

## BOOK OF ABSTRACT

### MATERIALITY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: CO-CREATING LANDSCAPES

The University of Helsinki, Fabianinkatu 33, Consistorium Hall (Main building, 2nd floor), 5-6 June 2018

**Janne Saarikivi** (University of Helsinki), *Making of the landscapes: naming as means of organizing material world*

**Karina Lukin** (University of Helsinki), *Mammoths and the Materiality of Nenets Mythic Worlds*

In the recordings of Nenets mythology, one can meet mammoths at least in two different settings. First, there are ideas about mammoths being the herd of *sixirtya*, a community of beings living under earth. Second, there is a character named as *Ya' xora* [pronounced Yanggōra] that takes part in the events in Nenets epic songs, *syudbabc* and *yarabc* and mythic tales, *xebidyaxaxanako*. Although I believe that the ideas around *sixirtya* and *Ya' xora* definitely interact in the understanding of Nenets, I will concentrate on *Ya' xora* and epic songs/mythic tales. In both contexts, we are dealing with Nenets mythology, or rather what has been called mythic discourse – a large body of knowledge transmitted mainly in oral form and forming basis for Nenets understanding of the underworld.

When discussing mammoths in Nenets discourse, the researchers have usually referred to narratives about *sixirtya*. These images and motives are both historical and mythological in nature so that the Nenets connect archeological findings such as dwellings and utensils and mammoth bones to the narratives that tell about the visits to the worlds that are beyond everyday perception. The myth and history interact in a powerful way in these narratives situating places where one has been or can be in contact with both historical and mythic beings. The mammoths in epic poems and mythic tales differ from the herds of *sixirtya*. These are characters acting as agents on their own. They are characters with whom the heroes interact creating solidary relations mainly through marriage. I argue that these characters are as well connected to the mammoth bones found, collected, used and sold by the Nenets.

My interpretive frame of reference is based on metaphor, narration, and imagination. For decades, the research tradition has emphasized the importance of material environment for understanding and explaining thought. This is most clear in the works of Paul Ricoeur and in the classic *Metaphors We Live by* written by Lakoff and Johnson. The general frame for metaphor claims that the combination of terms or ideas that at first seems distant is in the heart of any metaphor. Ricoeur has further claimed that this logic of metaphor is in the center of human and social imagination. Furthermore, I will rest on Greg Urban's formulations about the entanglement of the sensible and intelligible in narration, but emphasizing more strongly the share of sensible in narration.

In the recordings of epic songs, *Ya' xora* is all down the line translated as 'mammoth'. Likewise, the name is often opened to consisting of *ya'* (genitive of 'earth') and *xora*, which has been translated by many researchers as 'reindeer bull'. However, the word *xora* does not refer only to a reindeer bull, but to a male animal in very general sense. My paper will open first of this central metaphor itself. Moreover, I will sketch the character of *Ya' xora* in narration, its relation to Nenets mythic landscapes and to other mythic characters. This analysis outlines the metaphorical relation of the character to Nenets community, which is contrasted to the relation of *sixirtya's* mammoths in another stories.

**Kristina Yuzieva** (University of Helsinki), *Bird-Image in Mari Traditional Vision: Owl*

The Mari are the indigenous inhabitants of the Middle Volga Region in Russia. Nowadays almost half of all Maris live in the Mari El Republic with significant populations in the catchment of the river Kama. Maris traditionally practiced a pagan faith and preserved it up to the present.

The purpose of this ethnolinguistic study is to reconstruct the image of the owl in the traditional views of the Mari people. In fact, the main focus of my presentation is on two things: (1) the derivational-phraseological semantics of the name of the owl (Mari: *tumna*); (2) the bird (owl) as a carrier of positive or negative information, which is connected to the place of the bird in space. My research has a synthetic character, drawing on all available materials about owls and their interpretation (understanding, assessment, etc.) in folk consciousness from ornithological (linguistic), ethnographic, mythological, and folkloric sources. An analysis of the available material allows me to conclude that the owl is a vivid and at the same time contradictory image in the Mari traditional culture. The owl is connected with the concepts of family well-being, of cattle increase, of protective charm. In the Mari linguistic worldview the owl symbolises stupidity.

Birds, falling into the symbolic system of language, have different associations that have been made use of in metaphorical language.

**Laura Siragusa and Olga Zhukova** (University of Helsinki and RAN Petrozavodsk), *The Materiality of Vepsian puheged and vajhed/pakitas*

We present Vepsian *puheged* (V. enchantments, spells; plural of *puheg*) as a way to co-build the environment and corroborate relations through the act of blowing and a specific verbal art which, contrarily to what is often assumed, allows for very material experiences of life. Our work engages with a present academic renewed attention to the construction of environments where both human and non-human agencies are enmeshed (cf. Anderson 2017; De Castro 1998; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017; Ingold 2000). Our biggest contribution to such discussion is not only to focus on the agencies displayed by human and other-than-human beings in verbal art, but also to put on center stage the materiality of ways of speaking and blowing words, which are not always acknowledged and/or discussed to the fullest, and to show how they contribute to the co-construction and creation of environments.

For this purpose, we take the reader to the land traditionally inhabited by indigenous Veps in Northwest Russia, where Siragusa conducts research and Zhukova comes from and works. When speaking about Vepsian we engage with the heritage language of a Finno-Ugric minority of Russia, whose material potential lies beyond the symbolic and representational. Most villagers (especially those older than 50) are bilingual in Russian and Vepsian.

In the Vepsian language, the word “spell, enchantment, chant” is translated as *puhe*, *puheg*. These words have direct reference to the movement of air as a way to participate in life and interconnect with the environment more deeply, and as a way to be and feel part of a meshwork of sentient beings (both human and non-human). “To cast a spell” in Vepsian is *puhuda puhegid*. The verb *puhuda*, literally “to blow,” is also etymologically connected to *puhutuz* (whiff of wind), *puhtaz* (clean), and *puhthuz* (cleanliness, order), which lead us to interpret *puheged* as a way to clean the air, and thus, bring (dis-)order through blowing (cf. Hämäläinen and Andreev 1936). With our work, we mark the materiality of the movement of air and its agentive quality.

In general, *puheged* cover specific functions, which are mostly related to life in the village. They concern human-to-human relations, health, and human and other-than-human relations. Indeed, they can be used for healing purposes: curing from hernia, bleeding, pain in the ear, and so on. They can be used to protect and look after the children. Some are used to make someone fall in or out of love. These *puheged* are called *zagovory* in Russian (cf. Agapkina, Levkievskaya, and Toporkov 2003; Ivanits 1989:111). Then some enchantments, called *vahjtes/pakitas* (*zaklinaniya* in Russian) are used to come to terms with the territorial masters with regards to making use of the produce found in their territory, building a house, having a successful hunting or fishing session, protecting the cattle on pasture, and so on (Makar'yev 1932:36–37).

**Madis Arukask** (University of Tartu), *The Vepsian herdsman: in between fixed textual genres and silence*  
It is common for herdsman to talk less or not at all. As his work has connected to magic agreement with the forest spirit he has to follow corresponding taboos. The most information we know about his occupation and its nature comes from commentaries of lay people, different folklore genres (memorates, legends, spells in oral and written form), and descriptions of rituals. Basing on this I discuss in my paper (1) how the textualised world explains the non-verbal reality, also (2) how the authority of herdsman often bases on things in his equipment what can be taken simultaneously as material items and magical verbalised concepts. Finally I try to touch the question (3) how verbalised is the Vepsian folk culture comparing to the Russian one.

**Francisco Apurinã and Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen** (University of Brasilia, University of Helsinki), *Os mundos dos não-humanos, os Apurinã e língua - The worlds of non-humans, the Apurinã, and language*

This paper looks at the relational spaces created between the non-humans and the Apurinã. The Arawak-speaking Apurinã, who live in Brazilian Amazonia, express the agencies of animals, plants, objects, and spirit master beings, especially when speaking about their health, ideas of creation, traditional education, and possession relations. Furthermore, non-humans are crucially related to Apurinã's livelihoods and their movements in the forest and rivers. Apurinã's communication with the spirit agencies includes specific chants and spells, and their pronunciation crucially point to the otherwise invisible other-than-human beings. On the other hand, by movement and avoidance this materialization can also be limited. In this paper, we analyse the ways the Apurinã relate to non-human entities, through traditional narratives and everyday language. Narratives of healing or formation of illnesses especially reveal close interactions and relationality with plants, animals, meteorological phenomena, and waters. In these cases, non-humans' actions and

impacts are reported in several forms. They require negotiation and special ways of communication. Furthermore, we look at mythic narratives and how they express interrelations with the non-humans in Apurinã's history. Overall, through ethnographic and linguistic lenses, our cases shed light on how the Apurinã's constitute their landscapes with diverse entities.

**Vesa Matteo Piludu** (University of Helsinki), *Mimesis in the Forest and in the Village: Changing Bodies and Environments in the Finno-Karelian Bear Ceremonials*

In the ritual, the language of the songs of the Finno-Karelian bear ceremonial the portraying of materiality - in particular the hunter's and the bruin's body and the forest environment – changed in different ritual phases.

Leaving from the village the hunters uttered incantations to make their blood "harder". Their body became "closed": the courses of sorcerers and envious persons, and the bite of the bear – normally causing a forest-illness - cannot damage them.

Entering the forest they described themselves as handsome and seducers of female forest spirits and the feminized woodland. The hunters became mimetic because in the songs they represent their acts of seduction of the forest spirits as a kind of bodily melting with the forest. However, the hunters did not completely transform themselves into forest beings, they maintained their human identity, as their brief seduction and wedding with the forest spirits was finalized to ask the forest spirits to give them the bear.

The hunters sung about another highly mimetic situation in the bear feast, when they ate the sense organs of the bear head, and they sung that they see with the eyes of the bear and hear with the ear of the bruin, or that they acquired a common "kindred song and mind" when they ate the tongue of the bear.

Nevertheless, they maintain the consciousness of the alterity of the bear and of their human identity, because in the following phase they detached the bear's fangs and claws, depriving it of its weapons and using the bear-force contained in them **for many** rituals, including the self-protection from bears. The hunters' mimesis results as an emphatic and often sensual, but strategic and voluntary, manipulation of the process and the degree of identification with the alterity: a partial transformation and imitation, an "incomplete coping" characterized by a state "in-betweenness" that includes the defense of the self-consciousness and independent agency. "

In the *Bear Songs*, the description of the environment also changed in different ritual phases: a successful hunt or "seduction" transformed the dark and gloomy forest in a shining, golden, musical and welcoming atmosphere.

**Victoria Peemot** (University of Helsinki), *Not Every Horse is a Horse. The Equine Vocabulary in Tyva Language*