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Vernacular Economics and Stories of Fights

Finnish Folktales through the Lens of the Civilization Process

Eija Stark

Abstract

Using Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process, this article explores Finnish folktales about petty trade and markets collected in the early twentieth century. In folktales, the marketplace as the arena of commercial dealings was understood as a distinct zone with its own code of behaviour. It was a public place that differed from the private sphere. As part of folk life, the marketplace required social interaction, which provided both literal and metaphorical spaces especially for masculine performances. One outcome of this performance was aggression. The analysis is based on the exploration of the tale structures where the sequence of events follows the fight tale structure.

Keywords: folktales, fight stories, civilization process, vernacular economics, Finnish folklore

The marketplace has always been a part of folk life. However, when reading Finnish folktales about marketplaces and peddling recorded in the first half of the twentieth century, one soon discovers their violent nature, even though impulsive feuds, fights and homicides had already decreased remarkably over the last few hundred years (see, e.g., Ylikangas 2002). Vernacular forms of economics, such as peddling and trade on annual market days, continued to meet the basic needs of many customers well into the twentieth century in Finland. Trading practices were a form of performance in which potential buyers found pleasure in looking at and examining new, exotic and beautiful items that were something out of the ordinary. Moreover, the marketplaces were the space to buy and sell food. Besides novelties and new wares, markets also offered a hub around which the parish community and vendors from a distance could gather. Petty trade and itinerant trade consisted not only of commercial activities but cultural encounters, too.

In small towns and parish villages, the marketplace was a traditional arena for retail trade, where dealers operated from humble premises and there was a place that could be used by visitors and local residents (see,

e.g., van den Heuvel 2012: 137; Fontaine 2006). The marketplace was a space where internal cultural issues were worked out amidst the exchange of communities (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 13). Besides traditional regular market days, ambulatory peddling increased from the mid-nineteenth century onward in Finland. This kind of petty trade was a response to the growing demand for goods in peripheral and mainly rural settings. More and more demand by consumers was driven by the fact that goods and merchandise offered a better standard of living for rural and working-class customers, many of whom were women, young people or groups in subordinate social positions (see Wassholm & Sundelin 2018: 133–134; Ahlbeck et al. 2022). However, this changing and dynamic context produced tensions and conflicts of interest. In addition to the long tradition of drinking and blows being exchanged in the marketplace, mobile petty trade, which was more private in nature, was also often linked to violence.

Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process has been the most prominent and controversial interpretative framework for explaining the apparent changes in patterns of violence. In a broad sense, the term addresses the changing codes of manners and the standards of social behaviour in Western societies. Aggression used to be a manifestation of affect, over which people have subsequently needed to exercise greater self-control. Travelling by road, for example, was dangerous in bygone centuries, and so it remains today, but the nature of danger has changed. While earlier travellers on the road had to defend themselves against violent attacks, today the main danger comes from car accidents, which require more self-control (Elias 1978 [1939]: 233; Mennell 1985: 24). Despite numerous elements of modernization, such as the growing number of literate people, industrialization and the gradual increase of consumption, many people in Finland lived well into the twentieth-century in an economy where they were embedded in fixed social networks (that is, they were dependent on their neighbours and village community). In this context, individual honour was important for social standing.

Through a process of civilization, sovereign states started to gain a monopoly of legitimate violence. I base my article on the idea that this likely transformed expressions of aggressive emotions into a central feature of the narrative world. I discuss in more detail how violent acts or the threat of a fight as the narrative theme were entwined with the social context of economic change. Finnish folktales mainly present two forms of violence that occurred in trade encounters: classic brawls, in other words, physical fights in groups, and individual peddlers who did not belong to the local communities and were vulnerable to conflicts with the locals. Besides physical conflicts, there was also a special space – namely, inns and overnight farmhouses – where the threat of violence recurrently arose; this comprises the third theme of the sample tales.

Folktales as Source Material and Some Critical Remarks

I base my discussion on a corpus of 200 Finnish folktales that touch on petty trade and markets. For the most part, the tales were recorded by lay collectors in the first decades of the twentieth century, being the result of various questionnaires set up by the Finnish Literature Society (SKS: *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura*). This narrative type belongs to the genre of legends; strongly localized, it uses straightforward language and has a scattered structure. According to the archive catalogue of the Finnish Literature Society, folktales on trade are categorized as “historical tales” (in Finnish: *historialliset tarinat*), referring to their possibility to resemble real events, places and persons. Trade tales were thus told as if true; that is, the events in the tales may have actually happened in certain villages and with specific people. The recorded tales in the archives have been arranged according to genre (i.e., folktale) and then thematically within the genre under seven topics, such as nature, unusual persons, wars and society.

In what kinds of social and economic reality were these tales narrated and then collected? Narratives came from all parts of present-day Finnish-speaking Finland, in addition to Karelian areas that nowadays belong to Russia. Lay collectors usually wrote down the tales from their own memory or interviewed relatives and neighbours in their home district. Narratives date back to the face-to-face milieu of craft production that nurtured storytelling (see, e.g., Limón 1983: 39; Apo 1995), and as was typical at that time, lay collectors sent their written notes to the archives without too much background information. In general, the loss of context has been a problem for interpreting the pre-industrial mentality of the common people. Therefore, the rise of performance orientation in the 1970s has offered a new chance to study the larger cultural ecology in which folklore was performed (see Paredes & Bauman 1972; Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 11). In my analysis, folktales offer comments on the economic structure that people once inhabited.

From the perspective of a researcher studying the archived trade tales, there are several source-critical questions that need to be raised. The first involves the question of whose folktales these particular tales are. Often we do not know much about the relationship between the lay collector and the informants, or if the informant was sending his/her own information to the archives. Second, if the collector had interviewed someone in the locality, one could ask how the collector approached the subject and framed his/her questions. As mentioned above, there is scant contextual information surrounding the performance, setting and function. This is not a minor problem, because in the Finnish Literature Society’s archive collection there are approximately 40,000 cards in the genre of historical and local legends. These include stories about gypsies, strongmen and petty trade, to name just a few.

Most of the tales analysed in this article show up as incomplete: although the setting of a tale might be clear, the plot and the characters vary. This is due to lay collectors who knew the circumstances of the stories and had an insider's view of shared events. Laura Stark (2015: 128) has pointed out that because these kinds of insider narratives were often written down as if told to close acquaintances, they tend to leave semantic linkages unexplained and contain more dialogue than commentary. In order to better understand the tales, I take my methodological inspiration from James Leary (1976: 31), who has studied fight stories and structured their sequence of events. For the most part, the Finnish trade tales that contain elements of violent acts have the following types of narrative structures: (1) the *initial situation*, which corresponds to the origin of a conflict; (2) an *exchange of words*, that is, physical conflict is preceded by verbal conflict; (3) an *exchange of blows* that follows talk, although sometimes occurring immediately after the initial situation; (4) the *emergence of a victor*, which means that somebody wins the fight; and (5) *reconciliation* or *resolution*, so that the fight is resolved and the characters react to that resolution.

In my sample, there are also narratives that do not explicitly contain violence. These tales can be abstracted structurally in the following simple way: an introduction of the *setting and characters*; an *exposition* of a turning point; and a *complication*, that is, action and a *resolution* in which the story dilemma is resolved and the characters react to that resolution. Narrative researchers claim that the most important elements in every story must be exposition, complication and resolution (see, e.g., Goldstein 2021: 138; Labov 1997). This observation coincides with both the petty trade stories on the theme of a fight and the stories that present the marketplace as a space of tensions. Although the exploration of the tale structures works here as the methodological tool, my analysis primarily goes beyond structures.

In folktales generally, the marketplace as the arena of commercial dealings was understood as a distinct zone with its own code of behaviour. Above all, the marketplace was a public place that differed from the private sphere. As part of folk life, the marketplace required social interaction, which provided both literal and metaphorical spaces especially for masculine performances. One outcome of this performance was aggression, which cannot be considered a positive aspect but in tales is discussed as such. Because folktales were not aimed at revealing the historical truth, stories can exaggerate events and characters, and it is very likely that they were told with a strong subtext of humour. As a specific genre, however, trade tales overlap the territories of history and fiction. Following Paul Ricoeur's formulation of imaginative variations on the constitution of historical time, Camilla Asplund-Ingemark (2016: 310) has interestingly pointed out that narrators often formulate a fictive experience of time that is not bound by the historian's ambition to represent the past in a scientific way.

As phenomena, petty trade, market-going and growing consumption were a mixture of tradition and modernity. On one hand, markets and increasing economic change represented modern capitalism that, from the perspective of the lay collectors and the Finnish Literature Society's central figures, did not correspond to authentic folk culture. On the other hand, it was very traditional because exchanges of food and services without using money had been practised throughout history. One obvious reason for the absence in the archive collections of folklore on vernacular economics, consumer goods and market entertainments is their modern nature. To put it simply, ethnographic questionnaires did not target these aspects. Out of the entire collection of the Finnish Literature Society's archives on historical legends, tales on trade and market-going comprise only a tiny part.

Folktales and the Reflection of the Civilizing Process

How, then, to understand the tales on petty trade that have a strong element of violence? Drawing on Norbert Elias, the historian Pieter Spierenburg argues that patterns of violence were not only altered by greater levels of state intervention and broad changes in European socioeconomic life but also by increased levels of "affect control" that over several centuries gradually trickled down from the social elite to the masses (Spierenburg 2001: 90–91). In folklore studies, Jack Zipes has approached the literary "bourgeoisification" of the oral folktales from the concept of the civilizing process. In brief, traditional oral tales when textualized into a literary fairytale got different characters, settings and plots aimed at regulating the inner and outer nature of children (Zipes 1991: 28). Following Elias's view of the civilizing process, Zipes has pointed out how folktales shape social expectations (Zipes 1991: 47–49; Elias 1968 [1939]). One may make an educated guess whether Finnish folktales on trade were more brutal when performed orally in the narrating event, and through the practice of textuality, they acquired a smoother and thus "more civilized" style.

Norbert Elias based his theory on a study of the manners of English, French and German court society between the fifteen and nineteenth centuries. For this reason, the civilization process has been criticized as reflecting only a Europe-centred view and, at the same time, ignoring the different phases of development in Europe (see, e.g., Goudsblom 1994). I argue here, however, that some of his main points can be applied in the Nordic countries and precisely the Finnish context, too, where demographics and the livelihoods of the population evolved at a different pace from those of France and England. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Finland was still a country on the periphery; it was not only at the edge of Europe, but the vast majority of its population lived in the hinterlands of the country. In other words, in their daily lives, people lived with their nuclear family,

relatively distant from the nearest parish villages. Moreover, the majority of the people belonged to the social group of free peasants, who had a shared system of values, norms and practices. In sparsely populated areas where people lived in relative isolation, high culture was not able to flourish since the upper stratum was so small.

Without doubt, the concept of shame and embarrassment with respect to violence changed over the centuries. One of the many signs of this was that people became civilized in terms of physical distance between individuals (Elias 1978 [1939]; Linklater & Mennell 2010: 384). Although violence shifted from public places to private premises and homes, everyday forms of violence continued to occur. Interpersonal tensions and hostilities – for example, impetuous slaps dealt in anger, fistfights and petty brawls at marketplaces and weddings, the distrust of other people and an inability to cooperate – continued to exist in traditional communities (see, e.g., Österberg 1996: 48; Balikci 1965: 1456). When addressing fights or the threat of violence, narratives in fact discuss the human body. The central motivation for community violence was honour, which depended on the body. One's physical body and appearance were crucial for one's reputation (see, e.g., Stark 2006: 455; Spierenburg 1998: 4). Often honour was developed and maintained through duels. Duels, which were sometimes attended by dozens of people, especially in fights between young men of neighbouring villages (see, e.g., Haavio-Mannila 1958: 207), were a way for men to publicly prove their courage and manliness.

Although strong emotions such as aggression had to be hidden, they continued to exist in the minds of persons and their oral narratives. Folktales about trade reflect the dichotomy where, on one hand, instant emotions toward "strangers" were aggressive, but on the other, it was no longer appropriate to express these openly. Without doubt, the rural inhabitants whose folktales were recorded based their views and actively formed opinions of economic transactions as part of their everyday life. In conflicted societies, stories, songs and celebrations keep alive memories and the emotions associated with them. They also help define and reinforce disputing groups (Carter 2009: 312). Narrative texts, which the archived folktales are, do not directly reflect real life as it once occurred; instead, they lead us to notions that people in a shared culture had.

Brawls

One of the most recurrent themes in the tales about trade and market-going deals with salt. Prior to refrigeration, salt was one of the best methods for preserving food like herring, salmon and game meat. Besides being a condiment, among other things salt was used for curing and preserving meat, tanning hides, fixing dyes and making soap; it also served as a supplement

in animal feed and as medicine. In the absence of readily available salt, trade networks developed around its distribution over long distances from Russia (see, e.g., Toivanen 2009). Because the demand for salt played an important role in power relations (Antonites 2020), encounters on the trade routes were loaded with tensions, with travelling salesmen often needing to show off their strength. In the next tale, two horse-drawn wagons encounter each other on a narrow path on a frozen lake:

In the old days, the Pielisjärvi people would travel with horse-drawn carriages to Oulu to buy salt. Once there was also a court judge on the path, but he did not want to move aside to allow the salt buyers to pass, even though their carriages were full, and the path went across a frozen lake covered with a thin layer of water. There they were, the horses standing still, and the men arguing about who should move aside. Finally, both moved over a little bit but one of the salt buyers, whose name was Taavi Kärki, hit the court judge on the ear as he passed by. The judge went on. Soon, however, the court judge's men started to chase the salt buyers and caught them at the drinking pits. Taavi Kärki was taken to Kajaani, where he was tried and fined. This fine money was later used to buy the chandelier for the town church.

The sequence of events follows the fight tale structure quite closely. The *initial situation* in the story comprises the place and the group of men encountering one another on the winter ice. Although the actual text does not include the dialogue of the parties, a reader or listener can easily assume the *exchange of words*. This starts when the salt buyer Taavi Kärki begins pushing, and it makes his men appear as the winners of the fight. This part of the narrative is the *emergence of a victor*, although there is a *reconciliation* part in the end. Taavi Kärki is later caught and fined. It is unclear from whose point of view the story above was told: the salt buyers' or that of the court judge and his men; in the end, the levy was used for the good of everybody.

In fact, the image of the fight resembles a recurrent motif in Spaghetti Western movies, where the two characters face each other, waiting for the other to move aside or give up. In both genres, men can be protagonists or antagonists, and the protagonist is not necessarily devoted to justice or a good-hearted hero (see, e.g., McClain 2010: 60). Male violence or the possibility of reacting physically within the space of economic exchange was a ritualized act of force between two men or groups of men for the purpose of a reciprocal preservation of honour.

Whether the actors are on the move or in a sedentary location, either exact names or places are usually mentioned in the narratives, as in the following case:

It used to be the strongest men from Oulu who went for salt trading, because during travels there occurred fights and scuffles. Once there were three men from Oulu on their return home. They had fabrics and some spices with them. At the first overnight accommodation, some men wanted to check their load and said that they had

unauthorized items with them. The travelling men were prohibited from leaving and they were threatened with being tied up with ropes. A couple of the travellers were afraid of getting robbed. However, the strongest one of them was brave and encouraged his pals to eat and then leave the house. Soon after eating, he took the tabletop in his hands and started to wave and said: “It is better now that the guests are let alone and we can continue our travel ahead home.” He then beat with the tabletop those who tried to attack him the hardest. Meanwhile his friends were saddling their horses so they all could move on. A few sticks of wood they took with themselves – just to have batons in order to fight if the men from the overnight place would have started to chase them. But the men from the house did not give chase because they had seen how strong one of the Oulu men was. Such a heavy tabletop could not have been lifted by the small men.

The tales about salt trade and the theme of violent quarrels in which the salt buyers ended up on their travelling routes underline the value of necessity goods, i.e., the products that people used to buy regardless of their standard of living. However, the essence of the tale is honour. The aforementioned violent encounter on the ice was related to a masculine code, and presumably both parties knew one another. Therefore, following Pieter Spierenburg’s (2001: 95) argument, the violence may have been purposeful and, in this matter, a kind of performance of a group’s honour.

In the narratives, the vernacular way of doing trade was practised in groups, which also made travelling and modes of transportation more difficult. The farmhouses that offered overnight shelter were not necessarily keen to accommodate traders, since their groups tended to be big. The following extract reflects this kind of situation and how it led to violence:

The inhabitants of Vyborg travelled with 30–40 horses, one after another carrying all kinds of goods. Once, about 70 years ago on the evening of Christmas Eve, a big group of Vyborgians appeared at the house of Kana. The farmhouse was already decorated for the Christmas season with a tablecloth on the table and candles burning, but the farmhouse people themselves were bathing in the sauna. When they got back from the sauna, the table was overloaded with filthy haversacks [travel bags]. Then the farmhand, who was already drunk, got upset ... and threw the haversacks into the doorway. When he was driving the Vyborgians away for messing up the Christmas table, they responded: “Oh, we thought the table was ready for us, the guests.”

Structurally, many of the tales are incomplete; that is to say, they may lack some narrative components. The story about the boorish Vyborgians above, for example, does not have the exchange of words before an actual clash. The storyteller has put the exchange of words at the end of the tale. However, the victor of the conflict and the resolution at the end of the story are clear. Another variant of the same story expresses their attitude and inflated sense of self in a shorter way: “Vyborgians drove proudly without moving aside from oncoming traffic [i.e. horse wagons], and they drove in bigger groups than the others.”

Spaces of Vernacular Economics

Marketplaces were both formal and informal, and folktales concerning petty trade and market-going address the latter context. While formal markets were governed by regulations and the transactions were transparent, informal markets were located at any convenient place, such as the doorstep of a farmhouse or an inn or the street. Furthermore, inns provided storage of goods and shelter of horses overnight. For that reason, itinerant traders often arranged sales at village inns (see, e.g., Casson & Lee 2011: 31). In folktale settings, petty trade could occur at a farmhouse where the group of buyers was staying overnight or, as in the previous tale, on the path somewhere between home and the marketplace. Because there were long distances and sparsely populated villages located here and there, it was logical that social encounters often occurred in peasant households:

The men from the market often passed by the Karvonen farmhouse and they dropped in to visit, too. After getting some food, it was customary to put some coins [as a voluntary donation] in a dish on the table. One time, these market men stole the dish. The farm master Karvonen went following them with his horse, rode past them and took hold of the harness without removing it from the first horse. The dish was then returned and with good will.

In the story above, the peasant and his role as the innkeeper appear as the good-hearted hero whom the petty traders who needed overnight shelter tried to cheat. The tale resembles the Finnish newspaper writings of that period, where petty trade was associated with the image of dishonest mobile traders deceiving their customers (Wassholm & Sundelin 2020: 124). At the same time, newspapers and authorities resisted the ever-growing consumerism of the peasants, or “the folk”.

Interestingly, theft is a rare theme in my source sample. According to Eva Österberg (1996: 49), theft was not a major category of crime in the Nordics before industrialization, since the area was sparsely populated with small-scale family farms and freehold peasants predominating in large regions; in this kind of environment, she argues, people were not tempted to steal to the same extent as in more commercialized and densely populated parts of Europe. As folklore has been proven to have functions (see Bascom 1954), presumably the Finnish folktales about trade and peddling taught listeners to be cautious of itinerant individuals who were not locals. According to the tale teller’s logic, there were certain situations where individuals were entitled to strike back or to avenge themselves for an injury. In the trade tales, a listener or a reader was supposed to enjoy seeing a bully get his “comeuppance”, as illustrated by the farm master Karvonen above.

Most of the tales in this analysis are framed as occurring in the space of people coming together. Typically, a reader or a listener is not informed exactly how many men there are in the space, but it is usually more than

three. The next tale was collected in 1912, but according to the narrator, it describes the time before the 1870s:

The itinerant traders faced many dangers in those days, especially in Ostrobothnia. Often there were robberies. For that reason, the farm masters who went to the market-places to sell their agricultural products travelled together in a long line of carriages. When this group of carriages spent the night at some of the Ostrobothnian houses, the men took turns watching over the carriages through the night. The wealthiest farm masters were able to pay the poorer ones to keep an eye on the cargo. According to the travelling petty traders, the people in Ostrobothnia were unfriendly. They did not want to give any hay for the petty traders' horses, not even for money.

Many of the recorded tales in the archives are like the story above. Rather than a classic folktale with clear structural components, it is more of a summarized narrative of the customs of the old days. Although it does not have the element of violence, there is a conflict of interests and thus a possibility of violent behaviour. Without doubt, these narratives worked as cautionary tales for people traveling with money or valuable items. Stories expressed the uncertain aspects of itinerant trade that made it unsafe and even preferable to avoid.

Some of the trade tales deal with the possibility of Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers coming to blows. The relationship between the speakers of the two languages was interesting since, on one hand, Swedish was the language of administration and education until the end of the nineteenth century (Engman 2018: 101–103). On the other, Finnish speakers formed the great majority of people in the country. At the turn of the century, Swedish speakers amounted to 12.9 percent of the population (about 350,000 people) (STV 2016). Humour performed by the members of less powerful groups can be interpreted as a form of resistance against group formations (see, e.g., Vaid 2006: 160). The next tale depicts an aggressive encounter between a Swedish-speaking farmhouse and inn located along the road and Finnish-speaking marketgoers who sought overnight accommodations, food and drink. The perspective is from the Finnish-speaking side:

The people of Saarijärvi used to go to Karleby market to buy salt, axes, pans and iron nails until the 1870s. Usually it took place in the wintertime. At times, there were even dozens of horses, all driving together. For a group like that, it was difficult to get overnight shelter anywhere. Especially the Swedish-speaking people near Karleby would even hide the bucket for the well [from the market-goers]. The first house on the way to the market the Saarijärvi people called “the backwater of death”. People in that farmhouse did not like that pejorative name, and the Saarijärvi ones continued to say it every time they did not get overnight accommodation or water for their horses.

The linguistic dominance that the Finnish-speaking population had – that is, the number of the Finnish speakers was bigger by far – enabled them to

narrate prejudiced stories about their Swedish-speaking neighbours. Such ethnic tales were told and spread where a rough parity between the languages occurred (Davies 1990: 56). In other words, the mockery had to be understood by its targets, too. In folksongs, for example, fights between Finnish- and Swedish-speaking groups were modified so that the opposite side could understand the slurs (Haavio-Mannila 1958: 67).

Under the guise of humour, socially unspeakable topics, such as certain kind of social and cultural dominance in society, were able to be expressed and power relations inverted (see, e.g., Vaid 2006: 153). Without doubt, petty trade was embedded in power relations, and it played an important role in the performance of differing social and linguistic groups as well as gender. The aforementioned tale of the encounter of the local judge and Taavi Kärki is an example of the clashes between the two distinct classes. Male farmhands as the rural working-class ideal type did not hold economic or political power at the beginning of the twentieth century, but in tales they were able to perform and exaggerate their values and identities, which were based on physical strength and virility. Folklore of contestations arose wherever a relationship of dominance prevailed.

Single peddlers

Although small-scale trade was practised in groups, the most common image of a peddler is a single actor or entrepreneur. In 1859, a special law permitted the opening of country shops if the distance to the nearest town was more than 50 kilometres or so. Former ambulatory peddlers – that is, those who had been accustomed to itinerant trade – were often the ones who founded fixed rural shops (Alanen 1957: 214). Although relatively few in number, these country shops not only provided their customers with better access to consumer goods, but they were also generally seen as the cultural outpost of towns in the countryside (Sundelin 2022). Besides these, door-to-door peddling in the rural countryside continued to be one source of a makeshift livelihood. Peddling belonged to the “informal economy”, being illegal, unstable and usually sporadic. Petty traders had many names, such as “peddlers”, “mongers”, “hucksters”, “hawkers”, “vendors” and “bootleggers”; the epithets attached to these sellers were often pejorative and sometimes referred to their redundant strangeness (Ahlbeck et al. 2022).

Given the fact that the folktales were recorded from rural peasants, whether land-owning peasants or farmhands, they surprisingly often take the side of the powerful. A tale sent by a land-owning peasant in 1935 depicts a tar seller named Köpi who, on his trade route, found overnight accommodation at a wealthy merchant’s house. Köpi and his crew were served fish soup in the salon, decorated expensively and boasting a glass vitrine with expensive jewellery. Suddenly a man from the neighbouring village showed up and

took some fish from the soup without permission and with his bare hands. Köpi asked whether he did it on purpose or if he was just so eager to get some fish. When the man answered, “I did it because I dare to,” Köpi stood up and pushed the man into the vitrine so hard that he lost consciousness and the glass was broken. The merchant heard this and entered the salon. “I was eating your soup peacefully when he came and messed with the soup. I only slightly pushed him and he banged into the vitrine,” Köpi told the merchant. The police were called to the house, and they arrested the man. Later he was convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of 100 marks. The merchant was happy that somebody had hit the man, since many in the community feared him.

The moral of the story lies in Köpi’s heroism and the “bad guy” getting the punishment he deserved from violating the property of the merchant. In the Finnish version, the fine refers to the damage to the vitrine, not Köpi’s violence. This view is an example of *folk crime* that, unlike “proper crimes” such as murders and burglaries, did not tarnish the identity of those who committed them. Perpetrators of folk crimes were usually able to remain in their community after the violation of laws. This is because folk crimes were tacitly approved by the community, but also by the law enforcement agents (Phillips et al. 2016: 282). In the tale above, malicious destruction of property was a sufficient reason to beat somebody up, and a fine served as punishment for the crime.

Generally, the trade in the tales took place in a masculine sphere consisting of rituals that strengthened masculinity. In legal trade, arenas of masculinity transformed into more capitalist and monetary contexts. Rural shopkeepers, for example, offered alcoholic drinks to their male customers in order to get them to buy products, and later the sale of alcohol became common (Alanen 1957: 326). Naturally, women participated in trade, too, but there is surprisingly little talk about them in my sample.

Petty trade was not only loaded with aggressive and suspicious emotions, as the folktales reflect, but historically there also occurred physical violence and even a few incidents where travelling salesmen were killed (Nevalainen 2016: 128–129). Contrary to this, however, there are narratives where itinerant peddlers (usually from Karelia, that is, outside the community) are depicted with warmth. In the next extract, villagers are eager to protect Russian itinerant peddlers against the local police chief:

In Soukainen of Laitila, there used to be a police chief who caught Russian peddlers; he persecuted and tormented them in multiple ways, and always robbed their cargo. But the villagers were not happy about the police chief’s deeds and, therefore, some of the local hags made mockery songs about the police chief.

The tale does not tell further what kinds of songs were made. The folklorist Mervi Naakka-Korhonen has pointed out in her study of Karelian peddlers that, unlike the authorities, rural communities eagerly awaited the travelling

peddlers because they not only brought highly needed products but also luxury goods to the local inhabitants (see, e.g., Naakka-Korhonen 1988). Peddlers had an influence on the distribution of consumer goods, such as textiles, accessories, tableware and popular literature. Itinerant traders were able to distribute the increasing supply of colonial and industrial commodities, handicrafts and drapery. Moreover, all kinds of journeymen and sailors used to tell stories in farmhouses and inns. These tales were generally told to startle, delight and impress the listeners (Zipes 1988: 14). To sum up, mobile traders had intangible social capital that was valued in the remote areas where social contacts were limited.

Historically in Finland, trade was a privilege of town dwellers until the mid-nineteenth century (Alanen 1957). Trade activities were strongly guarded and those who lacked the privilege to engage in trading were quickly denounced to the authorities. For this reason, ambulatory peddlers were subject to intense scrutiny (see, e.g., van den Heuvel 2012: 126; Wassholm & Sundelin 2018), as the following example points out:

Not so long ago there were Russians going from one village to another selling all kinds of trinkets and buying animal skins. Because peddlers often had a few items to sell without permission, their worst fear was the local sheriff. If a sheriff found something illegal, he seized or simply took the bag from the Russian peddlers. Once in the parsonage of Stenius [in Saarijärvi village], a Russian peddler had arrived. The local sheriff found him and was about to grab his rucksack. The parson Stenius entered the room and asked if the Russian had brought some fabric that he had ordered. The Russian said: “Yeah, I did, but now I think I am losing everything, the fabric and the backpack.” Stenius asked the Russian to follow him when the sheriff’s assistant, Matti Mannila, started nagging: “You take your stuff that you ordered and we [the sheriff’s forces] take the rest.” Stenius, who had not ordered any fabric from the Russian, replied: “In my house, no one is robbed.”

Since this story is not a fight story, it has a different structure. The construction of the tale is typical in terms of its sequence of events: the *setting* and the characters are presented; the *turning point* is when the local sheriff catches the Russian peddler; the *action* starts when the parson Stenius enters the room and tells a lie to the peddler; and the *resolution* occurs when the police believe the parson, a person higher in the social hierarchy, and the dilemma is resolved. While peddlers may have been liked, they also faced bigoted and offensive joking which, as the unique form of discrimination, characterized their relationship with the local communities. Itinerant peddlers did not belong to the community and this made them vulnerable, not only in the eyes of the authorities but also local people. This bias is reflected in the resulting folklore materials, where economic exchange was presented from the sedentary population’s point of view.

There is not a single tale in my corpus where the protagonist would be a mobile peddler. This is due to folklore-collecting practices that were

conducted primarily with an idealized notion of the smallholding peasant majority in mind; industrial and modern ways of life appeared *non-traditional* and hence inauthentic. Consequently, the customs, traditions and views of those from non-peasant occupations were not documented or displayed as part of the existing sociohistorical reality. In fact, it was not until the 1960s that any folkloristic or ethnological materials from urban communities or Finnish ethnic minorities were recorded (Mikkola et al. 2019: 67). Hence, due to the collection and archival policies, the accounts of people who did not fit into the category of sedentary peasant folk only show up in the folklore materials as distinct from the core members of the nation.

Conclusion

Instead of addressing financial profits, economic losses, betrayals or thefts, the primary focal motif in the tales seems to be confrontation between men. As many folklorists have argued, folktales transmit culturally shared views and values that do not necessarily coincide with historical truth. The functions of folklore are different, including validating or justifying institutions and beliefs (Bascom 1954: 346). Therefore, the narratives here have been analysed through the concept of the civilization process. Briefly, this means that the rise of the state from the fifteenth century until the present depended more and more on specific modes and norms of self-restraint, which reinforced the hegemonic groups. The civilization process incorporated all groups of people into an interdependent network through the inculcation of norms, customs, rules and etiquette. Conversely, folktales can be considered as a backlash by the common people, giving voice to inappropriate, obscene and vulgar emotions and approaches that were otherwise out of the question.

Trade tales that address violent acts follow a narrative structure that consists of the initial situation, an exchange of words, an exchange of blows, the emergence of a victor, and finally reconciliation or resolution. There are two recurrent themes regarding violence within the corpus of tales. The first one deals with brawls in groups. Usually this occurred on the road or at overnight accommodations when one group of buyers met another group and the encounter ended up in a duel. The tales describe male honour, which is either violated by a verbal insult or by an argument on the road about who should step aside. Another setting of violence in the trade tales concerns social encounters where single peddlers ended up getting into fistfights with their hosts at overnight lodgings. Those stories, which do not explicitly mention an exchange of blows, follow a slightly different narrative structure, consisting of setting, turning point, action without physical contact, and resolution. Although these stories do not often contain an act of actual violence, there are elements of oppression and a possible fight.

The samples analysed in this article exist in the archives in written form, and although they were meant to be humorous and light in tone, from the contemporary reader's point of view they are rarely humorous. This is probably due to textualization, that is, the ways in which oral performances and orally expressed utterances are transformed into literary representations of orality. Originally, trade tales were performed in real life vis-à-vis situations where non-verbal gestures and pauses in narration gave full richness to the narratives. Moreover, they were probably performed among a group of males, given the tales' strong emphasis on male violence.

On one hand, tales about trade in settings of violence reflect the changes that the peasant communities encountered in the process of shifting from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing. On the other, tales offered a platform to deal with emotions and experiences that were not appropriate to express in normal daily speech. Tales were told and collected by persons who already lived in the changed world, where individuals had already begun to internalize a new level of self-discipline over the body and its physical functions as well as more rigorous suppressions of emotions, desires and impulses (see, e.g., Stark 2006: 24). Although the civilizational shift occurred in daily encounters, that is, spontaneous impulses were gradually restrained, they were still expressed in the oral tradition. In the modern day, fights and confrontations between males have been taken up by the film and television industries. Moreover, films capitalize on references to folk narratives (see Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 13).

Because the trade tales often deal with aggressive behaviour, the civilizing process is useful as an analytical tool to better understand the folk views regarding encounters with traders. At the mercy of their natural surroundings, people were dependent upon face-to-face relationships. The daily life of the people was characterized by attitudes towards aggression, emotional displays and bodily impulses that were more common than what we are used to today.

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