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Cultural Intimacy and Othering through Narrative Culture

Folktales about the Finnish Roma

Romantic nationalism and the historic-geographic method set the frames for interpreting peasants and their narratives in the vast oral culture of Europe. Folklore-collecting institutions, such as the Finnish Literature Society in the late nineteenth century, conceived of the so-called common people, that is, those who performed physical labor for a living, either in agriculture, the logging industry, or skilled craftsmanship, as a single, homogeneous group, “the folk” (in contrast to the upper stratum of society). They were treated as one entity, as the people who made up the majority of the population and were believed to have certain things in common. These people were assumed to speak the vernacular language; they lived in rural areas and were poor and often illiterate, or maybe semi-literate (Anttonen; Bendix; Dundes). The population of the nineteenth and early twentieth century included various kinds of social boundaries, such as ethnic and linguistic minorities and the complex layers of the poor, who often did not share the characteristics that were implied in the idea of the folk.

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, at the same time that folklore was being collected and, on a large scale, the formation of nation-states was taking place, surveillance and monitoring of the Roma was on the rise. Historically

in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Britain, and other places, itinerant groups had been labeled as idlers and criminals by the authorities from the sixteenth century onward. Especially in the countries that had undergone the Reformation, itinerant people, who were difficult to control and tax, became the object of restrictions and sanctions, as the secularization of poor relief gave local landowning elites a reason to send impoverished people away from their parishes (Lucassen 429–32; Tervonen, “Gypsies” 35). Nation-building thus consisted of deliberate efforts to confer national significance on some of the rural populations and elevate them to form the core element of the nation. These efforts subsequently pushed others—whose ways of life made them seemingly “other”—toward the margins.

Since their arrival in Finland from Western Europe—from the British Isles via Denmark—in the sixteenth century, the Finnish Roma, the Kaale, were at the very bottom of the social hierarchy (Åberg 51).¹ Their history is one of maltreatment and stigmatization from the death penalty laws of the outlaw Roma in the seventeenth century to the systematic institutionalization and assimilation of Roma children in the twentieth century (Pulma 217).² Unlike the people engaged in sedentary agriculture and the logging industries, the Finnish Roma were mostly itinerant and often only partly within the reach of central and local authorities. They lived in small, family-based bands combining a wide variety of low-capital economic activities with geographic mobility to make their living through services that were socially stigmatizing. Like other Roma and traveler groups in Europe, such as the Sinti of Germany and the Tattare of Sweden, the mobility, ethnicity, and culture of the Finnish Roma were connected to occupations that others were reluctant to practice (Lee; Lucassen et al.; Mayall; Okely). Nonetheless, begging, barter, and trade created both dependency and trust. At the grassroots level, the lives of the Kaale and the farming households that generously received them were entwined not only through the activities that the Kaale groups carried out as they sold and delivered goods or services to the people on the farms but also by the conventions of hospitality extended to itinerants by the farmhouse inhabitants (e.g., Engebriksen 181; Tervonen, “Going” 91–93).

In spite of this mutual understanding, the Kaale were erased from the idea of nationhood. Because the policy of collecting folklore only targeted the majority groups of the rural people, their lore and views were considered the most important and more valuable than those of minority groups. By contrast, the Finnish Roma, living on the margins from rural communities, were denigrated through the

narration of tales that ridiculed them and sometimes featured them as antagonists in brutal narratives.

This article explores the social encounters and conflicts narrated in Finnish folktales addressing the Kaale. The concept of cultural intimacy, introduced by Michael Herzfeld, identifies aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with a sense of collective security and togetherness. The more intimate a society, the more clearly cultural idioms become likenesses of social relations (Herzfeld 3–6). In a similar fashion, Finnish-majority folktales about the Roma can be interpreted as drawing social boundaries and expressing grassroots views about “us” and “the other,” thus reflecting a kind of cultural intimacy, a complex coexistence of ideologies and actions shared between the state (or the institutions close to it) and its citizens.

My point of departure is that collecting folktales about the Roma reflected a broadly shared cultural engagement between the nation builders of the Finnish Literature Society and the rural people in their everyday life practices. Although the historical encounters between the Roma and non-Roma were frequent and relatively harmonious (see Tervonen, “Going”), I argue that narratives about the Roma were deliberately not only told but also collected to underscore how dissimilar they were from the ideal national character type.

Archiving Folktales and the Finnish Roma

The primary basis for my discussion is a corpus of 600 folktale texts dealing with the Finnish Roma, which were gathered when the biggest folklore collections of the Finnish Literature Society were made (from the 1890s to the 1950s). A typical feature of the tales is the one-sided presentation of the Roma from the perspective of non-Roma. The setting of the narratives is usually in a farmhouse or in the farmyard, where the Roma enter to trade or ask for food. The characters representing the majority play rude and nasty tricks on the Roma, who depend on the goodwill of their hosts. Within this corpus, I specifically focus on the texts that deal with sexuality and the body as sites that foreground otherness most prominently.

By definition, a folktale is an entertaining narrative that used to be transmitted among people through the oral tradition. It has been argued that although fictional, folktales were also instructive, illustrating or explaining particular cultural ideas

and cautioning against undesirable behavior (Ben-Amos 255; Goldberg 558). It is important to note that narratives about the Finnish Roma were the tales people told between themselves about themselves—both fantasies and fears. In fact, the ways the Finnish Roma have been stereotyped in narratives—as sexually free and dangerous; as criminals, and as loath to work—reveal a great deal about the majority society. As Ben-Amos has pointed out, direct observations on social life can often contrast sharply with the folktales' themes; while peaceful people might have told stories about wars and violence, communities that enjoyed family cohesion might have focused on the abandonment of children (264). The same can be said about the historical relationship between the Roma and non-Roma in Finland as, at least according to the court records, interethnic violence has been rare (Tervonen, “*Gypsies*” 206). The Kaale stereotypes encoded in the narratives may have contributed to keeping them safely out of kinship relations and further integrative social attachments.

Like most folktales in the archives, tales about the Roma were gathered mostly by lay collectors acting on behalf of the Finnish Literature Society, and the people who narrated these tales were from a poor peasant and logging background (i.e., those outside the ruling class). The motivation for collecting folklore certainly did not come from the individuals themselves, but from actors within the upper level in the state or the authoritative institutions, as was the case elsewhere (e.g., Naithani 19). In many cases, rural lay collectors wrote down folktales from their own memory or interviewed relatives and acquaintances in their districts, and then sent the transcriptions to the Finnish Literature Society. By systematically collecting folk traditions—on the authority of Kaarle Krohn—scholars and lay collectors sought to obtain tales from the mouths of the folk (Krohn 6). Therefore even sexual and scatological themes could not be censored or edited, even though such materials hardly corresponded with the ideal lore that the scholars wished to obtain (Apo, “*Ex cunno*” 64).

The Finnish Roma certainly did not fit into the idea of “a folk” or a nation; given the nation-building interest of the collectors, their oral traditions and customs failed to arouse interest—and thus they were not documented and stored in the archives. If we look at the folklore materials preserved in the archives, however, we find voices that express the social boundaries of past times. In fact, many folk narratives were built around the very idea of difference, and they had the power to “other” people. This was often done explicitly and consciously. For Kaarle Krohn and Antti Aarne, for example, the folk in the Finnish context were all the people

versed in such folklore genres as charms, epic poems, and myths. This folklore expressed the character of the male peasant: “one who does not trust strangers or does not complain about his aches, but only works hard,” wrote Matti Kuusi on the general “folk attitude” of Finnish proverbs (93). In folklore collecting history, the master narrative described a coherent nation made up of people who earned their living from small farms with dairy cattle and forestry (E. Stark 71). The Kaale, by contrast, earned their livelihood by horse trading, buying and selling secondhand items, selling handicrafts, and fortune telling. One specific occupation of the Roma was referred to as walking, in other words, going from door to door asking for food, money, or clothing from locals. Along with fortune telling, this activity was practiced by Kaale women and directed at non-Kaale women (Roman, *Kaale Belongings* 18). In the days of horse-drawn transportation, horse trading or horse swapping brought Kaale men into direct contact with non-Kaale men (Tervonen, “Gypsies” 100).

Unlike the mobile Roma groups, the identities of the rural peasant population were embedded in fixed social networks; they were dependent on their families and on their neighbors, their village, and the bureaucrats of that time. Indeed, this kind of patterned social arrangement alone may have generated a narrative culture that enabled the community to deal with morally questionable yet somehow compelling topics. Throughout its history, the Finnish Roma culture has been shaped by notions of purity and pollution. This polarity has been applied to a series of domains, including food, cleanliness, the body, and conversation topics. Kaale people have resolutely refused to speak about matters concerning human reproduction. In fact, sex—especially female sexuality—has been so shameful that everything relating to it, including pregnancy, had been hidden, silenced, or concealed (Grönfors, “Institutional Non-Marriage”; Thurfjell 31). In spite of this silence and sense of shame—or perhaps because of it—a recurring theme in Finnish folktales about the Kaale is their sexuality, which supports the notion that humor was the most socially acceptable avenue for expressing confusing fears and aggression that specific cultural constraints otherwise forbade (Stein 291). In the end, the traveling Roma groups never settled long enough in peasant villages to defend themselves against the brutal, pornographic, or sadistic tales or to contribute different narrative topoi.

Majority Views, Majority Narratives

The Finnish Literature Society was established in 1831, and during its first 100 years, few spontaneous Roma materials ended up in its archives. The collecting interests around folklore were restricted to materials that adhered to standards for inclusion or exclusion in the corpus. In this fashion, the archives of the Finnish Literature Society truly served the needs of the formation of a nation-state and the clarification of national narratives (e.g., Berger 2). For example, in the 1950s, Matti Simola, a manual laborer and lay collector, sent his collections of Roma songs to the archives of the Finnish Literature Society and asked whether the notes were of any interest. An archivist answered with a letter that expressed appreciation and interest in people's oral traditions, but noted that Roma folklore did not fit into the categories of the archives. The staff person replied with the words, "really strange and exotic," thus expressing their bemusement and inability to see the Roma materials as authentically Finnish (Blomster and Mikkola 26).

Until quite recently, it has been very difficult to find an independent Roma voice in historical documents. One reason for this has been the Kaale's mistrust of authorities and their fears of outsiders' using their knowledge against them (Blomster and Mikkola 31). Another reason is that the Kaale did not have formal ethnically or religiously based organizations that would have produced their own written sources. Therefore, many of the existing sources concerning the Finnish Roma show them in an extremely negative light; they only appear in the context of a crime, a confrontation, or a depiction of extreme poverty, thus making it hard to get an impression of "normal" and nonconflictual everyday life (Tervonen, "Gypsies" 21).³ For example, because Kaale groups were perceived to be unlawful and prone to crime in the rural countryside, politicians (especially the estate members of landowning peasants in the Diet during the nineteenth century) suggested missionary activities to impose forced settlement and to remove Roma children from their families, which was later carried out (Tervonen, "Gypsies" 59–60; Viljanen 377–78). Although there are documented oral histories of the Kaale from the end of the 1990s onward, the Roma have been "written by the enemies," and these representations have reflected the hostile viewpoints of a majority society with an agenda of repressing vagrancy and maintaining "a good society" (see Lucassen et al. 3; Okely). The same is true in the narratives analyzed in this article: the tales about the Finnish Roma were told, written, and archived (and now analyzed) from the perspective of non-Roma.

If one looks at the premises of early folklore collecting, the principal characteristics of the term *folk* were defined primarily in relation to the elite but also contrasted with so-called savages or primitives, who were considered to occupy the lowest position on the evolutionary ladder (Dundes 2–5). In this model, the Roma were relegated to the position of primitives, below “the folk,” that is, peasants and lumberjacks. The right type of folklore, which was welcome in the Finnish Literature Society, was thus made up of the narratives that reflected this hierarchy. Vernacular narratives, which were considered valuable and interesting by the educated elite in the construction of the nation and nation-state, was told in everyday communication among many peasants, but for more practical purposes. Humoristic and often obscene narratives about the itinerant Roma were “social facts” in the sense that they reflected the incongruity of social ambiguity and contradictions (Davies, *Jokes and Targets* 272). Decades later, when the egalitarian call to reduce inequality in Finnish society was made, Seppo Knuuttila, a researcher who studied the narrative materials about the Roma (1992) and found their offensive language damaging to the Roma as a minority, preferred not to publish the tales in their entirety within his research. Knuuttila’s decision not to publish the tales is important, not least in terms of the insights gained on the perverted fantasies of the Finnish narrators, as the materials ultimately damage them far more than those about whom they amuse themselves.

I argue that the tendency to draw socially consequential boundaries on the basis of perceived cultural differences, for example, in folk narratives, was reinforced by modern nation-state formation and the accompanied ideologies of nationalism. According to Katherine Verdery, nationalism represented a form of cultural homogenization that created significant preexisting differences that had not previously been organized as such (Verdery 44–50). Encounters between the Kaale and the rural people had been based on ideas of inherent difference and interdependence between them, but the modern ideas of a coherent nation added new twists to it. My point of departure is a form of cultural intimacy that was practiced within the discourse of the Finnish-speaking rural people whose folktales were collected and preserved. These kinds of cultural expressions of the majority population were elevated to represent the language of national and ethnic identity, which became an encoded discourse about inclusion and exclusion (e.g., Herzfeld 79).

In this article, folktales are treated as the domain of culturally significant ideas and mentalities that also served to delineate the boundaries of belonging to the nation’s core group. Without doubt, these narratives did not address reality in an

empirical fashion, but represented a reflection of the historical reality that individuals experienced in underprivileged, often competitive situations in their daily lives (Holbek 182–83). Narratives about “gypsies” (the term used in the materials) were, as Laura Stark has concluded, commentaries on social life in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland, a country yet to be developed and beset with poverty; the narratives addressed micro-level social layers, economic dependency, and moral values concerning aid and assistance (120).

Because folktales are rich in their reflection of exoteric views, that is, a group’s sense of its identity in relation to other groups (Clements 236–37; Jansen 206–7), I ask how is a Roma or a group of Roma physically characterized in the tales? To avoid any negative or romanticizing images that have been associated with the word *gypsy* (see, for example, Glajar; Landon; Mayall), I use either “the Finnish Roma” or “Kaale,” as the Finnish Roma refer to themselves. However, the source materials without exception refer to the Kaale as *mustalainen*, that is, “gypsy.” In the narratives discussed here, the issues of sexuality and physical appearance come up predominantly in three ways: as insults directed toward the Kaale about their physical appearance, as commentary on their sexuality, and as depictions of damaged Roma bodies. Through such racialized othering, the tales simultaneously affirm the propriety of one’s “own,” the Finnish social body. Unlike the Finnish peasant culture, the secrecy surrounding the process of forming a couple through the practice of elopement, the hidden approach to pregnancy, and the taboo placed on the transition into adulthood were the cultural traits that were central in Kaale identity (Grönfors, *Suomen mustalaiskansa*; Roman, *Kaale Belongings* 109–20; Thurffjell 30–32). What is thus significant about the tales is how they project suspicion and implicit fear about the distinctive social organization of the Kaale.

Physical Insults

The first type of narratives I call “bullying tales” because they are about Roma individuals or a group of Roma being badly mistreated by the majority population. The tales stress the patronizing view of the majority toward the minority. They make a sport of bullying, simply occasioned by someone being a Roma:

A gypsy asked Mr. Sipilä if he could get some hay and he was told he could. When the gypsy went to the loft of the barn to get the hay, Mr. Sipilä told him to have

as much as he could carry. Meanwhile Sipilä took the ladders away and so the gypsy fell from the loft.⁴

Another tale has a similar motif: “Just before a gypsy entered the house, the farm master covered the fireplace damper, opened the trapdoor in the house and stayed in bed. Then the gypsy fell through the trapdoor because he could not see anything in the smoke.”⁵ The stories about the Kaale obviously would have had specific performance meanings that would only be discernible in the performance of particular tellers, audiences, and interactions (Dundes 9; Oring 31). Presumably the tales about the Roma stemmed from tense circumstances and interactions between different groups and thus have been an instrument of aggression (Bauman 39; Cashman 13). The material examined here lacks additional information about the performance of the tales. As Cashman explains, most storytelling contexts consist of limited number of people mutually interacting and a shared notion that they are at rest (53–54). Most of these Finnish narratives were probably told as funny stories and jokes, most likely only by peasant men and usually not in the presence of the Roma.

In the tales, the Kaale individuals are often treated in a violent way by all members of the majority, including children. One central feature of the Finnish Roma culture has been the dichotomy of old and young where an old person is always above a young person (Grönfors, *Suomen mustalaiskansa*; Viljanen) which the following narrative strongly ridicules:

Gypsies had asked the matron of the farmhouse to carry food for them. Little Paavo [a son of the farm] had gone to the shed and heated up the iron bar, and he went to the house with it. There he started to point at the gypsies with the iron bar, and one of the gypsies took the bar and burned his hands. Another gypsy did the same. Then the gypsies decided to leave the house and shouted: “Hey, that boy is a witch!”⁶

In Roma communities throughout the world, elders are highly respected, and they have been regarded as essentially moral and clean, compared with younger men and women. The older one became, the more one knew about the concept of shame, honor, and respect (Sutherland 104). The fact that the ridiculed people had their own culture, did not concern the majority (e.g., Glajar 30)—for if such culturally relative perspectives were common, such stories would not have circulated or been collected.

The typical setting in which a tale or event takes place is a farmhouse, where a group of Kaale enter to ask for food and temporary accommodations. The Roma usually lived in nuclear but not married families—for a long while Finnish Roma did not follow the custom of Christian marriage. The number of family members remained relatively low. Before World War II, the number of family members depended on the horse cart—that is, a family was as big as the belongings the horse-drawn cart could carry (Grönfors, “Institutional Non-Marriage” 161). Narrators probably constructed such stories because the Kaale did not offer a helping hand in exchange for this support, which ultimately led to a need for retribution:

One winter evening, gypsies entered a farmhouse to ask for shelter for a night. One of the gypsy men had gone into the hay barn on his own authority to take some hay. The farm master noticed this and locked the hay barn door, leaving the old gypsy man inside for a couple of hours. He didn't talk to anyone about it until he went to open the barn door and let the gypsy man out, so he could come into the house and warm himself up.⁷

According to the teller's logic, the majority individuals had a right to discipline Roma people who misbehaved by failing to adhere to social norms, as the Roma group did not follow the unwritten rules of the peasant folk.

Other tales feature violence and roughness as the punchline of the narrative, as illustrated in the following example:

A farm master promised [the Roma] that they could stay overnight in his household on the condition that they behaved themselves. In the middle of the night, the farm master smeared the gypsy woman's crotch with shit. Then he went to bed and started saying that it was stinking there. The gypsies woke up and realized that the gypsy woman had pooped her pants. This resulted in the gypsy man fighting with his woman, saying that now they had to leave the house in the middle of the night because she hadn't behaved herself.⁸

Unlike the folktale projects, the idea of symbolic pollution constituted a central means of shaping and directing social relations among the Finnish Roma. In fact, all interactions of the Kaale were strictly regulated by pollution rituals based not only on the upper–lower differentiation of spaces, places, and bodies but on how these divisions were related to bodily functions: the upper body

considered clean and the lower unclean, the child/elder clean and the adult unclean, the Kaale clean and the majority member (non-Kaale) unclean, and so on (Roman, *Kaale Belongings*; Viljanen). Thus, the foregoing tale above strongly disgraces the Roma. The lives of the Finnish Roma were plagued by prejudice. Kaale-as-other was interpreted as dangerous and impure. This is evidenced in the following narrative:

The master of the farm was staying in bed, suffering from diarrhea. A group of gypsies entered the house and the master started to moan how he had been suffering from this disease for many days, and he asked the gypsies to cure him. One gypsy woman acted like a doctor and took the farm master into the sauna, set him to stand on the benches and asked him to bare his behind for her while she recited charms. He waited for the right moment and emptied his bowels into her eyes while complaining that he could not stop his filth. The gypsy woman answered with satisfaction, "This is what we were shooting for."⁹

Notwithstanding the consequences, the Roma woman in the tale is represented as being so accustomed to filth and also so stupid that she only cares about the supposed cure that she was asked to make. Disgrace is a recurring motif in the oral tradition, but in folktales, individuals degraded by means of sex, scatological comedy, and sadistic violence usually hold authority positions (Apo, *Narrative World* 209). Ronald Lee suggests that because of their very exclusive culture and seeing non-Roma people as sources of pollution to be kept away from their camps, historically the Roma were believed to hide something. One would argue that people considered this way have generally been thought to be powerful. According to Lee, however, rural peasants started to believe that the Roma were impure and morally suspicious (5). Thus, the assumption of impurity and stupidity is a projection of the reverse of what was actually felt and feared. Yet throughout their known history Finnish Roma have observed strict customs related to hygiene; for example, any food or eating utensil that fell on the floor was polluted and could not be used (Grönfors, "Institutional Non-Marriage" 149). The folktales provide an interesting example of the majority population's contradictory beliefs regarding a minority population's ignorance concerning hygiene.

Sexuality

If one looks at the Finnish majority folklore, cultural images were quite explicit on the topic of sexuality, for instance, showing one's skin. This has been explained in terms of men and women farming and men and women performing hard labor (E. Stark; L. Stark). Although there have been taboos concerning sexuality (such as homosexuality and incest) among the majority population too, sexual matters were topics in which people often engaged. Contrary to this, Kaale had a strong taboo surrounding all kinds of sexuality and bare skin (Åberg 63–64; Grönfors, “Institutional Non-Marriage” 160; Roman, *Kaale Belongings* 96; Thurfjell 31–32). It is interesting how harshly the folktales present the Kaale as being sexually active and open, as in the next tale:

The gypsy man's dick was frozen and he wanted his wife to defrost it. The wife gave herself to him and when the gypsy man started to move, the wife said: “Only defrost it. Don't play tricks.” And the gypsy man did it so that the wife became pregnant.¹⁰

Such tales present the Roma as being unaware of sexual matters while having sex and keen to talk about sexual matters and using dirty talk. In the body of texts examined for this article, the most explicit verbal references to sexual activity were told by men, which is often the only additional information about the tale context; this supports the notion that when obscene sexual humor has been shared by a group, all the participants have been men (e.g., Legman 217; Stein 291). Because of a lack of awareness about the normative behavior of the Roma, the mentality of male peasants is shaping the content of the folktales. The problem in the tales is the Kaale and their twisted reasoning or behavior, which is sketched to be primitive, and thus seen as funny, such as in the case of incest:

I have heard a tale—or is it a jest or whatever—that once there was a gypsy boy who asked for money from his mother in order to go fuck, even though he did not know what that meant. The mother replied, “I give no money and you don't understand about women, and therefore you only might lose your money. On the contrary, put it [the penis] into my old pussy but don't move it too much, because otherwise you'll become your mother's chaser.” Well, the boy didn't do anything because the mother had said this.¹¹

This narrative is a typical example of a fool tale in which the fool here is the child (and also his mother) who have been growing up without understanding sex (Legman 113). Contrary to what is depicted in the tales, silence has been the prime element of the Kaale social organization. The silence of the Roma surrounding puberty, marriage, and birth were crucial in shaping the limits and boundaries of their social interactions. For example, it was not customary to call one's parents "mother" or "father" in public—it was highly offensive, as it attributed the potential for sexuality to the persons involved (Roman, *Kaale belongings* 120, 144). It is interesting that the topic of incest is quite uncommon in the Finnish folklore, especially when dealing with the peasants.¹² In general, the folktales analyzed here contain only a few examples where incest was narrated. Consequently, incest taboo was projected on the Other. Comedy was also constructed out of the Roma inability to use the right linguistic terms, as shown in the following tale:

One gypsy woman taught her son to beg, asking him to compliment the people of the farmhouses. The boy decided to obey this advice. The next time he went to a farm house, there was a little girl without pants sitting on the floor. The little girl watched the door while the gypsy boy entered the house. The boy said "Good day," and remembering the advice his mom had given him, he said: "What a big cunt that girl has."¹³

Although the Roma had been speaking Finnish as their mother tongue over centuries of assimilation attempts (Roman, "Religion" 208), the tales project the Kaale's ignorance of the right kind of language use and their ignorance of what was suitable to mention; from the majority point of view, this generated laughter.

Stories about promiscuous and incestuous behavior and a lack of hygiene confirmed the idea that the Roma were "savages," hopelessly controlled by nature, a threat to the family life of settler people and hence to the foundation of the national community (Landon 58). Some of the tales make fun of the Roma just because of their distinct ethnicity and inability to be decent:

A sausage was in a woman's cunt, so she went to a doctor. The doctor took it away and threw the sausage out the window, straight to the street. A gypsy boy walked by and took the sausage, ate it and said: "Hey, this is a good warm sausage!"¹⁴

This is a typical shaggy dog joke in which story consists of pointless or odd punchline (Brunvand; Dundes). Surely the boy could not have known where the sausage had been and the doctor, presumably a Finn, according to common sense, couldn't be accused of impropriety because he was obliged to treat his patients despite ludicrous issues. Instead, the point of the narrative takes another direction and is in fact twofold. First, the tale punishes the woman for her autoerotic act (e.g., Legman 364) (a foreign object stuck in her vagina that needed medical treatment). Second, the tale pokes fun at the Roma boy's childlike joy to get food for free that happens to taste delicious because it had been in the woman's vagina (although only a listener/reader knows this). What is more important is the Roma boy eating the polluted item and the tale thus stressing the distinctive Roma ideas on purity in which everything concerning one's lower body is polluted and shameful (Roman, *Kaale Belongings* 31; Sutherland 264). The same comes up in the tales when Roma individuals end up in formal situations—here a church visit—and pollute them with sexual if comic interruption:

In Haapavesi [village] one gypsy was in church while another was watching their horses outside. Suddenly the other gypsy shouted in the church door: "Hey, is Pekka Hagert inside? Your stallion fucked my mare and the only thing I could do was to stitch a blanket between them, and even that went inside as the cum splashed." Later the mare gave birth to a foal, and it had the blanket on its head.¹⁵

Again, it is evident that the sexual imagination of the Finnish narrator—and not the Roma protagonist—is what comes up with the physically impossible but imaginative element of a blanket enduring in a mare's womb.

Roma groups were considered outsiders and primitives who could be mistreated, as seen in the tale called "Gypsies and the Lumberjacks," where, as Christie Davies suggests, the direction of sexual domination follows patterns of social domination (*Jokes and Targets* 162):

Once there were a couple of lumberjacks and a gypsy man with his wife on the road. The lumberjacks roped the gypsy man to a tree, took the gypsy woman and fucked her, and came in the gypsy man's face. Later the gypsy man said that he didn't feel bad that the men fucked her, but how they came.¹⁶

In the tale, the primary aim of the lumberjacks is obviously to enjoy the exercise of arbitrary power that defines sex without consent (163), but the story goes further by highlighting the Roma man's inability to see this white man's power. Incapable of recognizing it and being outraged, he instead concentrates on his own voyeuristic and hedonist issues.

Among the Roma community, strong kinship ties provided protection against the majority population and their institutions, which were perceived as hostile (Åberg 61). In fact, kin solidarity and family of birth were the most important elements in their organization of everyday life, where the highest authority were in eldest men (Grönfors, *Suomen mustalaiskansa*; Roman, *Kaale belongings* 23). A rape motif in the following folktale of a man rowing gypsies across the river can be interpreted as ridiculing the family model specific to the Kaale—a model that offered emotional and physical security.

A man was rowing a group of gypsies across the river, one by one. The last one to be rowed across was a young gypsy lady, whom he started to fuck. The lady shouted for help, but the gypsies on the shore advised: "Swing your ass." The lady [replied]: "It doesn't help anymore. He already screwed me."¹⁷

Besides degrading Kaale traditional commitment to family honor, the point of the tale is in the Roma woman's change from unwillingness to willingness during the rape (e.g., Legman 257). All in all, tales about the Roma only present sexual matters between a Finnish male and a Roma woman, not the other way around. Following the argument of Ian Hancock, the hypersexualized representations of the female Kaale in the tales belong to the long Western tradition of making people of color exotic, available for colonization and control (181–83). Unlike in the folktales here, Kaale women have been—and are—considered asexual, and in their behavior they have to outwardly comply with those expectations. Historically, relationships between a Roma man and a non-Roma woman were occasional, if not common, whereas among Roma men, liaisons with non-Roma women could be boasted about and were sought, valued, and seen as one of the privileges of men (Grönfors, "Institutional Non-Marriage" 158–59; Knuuttila 243). By contrast, the tales presented illustrate the aggressive views of male Finnish narrators who demean Kaale bodies, ridicule them as sexually ignorant, uncaring about sexual abuse of their own group members, and focused on how to get the best kind of sexual pleasure.

Damaged and Injured

Although the majority of Finns were typically poor and received little education, and many of them also belonged to the “underclass,” there did exist social boundaries within the majority. On the narrative level, people made an effort to maintain the boundaries downward. The stereotypical tales about the Roma, where they were represented as strange and stupid, established a balance in an unbalanced world (e.g., Davies, *Ethnic Humor* 308). Damage to a Roma person’s body is a recurring theme, which was a source of humor for some and a “passing down” of injury experienced by the lowly placed Finnish narrators in their own society:

Gypsies were fighting, and one knocked the nose off the other’s face. Later, the doctor put the nose back but upside-down, so that the nostrils were upwards. The gypsy only thought, “Well, this is okay like it is, but a lot of snuff has to be used.”¹⁸

The Kaale inability to see the extent of the physical injury he had—and, thus, the humor of the tale—is in the stereotypically hedonistic view of the man’s injured body. One could suggest that in rural society with such phenomena as malnutrition and a lack of protection by welfare institutions being typical, people laughed at dark things to overcome them. The social criticism and aggression presented in the tales were not revolutionary by nature and did not aim at social change (Apo, *The Narrative World* 223; Zipes 38). Violent tales were not correlates of aggressive impulses but a sign of such impulses (Oring 17). To put it more accurately, violence as a humoristic topic probably belonged to the narrative culture of the peasant and lumberjack men who performed hard physical work on a regular basis and whose life included serious injuries and fatalities in the workplace.

The physical damage incurred is often presented in situations where a Roma person does something wrong:

Once a gypsy went too close to a shoemaker. He had the awl in his hand when turning toward the gypsy and he slashed the gypsy’s thigh deeply, saying “Oh.” But the gypsy only replied: “Not at all, dear shoemaker, it was I who was in your way.”¹⁹

The cruel accident turns amusing because of the Kaale’s lack of knowledge about codes of politeness: as a member of the minority, he is polite in a situation where he should not be. Equally likely, the narrator enjoys the majority group’s

power, which indeed may expect such politeness in situations where clearly it is not warranted but the social relations are such that perhaps an apology, here of the shoemaker, might not be forthcoming. Cruelty in the folktale is never “objective”; it is cruel only if the protagonist suffers (Röhrich 135–36). The next tale has been constructed in a similar fashion:

Once a gypsy woman was rummaging through a farmhouse’s shelves in order to find something. But a knife fell and put out her eye. “How lucky they weren’t shears, or else I would have lost my other eye, too,” commented the woman.²⁰

The motif of this tale has many variants, and the subject can vary from being a member of the Finnish Roma, for example, to a Russian or “a poor boy.” In all cases, the victim is considered the socially weaker person.

Folktales about the Finnish Roma combine comic elements and tragedy, and sometimes social concerns:

Once a gypsy was taking her baby to be christened, so she went to see the priest. She said: “There is something wrong with my baby.” The priest asked: “What is wrong with the baby then?” And the gypsy answered: “There is no life.”²²

This tale was collected in 1890 from a thirty-two-year-old Finnish male lay collector. It brands the Roma as being ignorant and simple-minded, but at the same time there is tragedy that the tale does not laugh at. At that time infant mortality was common in Finland and everywhere in Europe.

Roma groups, contrary to the collective in-groups, were viewed only in a negative light. According to the narratives, the Kaale lacked typical “human” qualities such as sociability and autonomy; as a result, the stories effectively dehumanized them. By means of the oral tales that were worth collecting and preserving, the majority intentionally demeaned the Finnish Roma, devaluing their lives in comparison with those of the majority—while telling within their own social situation where they themselves occupied one of the lowest rungs until “the folk” turned a valuable entity to a nascent state, and even then it was their lore and not their bodies that were desirable.

One might claim that the Kaale were Finnish society’s most outcast group, stereotyped as neither socially compatible nor competent. Triggering disgust and contempt, they were viewed in the stories as being of extremely low status and

undermining the values of society. Such stereotypical views were not confined to folktales. Officials and authorities in Finland often shared similar views in various documents. The following extract from 1900 was taken from a report for the state commission on vagrants. It concluded:

A gypsy cannot farm because his body, mind and nature do not support such work. His physique has become hardened only through passivity [...] he is afraid of work and feels totally exhausted, collapsing rather than enduring regular hard work. He is not like a draft animal but a wild cat. (Grönfors, *Suomen mustalaiskansa* 36)

Presumably, the scholars and lay collectors of the Finnish Literature Society and the state authorities held similar views on the Kaale population. Interestingly, the statement about the Finnish Roma above was copied word for word thirty years later in a revised version of the state commission's report on vagrants in Finland (Grönfors, *Suomen mustalaiskansa*). Given this background, one might ask whether the state commission documents were written based only on a single authority's personal mind-set. When talking about the Finnish Roma, local and state authorities, scholars, and majority of the rural population shared a good deal of cultural ground and understood each other's views (e.g., Herzfeld 6). Although the Kaale did not fit the "one culture, one territory, one social structure" model (Stewart 48), they have lived immersed and dispersed among the majority society. One may claim that there was an obvious gap between these two phenomena. On one hand, the Roma were accommodated and fed by the majority; on the other hand, they were marginalized and ridiculed as if they were deeply despised.

Conclusion: The Paradigm Shifted—Or Did It?

Until today, the Finnish Roma have purposefully maintained their tradition as an oral one, securing it at most in and for themselves. They have not been willing to reveal their customs to outsiders (i.e., the members of the majority culture). This is a consequence of their long-standing discrimination and maltreatment. The folklore collected about them in Finland thus only depicts outsiders' views, the exoteric and intentionally othering view. The tales about the Kaale, which were inclusive, brutal, and even mean, implicitly served as a means of stigmatization and isolation. Shared cultural narratives undoubtedly provided moral and intellectual

justification for majority perceptions and behavior on a personal and institutional level. The Finnish Roma were identified as the cultural other, as groups that lived insecurely on the edges of the already poor and undeveloped peasant society and as distinctive communities, which at times were closed.

Despite the arguments for cultural distinctiveness (i.e., way of life, customs, adherence to specific norms and cultural taboos), as the folktales reflect, the Roma lived—and continue to live—among the majority Finnish society, embedded within and interacting with them. The rising nation-state and its developers, such as folklorists, intended to preserve beautiful and great oral poetry and the myths of the forefathers, not dirty folktales, although these were also collected and preserved in the Finnish Literature Society's archives. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folklore in Finland was collected and interpreted to build a grand narrative of the past. However, it was a construction made selectively from voices of the past, and those pieces of historical sources that were considered to be the most valuable in the making of the nation. Being the expressive culture of the rural population, folktales about the Finnish Roma also encoded cultural intimacy, the process of what happened behind the walls of official self-representation and in the farmhouses who accommodated the Kaale.

In the late 1960s, the Finnish Literature Society started to document the songs of the Kaale. This was followed by long-term cooperation between individual Roma and some of the researchers from the society (Blomster and Mikkola 32–33). In the 1970s and 1980s, there were specific questionnaire campaigns aimed at the Roma, but neither the National Board of Antiquities nor the Finnish Literature Society received any responses from the Roma themselves, only responses from the majority population presenting their views on the Roma. On one hand, the questions had been formulated from the perspective of the majority; on the other hand, the Kaale themselves have explicitly been reluctant to allow outsiders into their culture. Due to their negative experiences with the Finnish authorities, the Kaale have feared that outsiders, if given insider information, would use such traditions and cultural knowledge to control and threaten the existence of Kaale culture.

What do these tales about the Kaale tell us about the cultural intimacy of narrative culture in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finland? Folktales about the Roma where the gist concerns their sexuality and physical appearance highlight the importance of the cultural codes and moral values of the majority sedentary communities. Although in real life the Roma customs were opposite from what the exoteric tales depicted, the stories point to central contradictions in the

tale-tellers' own culture and its problems, such as hard physical work in the fields and forests being done by both sexes, insecure livelihoods, illnesses, and lack of daily hygiene. It is important to note that the folktales project these ambiguities onto the Roma by personifying the contradictions of everyday life. The idea of the folk concealed many dividing lines; sexist and racist folktales were part of the young Finnish nation-state cultural intimacy, which showed how formal discourse of authority coexisted with undisciplined social life.

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■ NOTES

1. Today approximately 10,000 Finnish Roma are found in Finland's population of 5.4 million; another 4,000 Finnish Roma live in Sweden (Tervonen, "Going" 98). Though historically itinerant, since the 1970s Kaale have been an entirely sedentary population. Therefore, unlike Roma in other European countries, the Finnish Roma live today among the majority population (Roman, *Kaale Belongings*).
2. Local authorities, however, apparently ignored this law since there is no evidence that anyone was hanged (Pulma 217).
3. The centuries of discrimination and stigmatization of the Roma were continued in eugenics laws in the 1930s. Unlike in Sweden, where the sterilization laws were aimed at the travelers (*tattarers*), Finnish law made sterilization compulsory for people who were classified as feeble-minded, and the Roma were not especially targeted for sterilization (Hietala 232; Mattila 406–7).
4. Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki (SKS KRA). Kangasniemi. Suuronen Tyne. KT 82:5.1937. Translations of original Finnish tales here are my own (proofread by Albion Butters).
5. SKS KRA. Tuusula, Järvenpää. A.G. Andersson a)24.1894. Johan Hendriksson, itsellismies 45 v.
6. SKS KRA Ristijärvi. Kemppainen J. KT 210:5.1938.
7. SKS KRA Kauhava. Iida Kankaanpää 151.1936.
8. SKS KRA Punkaharju. Karjalainen Kauko. KT 73:101.1937.

9. SKS KRA Hankasalmi. Kaapro Liimatainen KT 65:3.1936.
10. SKS KRA Kiuruvesi. Juho Nevalainen KRK 108.690.1935.
11. SKS KRA Pekka Iivonen TK 23:50.1961. "Heard from the old people; documented in Ylöjärvi v. 1960."
12. In the Finnish epic poetry, there is a tale of Tuurittuinen, a man who sleeps his own sister, but not on purpose and he seriously regrets it. SKVR VI 851. Vuole, Kirkonkylä. Alava 1576. 94. <http://skvr.fi>.
13. SKS KRA Urjala. Huhtala Arvo. KT 46:16.1936.
14. SKS KRA Rantsila. Toppila J. KRK 225:122. 1935. The Informant: Vares Antti, forty-eight years.
15. SKS KRA KRK 224:1788.1935.
16. SKS KRA Soini. Elsa Lähelma KT 253:5.1946. The informant: Matti Mäkelä, a collar maker, b. 1865.
17. SKS KRA Rantsila. Toppila J. KRK 225:136. 1935. The informant: Haapa Iikka, sixty-two years.
18. SKS KRA Paavola. Kinnunen N. KT 189:85.1938.
19. SKS KRA Nurmes. Pekka Lasanen KRK 162:78.1935.
20. SKS KRA Rantsila. Simojoki Janne. KRK 224:1727.1935.
21. SKS KRA Laihia. Herman Brandt a)542.1890. The informant: Antti Vuorinen, thirty-two years.
22. In 2015 the Folklore Archives changed its name to the Finnish Literature Society's Archive on traditional and contemporary culture.

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Jude's repertoire that is "other-oriented"—Jude's narrative of her Polish grandmother's migration to the United States—to demonstrate how even her other-oriented stories serve an identity function. Through a dialogic process using metanarration, contrasts, and repetition, Jude negotiates between audience, character, and her own memories to express subjectivities. Interpreting these dialogic subjectivities gives the author insight into Jude's experiences as she faces the end of her life.

Myth and Cloth from India: The Kalamkari Collection in the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich | PAOLA VON WYSS-GIACOSA

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Important centers of devotional Kalamkari art are found in the southeast of India. The large, hand-painted temple cloths, often including extensive inscriptions, portray stories from the Puranas or the great epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in many successive images. These are organized in rows that run horizontally around a large centerpiece, which depicts a key scene. Kalamkari temple hangings mark a sacred space and offer a condensed presence of the divine, yet they also have a narrative function. Following clear aesthetic and stylistic conventions, they edify, illustrate, and serve as mnemonic devices. The article discusses the multifaceted collection of Kalamkari temple cloths from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh owned by the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich.

Cultural Intimacy and Othering through Narrative Culture: Folktales about the Finnish Roma | EIJA STARK

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Records of folk narratives from the past are available in large part through collecting and archival practices which saw pioneering efforts in nineteenth-century Finland. At the same time, archival decision making was not free of the ideological parameters of early folkloristic paradigms. In examining narratives about the Kaale—the Finnish Roma—in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society, this article pursues two goals at once: by outlining the contours and contents of the sparse, archived narrative material about the Kaale told by rural Finns, it is also possible to reconfirm the nation-building focus of nineteenth-century Finnish folklore, collecting which included this minority only through derogatory and ridiculing narratives by the majority population.

Symbolic Distinctions in Traditional Palestinian Toponymy: Class, Gender, and Village Prestige in Palestinian Space in Israel | AMER DAHAMSHE

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This article analyzes the Arabic toponymy of Palestine, based on folk tales and memories of Palestinians living in Israel. The discussion is interpretative and has a dual purpose. First, it aims to shed light on class and gender power relations and the issue

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