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THE POLITICS OF FOLKLORE, THE POLICY OF COLLECTING IT: MAJORITY FOLKLORE ON THE ROMA IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY FINLAND

Abstract: Nineteenth century Romantic nationalism viewed the nation as one entity whose members shared a common language, folklore, customs and traditions. This view of nationalism inspired the collection of folklore which served as the cultural heritage of a society. Once collected and interpreted, folklore built a grand - although often exclusive, mean and racist - narrative of the past. This article examines the social boundaries between rural peasant commoners and the Roma in Finland in the early 20th century. Using folktales from rural Finns about the Roma, this article examines how elements of everyday communication laid bare notions of social hierarchies among citizens and, simultaneously, served as political tools. Because the policy of collecting folklore only targeted majority groups of people, that is, white peasants and small landholders, their views were considered most important and more valuable. By contrast, the Roma, as outcasts from rural communities and removed from the idea of nationhood, were underrated through the narration of tales, which directed ridicule and, at times, harsh bullying at them.

Key words: folktales; social boundaries; peasant society; Roma; rural livelihoods; bullying; Finland

Whilst the treatment of groups traditionally lying at the margins of Western societies has improved over time, narratives and oral lore continue to express biases against individuals or groups on the basis of race, age, gender or disability. Mentions in folklore of ethnic minorities such as the Roma are replete with prejudices. Internal boundaries within the lower classes of past peasant societies also appear in the stories of life crafted by non-elites. This article specifically focuses on the role of folklore in representations of the national Roma in Finland, who for centuries lived among the non-Roma, or Finns. *The Kaales* in Finland are often portrayed as a traditional Roma minority, not only in their official status within the country, but also in their social organisation, which strictly upholds presumably age-old Roma customs, rituals and taboos. These rituals and taboos include sexual taboos, rules of cleanliness, dress codes, ritualised respect for elders, gender norms and specific views on morality, family and kinship. Today, approximately 10,000 Finnish Roma reside within Finland's population of 5.4 million; another 4,000 Finnish Roma live in Sweden (Blomster & Mikkola 2014: 15).

In this article I examine the mechanisms of folklore and how these serve as means of stigmatising and isolating one minority group from the majority population. Using folktales about the Roma as told by Finnish rural commoners, I investigate how such elements of everyday communication laid bare notions of social hierarchies amongst people

and how such tales were and are used as political tools. I focus on both the use of folklore as a rhetorical means of sending messages outside the community and as a vessel for constructing insiders' sense of belonging to a community. In addition, on a larger scale these messages are transmitted to the nation, a cultural-political community becoming conscious of its autonomy, unity and particular interests.

Finnish folktales about the Roma were deliberately collected to illustrate how dissimilar gypsies - as they were labelled in the materials - were and how the majority population viewed the minority group. This paper addresses prejudices as dealt with through folklore. Folktales about the Roma also reveal the folkloric archival policies of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Finland. Folklore collections began in Finland in the 1830s against the backdrop of Romantic nationalism and focussed on the development of national languages and the spiritual value of local customs and traditions.

In what follows, I identify the socio-historical contexts of 19th and early 20th century folklore on the Finnish Roma and how the explicit aims of what was and whose folklore was worthy of collection carried political consequences. This paper is based on the folktales preserved in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society collected between 1880 and 1950. I depart from previous analyses in viewing oral communication where folktales are used as the domain of culturally significant ideas and mentalities that also serve to delineate the boundaries of belonging to the core group of a nation. Folktales, and folklore in general, however, did not address reality in an empirical fashion, but served as a reflection upon the subjugation individuals experienced in their underprivileged, often competitive situations within their own social groups (Röhrich 1991 [1979]).

The Other within the nation

The Finnish Roma population has a multi-fold background. The Roma in Finland date back to the beginning of the 16th century, when Finland was still a part of Sweden, traveling to present-day Finnish territories from other parts of the Swedish Empire. Later in the 19th century, these communities gained strength when Russian immigrants merged with the Finnish Roma (Roman 2015: 208; Pulma 2006: 215). The lengthy isolation of Finland from contact with other Roma populations meant that previous alliances were lost from their oral traditions. During the Swedish Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries, policies served to expel and control the Roma, resulting in harsh times followed by centuries of attempted forced assimilation (Grönfors 2001: 151).

The Roma in Finland, however, share a history and many national myths with the majority population. According to Nordberg (2006: 536), membership of the Roma in the national community stems from a sense of belonging to the citizenry of the nation-state, resulting from historical narratives predominantly through participation in World War II, as well as through a shared language and religion with the majority population. The national Roma represent an ethnic group that identify as and share a historically derived cultural tradition whereby descent primarily grants membership. The national Roma in Finland remain a part of a larger social system rather than an independent and self-sufficient group and their ethnic identity is always situational. Thus, recognition of the group may vary between situations and social contexts (Oring 1986: 24–28).

As a distinct ethnic group, the national Roma do not match the ideals of those whose oral traditions represent the national culture. Romantic nationalism relied upon the existence of a historical ethnic culture, emphasising the role of the nation as one entity from a collective creative process during the heroic Golden Age (Harvilahti 2012: 395). Because Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy under Russian rule beginning in 1809, Romantic nationalism aroused the need to reconstruct a mythical shared past. One way in which this was accomplished included collecting folklore selectively from those considered authentic folk, not from individuals with a different mother tongue or ethnicity.

Folklore collecting institutions regarded common people as one largely homogeneous group: they spoke one vernacular language (Finnish), were poor and illiterate, whilst simultaneously believed to bear authentic oral poetry and the myths of their forefathers (e.g. Anttonen 2005; Bendix 1997; Dundes 1980). In Finland and elsewhere in Europe during the 19th century, the idea of the commoners as a homogeneous group bolstered the image of a unified 'nation' free from internal social, ethnic and cultural tensions.

When large-scale folklore collecting began in Finland during the 19th century, upper class members of society, university students in particular, were largely responsible for the process. From 1870 onward, however, self-taught commoners began voluntarily collecting folklore. Announcements relating to collections encouraged individuals to collect both old poems in Kalevala metre as well as other folklore, such as proverbs, fairy tales, riddles and incantations. During the first century of the Folklore Archives' existence, only a few materials from the Finnish Roma were incorporated. The national project to expand the collections considered Finnish majority folklore more important and more valuable than folklore from ethnic minorities (Blomster & Mikkola 2014: 16).

Social and economic circumstances greatly impacted not only folklore and popular thought (Röhrich 1991 [1979]: 3), but also what was viewed worthy of collecting and preserving in the archives. All who collected folklore were members of the cultures they described and familiar with their everyday operations; archives authorised the selection and management of the elements contained in the stream of information (Olsson & Stark 2014: 4–9). Thus, we must ask what kinds of information were viewed as important and what constituted acceptable or unacceptable folklore. In the past, acceptable folklore included ethnic tales (or jokes) told within societies throughout the world. These tales comprise jokes about other ethnicities depicted either as stupid and inept or as cunning and calculating (e.g. Davies 1990, 10).

The materials used in this paper are without exception highly prejudicial - in other words, vulgar and nasty - and I, therefore, use social boundary as a central concept (Barth 1969). Social boundaries in this paper are defined as objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and the unequal distribution of material or nonmaterial resources and social opportunities (Burke 2000; Lamont 2000; Skeggs 2004). Social boundaries were interpreted as markers of difference and often produced symbolic boundaries. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the stereotypical expressions, often extremely negative, reflected the collective impersonal thinking of the majority of common people - not the thinking of those with whom the materials dealt. In this article, I refer to the national Roma in Finland. Likewise, individuals did not think alike and the same individual may express him- or herself differently in different communicative situations. My folktale sample consists of 150 individual folkloric variants. I categorised

these based on three themes: 1) the Roma's inability to fit into the dominant majority; 2) the different lifestyle of the Roma; and 3) bullying the Roma.

The Roma as non-peasants and the Other

The Roma's position in Finnish peasant society was defined by biased preconceptions that they were inherently different. The majority population viewed the Roma as looking different because of their darker skin. Additionally, skin colour was also important for the Roma since the Roma in Finland called themselves 'the Kaales', meaning dark in the Romani language (Thurfjell 2013: 14). The majority population passed along tales about the origin of the Roma skin colour as follows:

The Devil created a man at the top of the Russian oven with soot-covered walls. That's why gypsies' skin colour is dirty and black. But, the Devil could not get the gypsy to breath. Then, God came and farted, and said, 'Here's a soul for your creature.' This is why a gypsy stinks so badly.

Folktales reflected clear links between dark skin colour and inferiority, a linkage strengthened throughout the 19th century through the acceptance of European Romanticism and the inferiority of people of colour (Beck 1993: 184). It is tempting to think that prejudiced folklore often signals prejudiced thoughts. Yet, the modes of discrimination and even cruelty, such as those tied to sexism and racism, were expressed because they existed in daily social interactions where such oral forms of expression were used (Röhrich 1991 [1979]). According to Alan Dundes, a racist society is bound to have racist folklore (1980: 174).

In addition, the Roma were depicted as stupid and unable to cope with the peasant way of life where many skills were handy, while others were almost essential and made life easier. This view of the Roma's stupidity could be a consequence of ignorance, such as that displayed in the following tale: 'Gypsy boys go fishing by a boat, but forget to cap the hole with a plug. The boat sinks and the boys drown.' In this tale, we see the view of the Roma as different from 'us', the white Finns, in their understanding of things work.

Similarly, ethnic humour often refers to others as eating peculiar or inferior rather than forbidden foods, whereby the dominant white man's Christian traditions lack a coherent set of food taboos (Davies 1990: 276–277). In Finnish folktales, the Roma possessed no knowledge of food; because they were forced to beg, they had to accept what they were given:

A group of gypsies arrived at a farmhouse. The members of the household had been seen fishing and the catch had been good. Well, vendace had been salted in bowls. Gypsies asked to eat the vendace. The farm master gave them a lot. One of the gypsies asked, 'May I eat one fish at a time?' The farm master answered, 'Yes, you can eat one fish at a time'. Then, the gypsies ate a lot of vendace. But, the farm master hid all of the drinking water in the house and locked the well cover. The nearest lake was far away. By the next night, the gypsies were almost dying of thirst. When the gypsies left the house the next day, they never returned.

Given their unstable, mobile and extremely poor living conditions, the Roma were unable to achieve or consume prestigious food items and subsisted on inferior foods out of necessity. In the peasant economy, it was customary that people with limited access to food reserves were not full after eating. Moreover, during low productivity times, even farm households, farmhands and servants starved from time to time.

The Finnish Roma featured a so-called wagon culture. Typically, they rented a small cottage from larger farm households or lived in farmhouses whilst they worked as farmhands (Grönfors 2001: 161). Historically, the Roma could not carry tools or large physical objects with them when moving from one location to another. Thus, given the Roma's different livelihood compared to Finnish peasants, they did not always know specific tools or items familiar to the majority population. The following story about a gun serves as an example:

The gypsies knocked on the door in order to enter; the farm master stuck a broomstick out from the knothole and said he would shoot them unless the gypsies left. The gypsies left screaming, 'Hey, good farm master, don't shoot us; we will leave.' They thought the broomstick was a rifle.

The Roma typically lived in nuclear families, but not in married families, since for a long while Finnish Roma did not follow the custom of Christian marriage. Due to their travelling lifestyle, the number of family members remained relatively low. In previous decades, 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 2001: 161).

During the 19th and early 20th centuries in Finland, the most common livelihoods for the Roma consisted of trading and handicrafts. The rule amongst the Roma was that you were not encouraged to trade with other Roma, but rather with the majority population. Roma women crocheted clothing that they could sell and, before the advent of the automobile industry, Roma men horse-traded. Roma women also earned a living in the past through fortune telling, a valid means of earning an income before the emergence of the press and women's magazine horoscopes (Grönfors 1981: 81). Whilst these Roma livelihoods were known and recognised by the majority population, folklore represented the Roma as petty thieves:

There is a saying that when a gypsy family entered a farmhouse, the son of the gypsy family took a knife from the table and put it in his pocket. The gypsies moved on. Once on their way, the son would say, 'Hey, Father, I found a knife.' 'Where did you find it', the father asked. 'It was on the table', answered the son. 'Very good', the father said, complimenting his son's find.

This tale also reflects the majority's condemnation of the Roma's strong family bonds, as well as how they transmit cultural knowledge in their seemingly implicit and simplistic ways to the younger generation. Amongst such tales, the majority recounted prejudiced proverbs on the Roma, where a different type of kinship was noted. One proverb, 'A gypsy is everybody's relative', referred to the small number of Finnish Roma who all knew one another's lineage well. Most Finnish Roma were related to each other because of their preferred endogamy (Grönfors 1986: 105). Ethnic Finns did not understand the meaning of family for the Roma and ridiculed them, as reflected in the following joke: 'What is a gypsy's nightmare? The rest of his group is about to leave him be-

hind.’ These tales ignored the Roma’s inability to lean on poverty relief, relying instead on their nuclear family.

The Roma’s general unawareness of society, its legal state and how it worked garnered laughter directed at them as a minority group, as illustrated in the following tale:

Once upon time, a gypsy was on trial accused of murder. The gypsy’s wife defended her man to the judge by describing his redeeming features. ‘Listen, people liked Santeri in the little village when he was a little boy. He threw stones at birds’ nests and stole some hay for the horse. So, in that sense, if we applied the law of Nurmes and the judge from Vihti, Santeri would be released, and the dead man would be fined’.

The tales in this section represent the most accurate representations of the dominant group’s theory of humour based on the idea that people laugh at others in order to reveal their triumph over other groups. Obviously, whenever individuals feel less foolish, unfortunate or weak compared to their peers, a sense of euphoria induces them to laugh (Martins 2012: 98).

The Roma faced stigma related to many distinguishing characteristics, which consequently devalued them. One way to alienate them consisted of couching the Roma’s distinctive features explicitly within racist attitudes and stereotypes, and, then internalising racist attitudes through parenting. The following tale was shared with a young child if s/he cried excessively: ‘Can you already see the gypsies coming? I’ll give you away to them because you are disobeying me.’ In other words, the Roma served as a deterrent used in child-rearing. Many older Finns were scared of ghosts, wolves and the Roma during their childhood, as shown in the next example, an extract from the life history of a Finnish man born in the 1930s: ‘A great number of gypsies in our little cottage represented a difficult experience for young boys like me, but mostly for my mum, who tried to carefully guard the scarce food resources so that they were not eaten shortages.’

Stigmatised living strategies

In the past, the main feature of the Finnish Roma was their vagrant style of life. All Roma livelihoods were consistent with their travelling habits. As a travelling community in a sparsely populated country such as Finland, and given the relatively small number of gypsies, Roma families or kin groups informally shared geographic areas. In other words, a Roma family acquired ‘ownership’ of certain territories only within which they could trade and beg (Grönfors 1986: 102).

According to the majority population, the Roma were more sociable; the Roma family spent time together, but also openly enjoyed social gatherings as expressed in the following sarcastic proverb: ‘Where else but at a wedding would the gypsies be.’ Finnish peasants and small landholders, on the contrary, passed on sayings warning against trusting any outsider or even close relatives: ‘A relative is worse than a wolf.’ However, such stereotypical views lived not only through 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 that, ‘A gypsy cannot farm because his body, mind and nature are against such work. His physique has be-

come 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 1981: 36).

Until World War II, most Finns lived in a subsistence economy working in fields, forests and in the logging industry. Recurrent themes in Finnish folklore and oral history focused on how life required endless work for scarce resources. Such experiences created a specific work ethic, an ethos based on hard physical work and diligence (Stark 2015: 352). According to most oral histories, work was like sports exercise causing one to sweat profusely leaving the body exhausted, but the mind pleased. Therefore, encounters between the peasant majority and the Roma minority occurred on the doorsteps of peasant households. One type of tale depicted various methods of begging used by the Roma:

As is known, gypsies whine about everything and use their children's illness as an excuse. Once a gypsy woman whined and cried, explaining how her child was quite ill. This affected the farm wife and she said, 'Let me see the poor little one.' When she looked at the child in the bundle, the child only laughed. 'This child laughs; this child can't be ill,' the farm wife said. Then, the gypsy woman answered, 'The poor child is laughing from his pain.'

Another tale reflects a dilemma associated with giving food - that is, once you give something, the Roma always want more. ‘The gypsy enters the house and first asks, “Good farm wife, give me a pot so that I can cook.” Then, she asks for groats, wheat, salt and so forth.’ Although these encounters typically occur within the female spheres of the peasant household, both men and women retold such folktales.

In addition, most believed that the Roma engaged in theatrical begging, as reflected in the following example:

The gypsy woman said to the farm wife upon entering the house, 'You, lovely lady, have beautiful children; they are like the Lord's angels. If you, lady, are at all merciful, you would give me a mark and I will tell you your fortune. Show me your hand.' The farm wife said, 'Get out! I won't give you anything.' The gypsy woman leaves the house and says, 'The devil how ugly you are. Your mouth is like the wooden poor boy of the parish Rantsila and your children are like guenons.'

According to the majority population, the eloquent manner of delivery is simply a performance the Roma use to achieve their aims. However, folktale as a genre represents characters as simplistic and flat, typically either very good or very bad featuring exaggerated characteristics.

Among most Finns, farming was based on the ownership of land featuring a small farm, where the husband and wife serve as co-workers. The man did typically men's chores and the woman carried out her duties, although women would sometimes help men (Stark 2014: 76). By contrast, the culture amongst Finnish Roma more strictly divided men and women. In folktales about Roma begging, this distinction was noted at the expense of the female Roma:

When gypsies entered the farmhouse, it was customary for the gypsy women to beg for everything and the gypsy men to remain quiet, sometimes even countering the begging with, 'Why are you whining? People will give you something

anyway without needing to whine.' But, straight away the gypsy men would add in their own language, 'Whine, whine, and whine more.' In Finnish, it meant, 'Beg, beg more.'

According to folklore, women openly begged going from one farmhouse to another, whilst Roma men attempted to retain their dignity by not asking so straightforwardly. The majority population, however, could see this, making the male Roma a constant object of ridicule. Although the tale above depicted co-operation amongst Roma family members when begging, those tales also acknowledged outspoken individuals, such as the Roma woman who explicitly expressed her aims. However, opposing tales exist about the Roma woman's honesty in begging. In the following version of the same tale from above, the Roma woman assumes the Roma man's position:

'There was a gypsy family in one farmhouse. The gypsy children rounded on the farm wife asking for food. They repeatedly said, 'Whine, whine'. The gypsy woman snapped at the children, 'Don't always whine; indeed, the good farm wife will give something,' but then added to the children, 'Whine, whine'.

These folktales create a situation where the listener or reader is provided with understandings of the Roma hierarchy, which, unlike that for the majority population, was inflexible and strict.

Bullying the Roma

Folklore played a role in perpetuating racial prejudice amongst the majority population and in psychologically preparing the Roma to deal with stereotypes directed at them by white peasant society (Ferris 1970: 188). A member of the majority population familiar with the Roma narrates many folktales. This was particularly clear in cases dealing with begging as a strategy and ignorance. However, the third category of Finnish folktales on the Roma are only appropriate for retelling amongst the majority population given their openly rude tone. I call this type of folktale 'bully tales,' because the majority population so rudely embarrasses the Roma in them. The following excerpt serves as an illustration:

The gypsies are whiners; this is not said in vain. When gypsies enter a house, they don't leave it easily. In our neighbourhood, there was one incident. There were many gypsies on the road; the group went to one neighbour, but the farm master shouted from his window, 'Don't come here; we have an epidemic here.' And, so, the gypsies didn't go there. Once there was a gypsy boy in our house when we were drinking coffee. Father thought to push the boy out, but the boy said, 'Before going, can you give me a donut?' Father gave him a donut, took the boy outside and there were more or less many more gypsies outside the house. They weren't let into the house. They had to go somewhere else. Once my father was reading a newspaper. A gypsy man was wiping his shoes in front of the door just about to enter the house. Father rushed to the door and prevented the gyp-

sy man from entering the house. Later, we laughed when the gypsies stood at the crossroads in the cold, rainy weather.

The narrator combines many smaller tales into one big tale on the Roma. This tale consists of the typical elements of prejudice - an attitude of favour or disfavour related to an overgeneralised belief (Allport 1979 [1954]: 13). Bullying tales not only depict the Roma as stupid and simple, but go further by showing the superiority of the majority population in the Finnish peasant society.

The settings in bully tales typically consist of the Roma entering a farmhouse trying to beg. A motif of coercion recurs throughout various tales and relates to food begging, as illustrated in the following: 'The farm master forces a group of gypsies who asked for food from the house to eat a big bowl a week-old bean soup. The gypsies have not since been seen at that house.' A recurrent feature in such tales is the bad quality of the food. Another tale combines the bully motif with the Roma's perceived stupidity:

Gypsies entered a house overnight. In the evening, the farm wife left the pot roast to cook. During the night, the gypsies decided to leave, and ate the roast leaving only the bones. The farm master happened to wake up and forced the gypsies to eat the bones as well. It was a chore, but what could one do? After eating the bone, someone said, 'How painful that was to my mouth.'

According to the majority population's folklore, the Roma people were not willing to keep 'a proper job.' The Roma were viewed as passive, lazy and receiving things such as food for free. Finnish folktales of the 19th and early 20th centuries and folklore in general deemed worth collecting and preserving in the archives can be interpreted as the nation-state acting as a producer of difference and as the performative homogeniser of the population (e.g. Verdery 1994: 38–39).

Other folktales on the Roma feature violence and roughness as the punch line 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 behave 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 stinks there. The gypsies woke up and realised that the gypsy woman had pooped her pants. That 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 didn't behave herself.

In the Finnish Roma culture, rules regarding purity emerged in the views of a man and wife and sexuality (Grönfors 1986: 103–104). This aspect - sexuality being taboo amongst the Roma - was unfamiliar to the majority population. This tale strongly disgraces the Roma, a recurring motif in oral traditions. In folktales, however, individuals degraded by means of sex, anal comedy and sadistic violence typically hold authority positions (Apo 1995: 209). Normally, the other is interpreted as dangerous and impure. Yet, when we look at the Finnish Roma culture, throughout their known history they have observed strict customs related to hygiene (Grönfors 2001: 149). Therefore, the above folk-tale provides an interesting example of the majority population's contradictory belief regarding the minority population's ignorance concerning hygiene. Most European ethnic

jokes about food focus not on the distinction between permitted and forbidden food, but between prestigious and inferior food items (Davies 1990: 283). The Finnish majority population's tales poke fun at the Roma's strict customs of ritual observances connected to pollution, such as avoiding certain kinds of meat:

Seeing the gypsies coming, a farm master put dog meat in a pot to boil. The gypsies ate the meat secretly, assuming it was lamb. Then, the farm master said, 'Those gypsies ate the dog meat.' Then, the gypsies left the house offering up prayers and feeling sick.

The implication of the tale above is that the Roma ate comic inferior food, thus becoming comically inferior (e.g. Davies 1990: 283). Here, the majority population made fun of the Roma's customs, in this case, customs surrounding food considered unclean or prepared following rules of cleanliness.

Some bullying tales express the superiority of the majority population over the Roma. Such tales aim at humiliation or simple violence towards the begging and dependent minority:

A gypsy asked Sipilä to get some hay and he agreed. When the gypsy went to the loft of the barn to get the hay, Sipilä told him to have as much as he could carry. Meanwhile, Sipilä took the ladders away and the gypsy fell from the loft.

In another tale, a farm master rows gypsies out into a lake, subsequently leaving them there:

The group of gypsies asked for a lift across the stream. The grandfather rowed, taking the gypsies to the island. Noticing that it was an island, the gypsies shouted, 'Grandfather, grandfather, this is an island!' 'You're welcome,' the grandfather answered. He acted like he did not hear what the gypsies shouted.

According to folktales, differences in ethnicity, social rules and dress contributed to bullying views of the Roma as strange or weak. Most likely, bullying occurred either within the sphere of the peasant household or the peasant-dominated domain and was often directed at the entire group of Roma rather than an individual.

Conclusions

Folktales collected from Finnish peasant society reflect the ideas and values of the majority population who until World War II consisted of poor, white Finnish speakers with a low level of or no education at all. The Romantic nationalism of the 19th century viewed the nation as a single entity whose members shared a common language, folklore, customs and traditions. This view of nationalism inspired the collection of folklore which served as the cultural heritage of a society. Folklore was collected and interpreted to build a grand narrative of the past which was exclusive, mean and racist. In the Finnish Literature Society, collection interests were restricted to materials in Finnish providing standards for the inclusion or exclusion of tales, songs and proverbs within the folklore domain proper. Hence, folklore about the Roma—rather than from the Roma—was welcome. Un-

til contemporary times, the Finnish Literature Society did not acquire folklore or oral histories specifically from the Finnish Roma.

Folktales about the Finnish Roma reflect an unequal society typical for rural people from historic times. Folklore served as means of clarifying social boundaries and maintaining hierarchies. However, the Roma lived in close proximity to rural small landholders and farmers, who provided a livelihood and temporary shelter. Because the policy of collecting folklore only targeted the majority populations, their views were considered more important and valuable. A variety of ideologies, such as nationalism and patriarchy, adhered to specific collection policies and the selection criteria for archives. Thus, I analysed shared knowledge concerning the Roma minority from the viewpoint of the majority population in the historic past. Folktales on the Roma retained aspects of a cultural identity essential to an insider's sense of belonging to the majority population of Finns. According to my analysis, three primary themes reinforced stereotypical views of the Roma. One viewed the Roma lifestyle and their livelihoods as non-peasant markers and, hence, as the other. In folktales, gypsies were depicted as stupid and simply unable to cope with the peasant way of life lacking many skills considered handy. Therefore, many of the folktales dealt with the Roma's inability to manage in rural often harsh environments considered risky and uncertain, for example, due to drought or early frost potentially damaging to the harvest and leading to famine. Tales narrated by the majority population depicted the Roma as not possessing the requisite knowledge or skills for life in a rural environment.

Another recurrent theme attached to the presupposed unskilful nature of the Roma focused on their travelling lifestyle and linked to begging. The Finnish majority population and Finnish authorities viewed the lifestyle of the Roma as problematic. The Finnish Roma were viewed as too loyal to their family and disinclined to physical farming work or outdoor timber logging. On a large scale, the majority population's tales on the Roma reflect the ability to create rules and values resulting in a deviance label. Indicative of the hegemony of rural communities, patriarchy (i.e. white, Finnish-speaking peasant males) dictated the rules and boundaries, and hence, defined the Roma as the other. This mechanism also influenced legislation, since land reforms and poor laws enacted during the 20th century favoured the ethnic majority - Finns. For example, only married men could buy a small farm. Single men or unmarried couples such as those typical amongst the Roma were barred from even applying for farmland or loans to buy a farm. Thus, unmarried, dark-skinned Roma beggars were defined as deviant and, therefore, not authentic or true members of the 'Finnish nation.' Finally, the Roma, as outcasts from rural communities as well as removed from the idea of nationhood, were kept subservient through the narration of tales in which they were harshly bullied. The source materials for my analysis depicted bullying as closely related to, and at times difficult to distinguish from, racist violence, harassment and abuse. Roma bullying was identified through the bully's motivation, given that victims were singled out because of the colour of their skin, the way they talk ('whining'), their ethnic group affiliation or by their cultural practices. Folktales on the Roma hypothesised that racist bullying was tolerated in rural Finnish communities for two reasons. First, they were openly narrated and expressed as funny stories. Second, the Folklore Archives welcomed and preserved these types of narratives in its collections. By comparison, Finnish Roma folklore was not collected nor preserved in the Folklore Archives until recently. Thus, Finnish folktales about the Roma reinforced both the eth-

nic roles and national myths that served multiple social and political purposes during the emergence of the new Finnish nation-state.

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