Per contra, one of the hardest accusations to annihilate someone's opponents at the time was that of nationalism.

In addition, I was motivated by the Soviet modernist worldview, which was also expressed in research policy, including folkloristics, and its acceptance among Estonian folklorists. Here, too, there is a contradiction between the official rhetoric and the scarce contribution of Estonian folklorists to the collection and research of modern folklore.

In addition to the self-evident wish to understand how Estonian folklorists managed and adapted in such a difficult situation, I also have a more straightforward wish to understand what kind of and to what extent changes actually took place in this period. In other words, we must understand what were the positions of Estonian folklorists on the scale of openness-closeness, self and other, or archaic-modern before this difficult period.

This article is dedicated, above all, to the historical formation of the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA), which is impossible to discuss without bringing up the development of Estonian folkloristics in general. Due to the common definition of folklore – the archaic oral heritage of the peasantry<sup>4</sup> – folklore archives are also assumed to be a strictly national, conservative, static, self-absorbed system. In fact, over time, depending on the political circumstances, the archive collection and research strategies have been quite varied. I am particularly interested in the changes that took place in the archive collection policy and research policy during the sovietisation processes, and those changes will be examined most meticulously. Below, the contradictory principles that have influenced the formation of the archive collections will be discussed: folk and nation, traditionality and modernism, uniting and segregative, and finally the concept of authenticity.

I realise that while talking about nationality and folklore, many concepts consist of former trend words, presently anachronistic and unwanted, contradictory and overlapping, political and ideological, such as identity, etic-emic, self-other, etc. I am aware of many of these, and certainly many have been dismissed unworthily. However, I do not avoid or use any of them emphatically, but only as based on my subjective preference. Here I have been mostly inspired by and relied on – in addition to numerous Estonian authors – the writings by Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]), Pertti Anttonen (2005), and Miroslav Hroch (2000 [1985]).

I also acknowledge that any historical review in the form of an article can only be cursory and superficial, but I do not have the aim to give a reference review or just another overview. Perhaps the main impulse for writing this article was one very ethnographic and poetic figure crossing my mind while

reading the writings on the nation building of Estonians, or the development of Estonian folkloristics – a Chinese finger trap, where the threads are bound, being alternately visible and hidden, but still bound and present at the same time.

## NATIONAL AWAKENING AS THE STARTING POINT FOR ESTONIAN FOLKLORISTICS



**Figure 1.** Peeter Tatz and August Martin documenting folk tunes in Näsare farm, Pöögla commune, Karksi parish. ERA, Foto 1994.

The Estonian term *rahvus* (nation) denotes a community with a common language and culture rather than a political or territorial entity. For that reason, the term “nationalism” has gained its negative meaning in Estonia only recently, since the fight for the nation’s right to exist and survive has been seen, first of all, as a fight for cultural identity and self-determination. Due to historical and geographical reality, this struggle was topical from the time of the national awakening in the 1850s until the end of the Soviet period.<sup>5</sup>

Estonian folkloristics was born within the framework of Estonian national movement, becoming one of its cornerstones; it was closely intertwined with the construction of the Estonian nation, with gaining, losing, regaining, and

maintaining its cultural and political independence. Significant events in the history of Estonian folkloristics were connected or coincided with those of the Estonian nation. The founders and theorists of Estonian folkloristics were actively involved in the construction of Estonianness or attributing a meaning to it. In general terms, Estonian folkloristics has a national basis – unlike colonial, anthropological, exoticising, or other approaches studying “other peoples”.<sup>6</sup> In the latter sense it is also important that the concept of *nation* largely overlaps with the concept of *folk* in Estonian, both conceptually and linguistically.

The development of both Estonian society and Estonian folklore was related to developments in Europe (especially in Eastern Europe) as well as in the wider world. The process of independence of Estonian cultural identity reflected similar developments in Europe, and the political independence of Estonia and loss thereof became possible due to political events in Europe. The development of Estonian folkloristics was in the same wave with European folkloristics, with the probable exception of the Soviet-era folkloristics.

When dealing with the Estonian Folklore Archives and Estonian folkloristics, it is unthinkable to disregard the contribution of the pastor and linguist Jakob Hurt (1839–1907). Besides respect for his monumental life work of collecting, studying and publishing Estonian folklore, we need to point out the dichotomies and contradictions he exceeded – valuing archaic traditions in the modernising society, and uniting people through collective endeavour while segregating traditions of other ethnic and social groups (non-Estonian and non-peasant). These conflicting circumstances have been essential throughout the history of Estonian (and international) folklore research and have been influential until today.

The emergence of the Estonian nationality and its connection with folkloristics are not unique. It developed in parallel with other Baltic nations, following the patterns of the independence processes of the Eastern European (small) nations, especially the isolation and resistance to another, ruling nation, using history to justify modernisation.

Jakob Hurt chose the collection of folklore as his tool for national awakening. Estonian folklore had been previously collected by Estophiles of Baltic German origin, as a literary hobby or amateur linguistic activity inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, or a collection of anthropological curiosities (Valk 2007; Lukas 2011). In the 1880s and 1890s, collection of their own “old treasures” and providing help in the creation of their own history united and uplifted people from the Estonian nation from all over the country and from all layers of society. With the clarion call ‘To all enlightened sons and daughters of Estonia’ (published in the newspapers in March 1888), and through a skilful PR campaign (publishing reports on collected materials and inspired correspondents’ letters,

etc., along with a personal approach), Hurt managed to engage approximately 1,400 people from all over the country (and diasporas); almost 115,000 written pages were sent in over the years 1860–1906. The nationwide collection campaign became an inspiring example – thus Matthias Johann Eisen and others collected materials for various purposes (see, e.g., Hroch 2000 [1985]: 76–85; Kikas 2014; Jaago 2005; Kuutma 2005).<sup>7</sup>

The lifelong work of Hurt gave way to the institutionalisation of Estonian studies: the Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909 and the Estonian Folklore Archives in 1927, to preserve his folklore collection and to continue his work.

### WHO ARE THE FOLK? UNITING AND SEGREGATIVE BASIS OF THE ESTONIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVES



*Figure 2. Besides repairing the handle of the scythe, Jüri Pent tells ancient stories and recites verses. Ullo Toomi writes them down. Otsa farm, Säreveere commune, Türi parish. Photograph by Ullo Toomi, 1939. ERA, Foto 1671.*

A prerequisite for the construction of a nation is to connect people who feel communion despite being strangers – to create an imagined community, as Benedict Anderson has concluded (Anderson 2006 [1983]). Hurt created the Estonian community through the folklore collection campaign, instigating people with speeches, calls and reports via the media.

The aim of the Estonian national movement in the nineteenth century was to construct a nation based on cultural and linguistic unity – and differences – similarly to other East-European small nations / ethnic minorities (see, e.g., Tamm 2008). We should bear in mind that the territory of the Estonian ethnos was a part of the Russian Empire, and was divided between two provinces: northern Estonia belonged to the Estonian Province, southern Estonia (along with northern Latvia) belonged to the Livonian Province.<sup>8</sup> In consequence, while constructing the Estonian nation, one had to unite people from different territorial areas, with different dialects and micro-cultural aspects (see Valk 2014: 223–227).

To reference Alan Dundes (1980 [1977]), we can ask who are the folk we are talking about in relation to folklore. Reflecting the specifics of the Estonian language (and history), the terms “folk” (Est. *rahvas*) and “nation” (Est. *rahvus*) are markedly similar in spelling and can at times be of similar meaning. *Rahvas* (folk, people) is a social category, relating to a socially, economically and culturally marginalised community: “others”, mostly country folk, who, as a result of Estonian colonial history, were mostly ethnic Estonians – *undeutsch, nerusskie* – (non-German, non-Russian). During the past millennium, various colonists had filled the higher strata of the society – the aristocracy and bourgeoisie of Swedish, Danish, German and Russian origin.

Because of the ostracisation and marginalisation of ethnic Estonians, national leaders did not see the possibility to build up the Estonian nation as a part of German or Russian culture/nation but alongside them, even opposing to some extent. Hurt did not pay attention to the ethnic minorities living in Estonia. Baltic-German and Russian aristocracy and bourgeoisie were not seen as folk, because, according to the principles of the time, higher strata of the society did not form communities with their own folklore (see, e.g., Dundes 1980 [1977]: 2–8). They were seen as representatives of high/formal culture, administrative power, the empire, and an ethnically/culturally privileged group and the majority in a broader sense (see, e.g., Valk 2014).

In contemporary discussions about nation(alism),<sup>9</sup> its uniting function is often left aside, and the focus is on exclusion and segregation. Thus, some researchers do not interpret the folklore collection campaigns of the nineteenth century as a unifying event, but as the isolation of ethnic groups by traditional-cultural markers (e.g., Arukask 2011: 93).

The identity of small nations and ethnic groups (also minorities), with an emphasis on intersectionalities and distinctions, grows especially under oppression – for example, under the impact of imperial Russification, which was the case in Estonia (and in other Baltic provinces) in the nineteenth century. After gaining national and cultural independence in 1918, the constant pressure of Germanisation or Russification evanesced, and the ethnic identity was merged with national and/or state identity. Also, folklorists started to collect and research the folklore of ethnic minorities and neighbouring peoples, looking for connections and associations in content and spread, and even in the origin of folklore (e.g., Valk 2016: 639–641). Indeed, comparative studies have always been the core and actual part of the discipline because of the international essence of folklore genres.

The folklore of neighbouring peoples and local minorities was not the mainstream research topic in independent Estonia, yet it was not completely ignored. Folklorists' personal research interests were mirrored in the collection policy of the EFA. Here we can point, of course, to the head of the archives, Oskar Loorits (1900–1961), who had great merits in collecting, publishing, and examining the Livonian language and folklore, not to mention supporting the Livonian identity through these activities.<sup>10</sup> Professor Paul Ariste (1905–1990), a linguist who started his scholarly career at the EFA, enthusiastically documented folklore and ethnology of ethnic minorities and kindred peoples until the end of his life.<sup>11</sup>

The EFA sent students of Russian philology to the Russian villages (Old Believers near Lake Peipus, also Russians in the Pechory region) to collect Russian folklore. One of the EFA's Russian collections consists of impressive seventeen volumes (ERA, Vene), extending to more than 10,000 pages (Salve 2002: 34–38). Later, smaller collections from other peoples were added, and the gathering of the folklore of related Finno-Ugric peoples also began (Västriik 2010: 10–14). However, the collection of and research into the Baltic German heritage did not start with considerable enthusiasm.<sup>12</sup> In this case, moderate interest could have been mutual. Could the Baltic German community, which lost its socially privileged position during the independence process of Estonia, agree to be a research subject of folkloristics? Could they consent to consider themselves as a folk, or did Estonian folklorists see the Baltic-German ethnic minority as a folk?

However, philosophers and ideologists had not stopped thinking about and discussing the nation's identity, its uniqueness and *élan vital*. Here Oskar Loorits was the prime mover; he used his knowledge of comparative folkloristics in his disquisition about Estonianness (see Västriik 2005).<sup>13</sup> During the first independence period, the concept of national sciences was also introduced into the humanities, with one of its aims being the separation of national phenomena/features from the foreign ones (see Tamm 2008: 22–25).





**Figure 3.** Erna Tampere and Otilie Niinemägi writing down songs. Metsara village, Põide parish. Photograph by Herbert Tampere, 1956. ERA, Foto 2632.

After World War II, Estonia underwent systematic changes in political life and structures of societal management in the course of sovietisation reforms – brought about by the application of the unifying model for republics of the Soviet Union – which changed the institutional and personal networks, as well as the standpoint of folkloristics and other Estonian studies. With the need to constantly oppose the previous socio-political order, preceding research efforts were declared to be tendentious and even detrimental, thus discursively discontinuing the development of Estonian studies.

At first glance, the ideological background of the Soviet humanities – constant emphasis on the importance of folksiness – and the official politics of favouring indigenous peoples (*korenizatsiia*) in different periods (e.g., Slezkine 1994) might allow folklore collection and research to rise to the top of the research hierarchy in the humanities. However, the question was: What was considered as folk culture? Was there any intersection with folklore? In addition, how did the collection and research into folklore coexist with the campaign to uproot “bourgeois nationalism” during the Stalinist era?

Researchers of sovietisation have revealed that the ultimate purpose of *korenizatsiia* and later national politics was to abolish nations and ethnicity. The construction and supporting of national identities and ethnic cultures

was just an essential link to get the society from clan system to socialism. The creation of literary languages for ethnic minorities was necessary for people to read communist literature and understand their class bonds and obligations (Hoffmann 2018: 66–73; Slezkine 1994).

Ethnic circumstances in occupied Estonia in 1940 were different than the ones in Central Asia after the annexation to the Soviet Union. Estonia – and other Baltic states – was an established national republic and its population’s aim was to continue to maintain their ethnic identity and cultural independence.

According to the studies on the subject of Estonia’s political or cultural life during this period, the accusation of bourgeois nationalism was not associated with nationality or ethnicity, but was simply an antithesis to everything Soviet (see, e.g., Zubkova 2009).

Many researchers referenced in their studies how in reality the country was governed with the imperialistic chauvinism of Great Russia, even if the official Soviet ideology declared all peoples living on the territory of the Soviet Union to be equal (see Annus 2015). The nation was again defined in terms of social concepts – as in Estonian and Livonian provinces in the Russian Empire. The Soviet nation was based on social class, citizenship and territory, and was highly ideologised and idealised. Ethnic minorities were tolerated in the Soviet Union only as long as they remained peasants and workers.

The political pressure to become one big Soviet nation was followed by adaptive resistance in annexed Estonia; for folklorists this meant the return of focus to the archaic folklore of the agricultural society and a certain level of ethnic restraint. For academics, the study of archaic peasant folklore was, to a certain extent, an opportunity to engage in national culture, avoiding the mandatory Soviet propaganda on the one hand and official repression on the other. Popularising folklore through publications, folk music ensembles, festivals, sound recordings, exhibitions and museums – especially when it came to archaic *runo*-songs, place-lore, calendar customs, etc. –, or using folklore as a source of professional art creations was a safe way to resist sovietisation and maintain a sense of Estonianness.

The folklore studies of the Stalinist era “revealed” the friendly relations between Estonians and Russians, which had been supposedly concealed in the publications of the previous era in “bourgeoise” Estonia. During the post-war years, Estonian intellectuals were obliged to enter the Russian-speaking scientific arena. The history of Estonia was considered a part of ancient Rus history, where the Eastern Slavic and Russian influences were emphasised, while the connections to Finnic, Scandinavian, Germanic or Baltic traditions remained in the background or were not mentioned at all.

Relations between the Estonian and Russian peoples were brought into focus right away. Ethnologists adapted very successfully and started researching

the ethnogenesis of Estonians; archaeological, ethnographic, folkloristic and dialectological fieldwork was conducted in eastern Estonia, with its ethnically mixed population (e.g., Moora 1956; Jääts 2019). At the end of the 1940s, folklorists sent Russian philology students to the areas around Lake Peipus to collect Russian folklore. Despite the efforts, the material was of no primary importance, and it was archived separately from the main collections, without any special research being based on it.

When the Chair of Russian Language of the University of Tartu began to organise its own fieldwork in the 1960s, the efforts of Estonian folklorists to collect Russian folklore ended. The prejudicial feelings towards the collection of Russian folklore are clearly represented in the post-war manuscript series “RKM, Vene”, which consists of only four volumes. It is highly probable that Estonian folklorists were interested in the Russian influences on Estonian heritage. However, the constant dominant presence of Russian culture as a domain for comparison succeeded in nipping the potential of such research in the bud, and folklorists directed their steps back to ethnocentrism.

While Russian neighbours and local minorities were excluded from the folklore collection and research priorities, the geographical and ethnic area of the concept of kindred peoples broadened noteworthy during the Soviet period. The Estonian folklorists’ interest was turned to kindred peoples since they had feelings of greater solidarity and belonging because of the similar political background. Hence, organised folkloristic and ethnographical expeditions to Finno-Ugric peoples began, for which being a member of the Soviet Union gave hitherto non-existent opportunities (Salve 2002; Västriik 2010).

Thus, the collections of the EFA labelled “other nations” grew in the form of Finno-Ugric material, and the accrument of recordings of other peoples living in Estonia was very limited in the Soviet period. The documentation of the folklore of national minorities in Estonia was resumed only in the 1990s, when during the great collection campaign of the pupils’ lore, folklore was also gathered from Russian schools. Estonia’s re-independence was also accompanied by the growth of interest in Russian Old Believers living around Lake Peipus, as well as Ingrian Finns, Romas, Baltic Germans, etc., along with the rise in the self-consciousness of national minorities and the establishment of national associations. Research on Russian speakers who had immigrated during the Soviet period has taken off only in recent years (e.g., Seljamaa 2016).

Today, we need to rethink what is the task of the Estonian Folklore Archives. The main task is undeniably to record Estonian national intangible heritage – as relevant to the national archives – considering the political meaning of the concept “national”, despite linguistic or ethnic relations. The EFA should definitely be a place to record also non-Estonian heritage from Estonia.

Since the area of activities of the Estonian folkloristic research has extremely expanded geographically, another aspect here is that the archives should, in fact, refrain from becoming a collection of curiosities or colonial archives. A very enlivening example of this problem is the idea expressed by Indrek Park, an Estonian-origin researcher of Native American languages, of preserving his Mandan language manuscripts alongside the Finno-Ugric collections of the Estonian Literary Museum (Niglas 2020).

Today, this idea seems somewhat unacceptable – considering the discussions on cultural appropriation, the interweaving rights of communities, performers and collectors, etc. However, the complexity of the collection politics demonstrates the historical facts that the EFA possesses several old collections which were collected using copyright-disregarding practices unthinkable today. For example, we must be grateful for the Baltic Germans' literati who copied old manuscripts of *runo*-songs from each other in the early nineteenth century, or the copied sound recordings of small Finno-Ugric peoples from the Soviet period, whose original recordings have been lost from local museums by today.

In the globalised world of tourism and international scholarship, we should reconsider and discuss the tasks and opportunities of the EFA in collecting, opening, researching, and publishing of folkloric materials.

#### FOLKLORE ARCHIVES RELYING ON TRADITIONALITY/ARCHAICITY AND MODERNITY



**Figure 4.** Sound-recording. J. Kikas by the microphone, E. Pärnamets waiting for his turn. Erna Tampere and Herbert Tampere writing down. Photograph by Richard Hansen, 1957. ERA, Foto 3134.

Another two contrary factors interweaved in the establishment of the Estonian folklore collections are traditionality/archaicity and modernity. The concept of folklore is characteristic of the modern culture which seeks its roots and qualities in traditions (Valk 2016: 638–639).

While constructing the identity of a small nation – essentially a modernist undertaking –, one of the main tasks is to construct the nation's history, to establish the justification for the existence of ethnic or social groups that were marginalised so far. Because Estonians – feudal serfs up to then – did not have their national (written) history, and Baltic-Germans' historical literature was territorial and focused on the Baltic-German culture, Estonian history had to be established – as Marek Tamm concludes, 'to write Estonians into history as a nation' (Tamm 2008: 503). The main idea of folklore collection was to collect oral history, i.e., evidence about the historical past of Estonians (see, e.g., Bendix 2009 [1997]; Jaago 2005; Saarlo 2008; Särg 2007; Valk 2005).

Folklore – based conceptually on J. G. Herder's ideology and Hurt's personal preference for the older, alliterative folksong, *runo*-song – was considered as the spirit of the people, "the old treasure", the most precious evidence of the nation's former greatness. For the nationwide folklore collection initiative to succeed, Hurt first had to change the perception of folklore as something obsolete and immoral through speeches and publications (Kikas 2014).

One of the prerequisites for the modernisation of the Estonian society was broad-based literacy that conduced to the vanishing of the archaic oral traditions. The spread of popular literature made songbooks with rhymed songs available country-wide, which in turn led to the spread of songs of a newer style. Alongside the process, the *runo*-song tradition became obsolete because it was no longer adequate to fulfil people's aesthetic, emotional, and musical demands. Oppositely, broad-based literacy created a prerequisite for people – ordinary rural habitants; there were enough of those who were able to write down folklore.

Hurt's great victory was, firstly, that he was able to make it clear to Estonian intellectuals that, if they were educated, they did not have to give up being Estonians (Raun 1986; Leppik 2013). Hurt's bigger hat trick was that one of the conditions for becoming a nationality was creating history by collecting archaic folklore, "old treasures" – *runo*-songs, fairy tales, legends, proverbs, etc. This was done by those same people with innovation-oriented thinking – students, village schoolmasters and teachers, members of literary societies, etc. – who had to raise confidence in the elderly people, who barely dared to know and remember something as retrograde as a *runo*-song. Into the gold fund of Estonian folkloristic writing belong descriptions by students-stipendiaries in their fieldwork diaries of elderly rural women, who did not dare to sing in front of young collectors or who were fleeing from their homes to escape the collectors.

Until the 1930s, when folklore collection was seen as saving the old treasures, elderly people who presented old stories and songs that they remembered from their childhood were primarily interviewed. The stories and songs of young people – in fashion at that time and reflecting the contemporary world – were mostly abandoned in terms of both saving time and resources as well as lack of interest. That is why the Estonian folk collections consist of archaic heritage presented by older people – in other words, memories of memories.

From the 1930s to the 1980s, folklore was defined by the characteristics that it considered to be essential: traditionality, collectivity, orality, and anonymity (Jaago 2010: 593). With the independence of the discipline, also the folklore research, methods and subjects regenerated and broadened. Professor Walter Anderson<sup>14</sup> renewed the research area with an interest in the phenomena that had so far been regarded as marginal, such as the written spread of folklore, child lore, lore of ethnic minorities, etc. Along with the novel issues, Anderson also introduced new collection methods, such as the questionnaire survey. His mass collection campaign in schools, on the other hand, was caused by the need to gather all possible text variants inherent in the historical-geographical method (Seljamaa 2005).

With the establishment of the folklore archives, a new research centre was created, manned by “young angry men”. The head of the EFA, Oskar Loorits, called for a methodological extension of the studies through philological, cultural, psychological, aesthetic, and sociological research instruments (Loorits 1932: 27; also 1936). In the evolution of the ethnological school at the archives, the focus of the study as well as the collection was on the personality of the performer and on the presentation context, stressing the importance of the text, presentation, and context in the case of folklore (Hiimäe 2005; Viidalepp 2004; Jaago 2010). Therefore, during the collection, which was generally an attempt to gather folklore material from the areas or on the topics that had not been otherwise or enough covered, attention was also paid to documenting the performer’s entire repertoire, not just recording the older genres.

Despite the renewal and expansion of research areas, the archaic folklore of Estonian peasants, however, remained the mainstream in the research; marginal and contemporary, as well as new trends and methods had been left on the sidelines. There was no particular interest in other social groups or in contemporary folklore issues. For example, the heritage of the Baltic Germans was not documented or studied (the collection of the Baltic German child lore by Anderson was an exception).



**Figure 5.** Herbert Tampere is writing down Otto Vares's tunes. Himmaste village, Põlva parish. Photograph by Erna Tampere, 1966. ERA, Foto 7693.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Estonian folklorists ended up bearing the aftershocks of the modernisation of the Soviet folkloristics (see, e.g., Panchenko 2005). Just like in Soviet Russian folkloristics in the 1930s, the archaic tradition of peasants was undermined, displaced by collection and research of a new, “Soviet people’s folklore”. The term “folklore” was replaced by “folk creations”. The focus was on contemporary Soviet folklore, which included workers’ folklore about the struggle between the social classes, heritage connected to the Great Patriotic War,<sup>15</sup> and folklore of collective farms. At the same time, the tone and orientation of the new folklore was determined from above: the so-called working masses were to praise the new social order and the Soviet leaders, while bourgeois Estonian and German occupation figures and so-called retrogrades were presented in feverish and satirical depictions.

Estonian folklorists were saved from the stigma of nationalism by the linguistic and conceptual difference between the words “nation” (*rahvus*) and “folk” (*rahvas*). The definition of folklore, which was in use in Estonian folkloristics, was directed to the past, denoting the oral tradition of common people, culturally and economically marginalised in pre-modern, agricultural society in the past centuries under monarchies that changed in the course of history. Details of Estonian history – foreign conquerors and rulers, peasants’ serfdom, etc. – had

a positive effect on the studies of archaic folklore against the Soviet political background. The traditions of the twentieth-century farmers, especially in connection with the independent Republic of Estonia, were not safe to collect or study. The materials, primarily about the older tradition and archaic folklore, were still being collected from the country folk during the twentieth century. In contrast, the research object of Soviet folkloristics reflected a modern model of culture, where cultural self-expression had already separated from everyday life and was channelled into professional or amateur cultural activities. Soviet folk creations were the product of modern thinking that, in addition to folklore and folklorism (amateur performances in folksy style), included literary pieces and individual creative works (see Oinas 1985). The publications, directed to the masses, showed Estonian folklorists as researchers who had taken to the new trends and the usage of the new terms and new fields of research with enthusiasm. However, collection and research into folk creations had never taken off properly (e.g., Saarlo 2018: 19–22; Jaago 2019: 130–131; Kalkun & Oras 2018).

From the distance of disciplinary history, but being familiar with the stage performances of folklore in the Soviet period, one can easily adopt a stereotypical opinion that during the Soviet period the folk culture blossomed as a result of the working class being in a privileged position in society and of Soviet cultural policy favouring creative self-expression. Actually, not every kind of folk culture was in a favoured position. The Soviet folklore mentioned above had a limited subject matter, often representing a parallel reality. The real folklore of the time, which could be critical of the societal order or related to folk beliefs, was proscribed: it was forbidden to share it with strangers, to collect or to archive it (e.g., Goršič 2018; Krikmann 2009).

In the 1960s, after some restrictions in the Soviet society were eased off, the interests of folklorists returned to more recent matters, and questionnaires were issued about songs about historical events and social struggles, on contemporary traditions, etc. Following the example of Finnish colleagues, who formed the only accessible connection with Western folkloristics for Estonian researchers, child lore became the new collection and research topic in the 1970s. Despite the new trends, the main collection strategy up to the end of the 1990s was expeditions into rural areas, where attempts were made to record all existing folklore materials (songs and narratives) of particular regions. Archaic folklore was still preferred to urban and contemporary lore.

As with ethnic minorities, the collection and research of contemporary topics evolved explosively in the context of the social changes that took place due to Estonia's re-independence. The EFA have not intended to collect "archaic folklore" anymore, but even when gathering memories, one reaches the modern times – the daily life in collective farms and suburbia. The focus of the



discussions and efforts is on contemporary lore, which is rapidly emerging, changing and disappearing, and its registration and documentation is technically complicated in many ways.

## **AUTHENTIC, OF LITERARY ORIGIN OR INDIVIDUAL CREATION**



*Figure 6. Students writing down folk tunes in Ohepalu village, Kadrina parish. Priit Raik, Anni Kroll, Enn Kivinurm, Elisabet Vari, Alma Talve. Photograph by Herbert Tampere, 1969. ERA, Foto 8809.*

Authenticity has been one of the most important principles in Estonian folkloristics and here the above-discussed concepts of archaic/traditional versus modern and native/indigenous emerge. Ülo Valk has pointed out traits such as old, valuable, and oral in the concept of authenticity in Estonian folkloristics (Valk 2005). If we consider the importance of folklore texts in constructing Estonian national history<sup>16</sup> and the influence folklore has had on building up and inspiring Estonian professional culture,<sup>17</sup> it is comprehensible why documented and archived folklore was (and in some sense still is) expected to be authentic.

The question of authenticity has been the central point of folklore research throughout the history of the discipline (Bendix 2009 [1997]). Discussions about the concepts of tradition and authenticity, as well as improvisation and variation, orality and literacy, public and private, have built up folkloristics and developed the academic knowledge base. The meaning of traditional folklore has disintegrated from traditional peasants' folklore to several different phenomena. Also, in the history of Estonian folkloristic tradition, we must question the formulation and delimitation of the concepts of traditional and authentic (cf. Anttonen 2005: 11).

The problem of authenticity of folklore, i.e., the quality and trustworthiness of collected (and written) texts, has been present since the country-wide folklore collection campaigns at the end of the nineteenth century, when notes about places and singers' names became obligatory (Valk 2005: 34; see also Bendix 2009 [1997]: 95). The provenience of (re)written songs, the singer's name or even place of residence were not emphasised before systematic/scientific collection; a remark "from people's mouth" was considered satisfactory.

The list of folklore genres, drawn up and disclosed by Hurt, was relatively long, including genres publicly not approved, such as superstition and obscenae. For the sake of research, all genres of traditional lore had to be documented. Thus, the criteria of authenticity were not thematically but historically conditioned – older genres like *runo*-song were considered to be more authentic than the newer style of singing, because of the borrowed essence of the latter (Särg 2007; Oras 2017). The reason for this partiality was the situation that folklore texts were seen as historical documents, testimonials, not as poetic texts (Hurt 1989 [1876]: 31–35).

One of Hurt's requirements to his co-workers was to write down only traditional folklore, and not to copy from literature or to write creations of their own. Because of this requirement, several correspondents have confirmed that they have written down only what they have heard with their own ears, adding nothing. Today, experienced researchers of archival texts take this statement as a symptom, a hallmark for especially irresponsible copies from books or romantic-poetic experiments in *runo*-song form (Salve & Saarlo & Saukas 2019: 60). Hurt himself noticed this phenomenon and noted delicately in his newspaper reports that one or another contributor had sent the creations of their own (Valk 2005: 34). Also, other collectors have faced the same problem. Researchers of vernacular literacy and of contributors of folklore collecting campaigns in the nineteenth century have paid attention to the drawing power and complexity of the status of 'the man of letters', and also to the difficulties for the writer to delimit their different roles – a mediator of folk traditions and a creative author (Kikas 2014; Salve & Saarlo & Saukas 2019: 55).

We can assume that the basis of the Estonian Folklore Archives – collections of older manuscripts – consists of recordings of traditional oral peasant tradition, different genres of folklore, with piquant additions of amateur poetic creations and copies of literary texts and re-folklorised texts. Over time, attitudes to the written origin of folklore texts or to the role of individual creativity in variation and improvisation of folklore texts have changed.

During the first period of Estonian sovereignty, after the establishment of the EFA, when folklore research emancipated and broadened its area of topics and methods, the concept of authenticity started to expand and became more flexible. It may be said in addition that the distinction and diversification of theories and methods somehow shifted the authenticity in its rigid sense out of focus (Bendix 2009 [1997]: 97). The use of the innovative methods – such as ethnological research, the study of performers-singers and storytellers, their repertoire and performative processes – adopted by Herbert Tampere, revealed the complexity of the concepts of traditionality and authenticity. Nevertheless, the contemporary folklore processes of the period – individual/vernacular literary creations, folklorisation of literary texts, and re-folklorisation – did not reach the focus of the academic research.

The collection of folklore texts was guided by sometimes conflicting directions. Generally, folklorists preferred oral traditions of a particular ethnic group of a particular region, of indigenous people (not immigrants or emigrants), but there were also deviations. For example, a voluntary contributor of the EFA, Priidu Tammepuu, who recorded the unconventional repertoire of a storyteller from Laiuse parish, was instructed contradictorily by archival officials. His correspondence from 1938 reveals that Rudolf Põldmäe and Richard Viidalepp instructed him to avoid individual non-traditional creations, but Oskar Loorits encouraged him to record untraditional narratives as an example of narration processes.<sup>18</sup>

The experiments with contemporary Soviet folklore and folk creations in the Stalinist period frightened off Estonian folklorists from exploring the boundaries of tradition and authenticity for almost all of the different Soviet periods. The established preset of folklore phenomena favoured by the Soviet officials – folklore groups and dance ensembles performing arranged folklore texts on stage – became a popular way of hobby cultural activities for Estonians but ignored the study object for folklorists. The concept of folklorism – the use of folklore by amateurs or professionals on stage, the “second life” of folklore – acquired a negative connotation of non-authenticity (see, e.g., Kalkun & Oras 2018).

During the process of conservation in Estonian folkloristics, the concepts of authenticity and traditionality became more prominent criteria for collection and publication.<sup>19</sup> However, “literary influences” was often a euphemism

for rewritings from books by correspondents, but also for learning songs from textbooks, and “individual creations” was a stigma for non-collective verbal expression. The recording and archiving of texts of literary origin or individual creations was avoided. Folklorists’ question about the origin of the song – from whom did you learn the song? – was a kind of an authenticity test.

But there are numerous examples of how the so-called authenticity scale was blurred. On one end of the scale, we have traditionally orally reproduced songs, inherited from family or local community members, on the other – amateur contributors of archives, who committed fraud by unscrupulously rewriting from literary sources. In the middle we have performers or collectors who might not have been aware of the literary origin of some well-known songs and considered them as a part of their local and/or family song tradition.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the literacy rate of Estonians was about 45–50% but in 1887, 77% of the population was able to write and 91% to read (Liivaku 1995: 40, 86). In the Soviet period, the secular publications of informative and entertaining functions, so-called folk-books, were studied in terms of the subject of relations to oral traditions – both as documents of folklore texts and as sources for oral traditions (e.g., Tedre 1965; Vinkel 1966). In the nineteenth century, some *runo*-songs along with romantic-patriotic songs were in the assortment/canon of folk-books, also folk songs and their adaptations were printed in the songbooks for choirs and schools (Rüütel 2012 [1969]: 30–33; Särg 2005: 29–30). During Soviet times, a possible link to printed sources discredited the song variant as well as its singer/performer for folklorists, and it was a strong reason for excluding it from publications.

As an example from today, editors of the academic *runo*-song volume *Vana kannel XIII: Laiuse regilaulud* (The Old Psalter XIII: *Runo*-Songs of Laiuse Parish) (Salve & Saarlo & Oras 2019) were repeatedly confronted with the fact that some country-wide known *runo*-songs had been published in the nineteenth-century folk-book and re-folklorised in a modified form. The best-known example is the song “Suude sulg” (Mouth’s Quill), which had been published by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald already in 1840 (Kreutzwald 1840: 25–26). The song has been recorded all over Estonia in approximately 200 variants, and in Laiuse parish in nine variants.<sup>20</sup> According to Kristi Salve, some words and phrases foreign to the *runo*-song poetics, which appear in writings all over Estonia, frequently in a distorted form (*keelekõlks*, *pajatisvaip*, etc.), leap to the eye. The song’s distribution is influenced and predisposed by Kreutzwald’s publication. The variants from Laiuse parish are recorded by trustworthy contributors; they coincide neither with each other nor with the printed text. It is obvious that the literary version returned to the oral tradition – (re)folklorisation. In such

cases it is complicated to make any decisions about the authenticity of the texts (Salve & Saarlo & Saukas 2019: 78–79).

The origin of the performer – i.e., the place of birth – is another factor affecting the estimation of the authenticity of a folklore text. For example, in one volume of the academic *runo*-song series *Vana kannel* all *runo*-song variants collected in one parish are published. The singing tradition of one parish is considered to be an entirety and distinctive from other ones, even those from neighbouring parishes.<sup>21</sup> Also, because the *runo*-song tradition was archaic and vanished (with some remarkable exceptions of Setumaa and Kihnu Island) from “actual tradition” during the collection period all over Estonia – the performers of *runo*-songs remembered the songs their parents and grandparents were singing – it was presumed that people learned their *runo*-song repertoire in their place of birth. This is the reason why the compilers of *Vana kannel* usually exclude songs of performers who were born in some other parish. The segregation was made on the basis of origin – songs from other parishes were not authentic for the publication.

Similar selections were made during the fieldwork in the Soviet period. Folklorists did not refuse to record the repertoire of newcomers – especially because collected recordings were archived and made available, linked to another parish’s material.<sup>22</sup> But if choices needed to be made – for example, because of temporal, material or other limits – then newcomers, especially those from urban areas, were left aside. Because the archaic tradition was preferred, it was presumed that only native habitants knew the authentic local tradition.

Authenticity is the concept that – and the importance of which – has changed most within time, research methods and ideologies. It is clear today that the value of the archived folklore texts cannot be decided on the basis of their authenticity. I have to agree with Ülo Valk that although authenticity can be functional in separating some kind of archival texts from some others, it should not be judgemental in valuing collectors or archives (Valk 2005: 38). Philological work on texts can reveal links and influences between written and oral texts. It is obvious that in the nineteenth century the archaic folklore was written down in an already modernised society, where there was no rigid border between the new and the old, but rather mixed links and divergent transitions. Researchers of vernacular literacy reassess the work of the collectors who had fallen into disgrace at some point.

The issue of authenticity of contemporary folklore, or even the adequacy of the concept for analysing the contemporary non-institutional creativity, are not discussed in this article.

## IN CONCLUSION

The article is dedicated to the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives and discusses the opposing concepts that have affected the foundation of the archives and the development of its collections.

It is trivially obvious that, in a period of crisis or pressure, inward recourses, conservatism, and a vision of the past are being used to protect national (or ethnic) identity. Nonetheless, I believe that there are some points of interest in the formation of Estonian folklore collections and the development of the EFA.

Firstly, the situation of the national awakening period, so-called Hurtian times, when the modernist, rapidly changing cultural and economic relations in the society probably had a great chance of leading to the disappearance of Estonians as an ethnic group. The emerging citizenry of Estonian ethnic origin did not, however, choose the Germanness of landlords, or Russianness of the Emperor, but opted to value Estonianness as such. An archaic part of culture, folklore, was chosen as a cornerstone for the identity creation of a modern nation – no matter how constructed we can see it today. It can be concluded that the cultural foundation of the Estonian nation has been based on the memories about the memories.

Secondly, the forced modernisation at the beginning of the Soviet occupation, in which quiet ignorance, an emphatically conservative approach to folklore, its collection and research, was chosen. This resulted in the abandonment of the collection and research of contemporary folklore, as well as the ignorance of many minority groups. The focus on self and exclusion of others was chosen as a strategy of self-defence or national resistance.

This is the Chinese finger trap<sup>23</sup> bounding of opposite values in the development of folkloristics and the formation of folklore collections. In every period – during the national awakening, the Soviet annexation, as well as the periods of independence and re-independence of Estonia – there was a thread of folkloristic (and nationality) values on the surface, co-existing at the same time with other, opposed values hidden somewhere inside. Inside the trap there is the concept of authenticity, which is directly linked to all the opposites surrounding it: archaic or modern, self or other, peasant or urban, folk or non-folk, etc.

The question for now is whether the folklore archives as such have a future. There are two aspects. Estonian folkloristics has been extremely archive- and text-centred, and has made efforts to broaden its sources and perspectives during past decades. The folkloristic study of archive texts, once at the forefront, has now become peripheral, an outsider in the perspectives of funding. However, this research tradition is of great importance in Estonian studies, in writing Estonian cultural history. Every generation could have the right to

have a position in the Estonian *runo*-song tradition – to give just one example here – or the obligation to open up the personalities, motivations and achievements of people who have ever collected folklore texts.

The second aspect is the addition and growth of archives today. It is clear that so-called archaic folklore – remains of the traditional folklore of peasant society – can no longer be harvested to fill in the white spots on the Estonian map. The task for archives is to collect contemporary or near-historical traditions. The archives will have a future only if their collections contain sufficient data and memories that are essential for the identity construction of current and future generations. And that is the basis from which the whole debate on the future should begin.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The first all-Estonian Song Festival took place in Tartu in 1869 and was dedicated to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the abolishment of serfdom. Estonian independence was established on 24 February 1918. The Estonian national university was established in 1919 (University of Tartu), and in the same year the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore was founded. The Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909, its sub-institution, the Estonian Folklore Archives, in 1927. On Estonian history see, e.g., Kasekamp 2010; on Estonian folkloristics see Valk 2005 and 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> The essay was completed before Russia militarily attacked Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In the context of the changed international policy, the programme of the last youth song festival, held on 2 July 2023, was not criticised for including only Estonian songs. On the other hand, the issue of nationalities has arisen in a new way in the context of the reception and coping of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia.
- <sup>3</sup> The first title is that of the annual conference of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (held on 27–28 April 2018), paraphrasing the clarion call of the literary society Young Estonia from the early twentieth century: 'More European culture! We are Estonians, but let us become Europeans too!' The second one is a citation from the Estonian Declaration of Independence (Manifesto to the Peoples of Estonia, 1918),

acting as the title of an issue of the Estonian Writers' Union's journal dedicated to national minorities (Vikerkaar 2018). The third is the title of an issue of a philological journal dedicated to Estonian studies (Keel ja Kirjandus 2018).

- <sup>4</sup> This definition of folklore is, of course, prejudiced and now outdated, but in fact, outside of folklore discourse, still generally applied.
- <sup>5</sup> On Estonian national awakening see, e.g., Karjahärm 2007, Annus 2019: 465–469.
- <sup>6</sup> Retrospectively and reflectively, we can point out some traits of the abovementioned approaches while dealing, for example, with ethnic minorities and minor kindred peoples (e.g., Kalkun 2017).
- <sup>7</sup> About the European parallels see, e.g., Bendix 2009 [1997], Bula 2008, Ó Giolláin 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> The division of the current Estonian territory into Estonia and Livonia dates back to the thirteenth century, the beginning of foreign conquests. In the course of various wars and rulers, the boundaries have changed, and a more permanent division has been established since the sixteenth century. On Estonian history, see Kasekamp 2010.
- <sup>9</sup> Avoiding delving into the myriad of interdisciplinary writings on nationalism, I rely here on the writings of Özkirimli (2000, 2005), and on Estonian culture studies, e.g., Peiker 2016, Monticelli & Laanes 2017, Laanes 2015.
- <sup>10</sup> About Oskar Loorits's comparative studies, see Selart 2013, Arukask 2009, Västriik 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> By virtue of Paul Ariste, small collections of folklore of Romas, Jews, Estonian Swedes, and a number of Finno-Ugric peoples are found in the EFA archives, not to mention his life-work, the manuscript of *The Votic Ethnology* (5,499 pages). About Ariste's folkloristic activities, see, e.g., Salve 2005, Arukask 2009.
- <sup>12</sup> In the manuscript series 'ERA, Saksa', there are only 800 pages, collected mostly by the students of the University of Tartu. Prof. Walter Anderson had started his questionnaire collections among Baltic-German students (see below).
- <sup>13</sup> In this area, Estonian folklorists followed the same direction as other European countries of the period.
- <sup>14</sup> Walter Anderson was of Baltic-German origin, and the first professor of folklore at the University of Tartu (1920–1939).
- <sup>15</sup> The Great Patriotic War is a term used in the former Soviet Union, and still in Russia, to denote a part of World War II, primarily the front between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.
- <sup>16</sup> Or some images, metaphors and symbolic scenes of it; see the discussion about the *droit du seigneur* (e.g., Metsvahi 2019); and "The Great Battle for Freedom" (Tamm 2008: 505–507).
- <sup>17</sup> On the use of *runo*-song as the basis of Estonian professional music see, e.g., Särg 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> EFAM, Tammepuu, M 1: 3, 8/9; 10/11; 12/3; 14/5; 20/1.
- <sup>19</sup> Of course, one of the reasons among aesthetical and ideological criteria was material – recording with new technical equipment needed resources (electricity, magnetic tape, transportation, etc.) which were limited during the first decades of the Soviet period (Oras 2008).
- <sup>20</sup> In *Vana kannel XIII*, a total of 1,709 text variants of 628 song-types have been published. Leaving aside abnormally "big" types of children's songs, there are only 10 song



types represented by more than 10 variants. Most of the song-types are represented only by 1–3 variants (Saarlo 2020).

<sup>21</sup> The parishes used to denote the territorial origins in Estonian studies are historical territorial administrative units that were originally shaped by tribal relations. The establishment of church parishes started in the thirteenth century. Because of manorialism and serfdom, cultural differences between tribes deepened through the centuries; that is why parochial origin determined the characteristics of both material and immaterial peasant culture even in the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century there were 112 parishes in Estonia.

<sup>22</sup> I.e., the labelling of the collected material was doubled: one label indicated the performer's living place, the other the place of birth.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Estonian *kassimärss*, see [https://www.muis.ee/en\\_GB/museaalview/469185](https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/469185), last accessed on 18 September 2023.

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

### Manuscripts and photographs in the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum:

EFAM, Tammepuu = Priidu Tammepuu's archives  
ERA, Foto = Photographs of the Estonian Folklore Archives  
ERA, Saksa = manuscripts of German folklore  
ERA, Vene = manuscripts of Russian folklore  
RKM, Vene = manuscripts of Russian folklore (before 1995)

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